



Terms of Reference

Enabling Environment for Civil Society: A global analysis of the landscape for Civil Society

Consultancy to produce a Forus perspective on the State of Civil Society's Enabling Environment, ahead of the release of the OECD-DAC's 5-year review of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society

ToR Date: 2 March 2026

Research Report Publication target: end of June 2026

Consultancy start date: April 2026

Location: Flexible (Remote work)

Budget: €15,000

1. Background and Rationale

[Forus](#) is an innovative global network empowering civil society for effective social change. It brings together 74 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Pacific, representing more than 24,000 civil society organisations worldwide.

National platforms of CSOs and regional coalitions play a unique and irreplaceable role in coordinating diverse civil society actors, influencing policy for sustainable development, and strengthening civil society's enabling environment at national, regional, and global levels.

Yet across all regions, platforms increasingly operate in fragile, volatile and restrictive environments. Over the past years, members have reported restrictive NGO laws and increased administrative pressure, shrinking funding and increasingly difficult access to funding, resulting in many NGOs having to adapt and review their business models, foreign agent narratives and public delegitimization, increasing digital and physical security risks for platforms working in hostile or fragile contexts.

In July 2021, members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) adopted the [Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance](#). In July 2026, the DAC will finalise its five-year review of progress in implementing the Recommendation. This provides a critical political moment for civil society to publish a complementary, evidence-backed assessment of how implementation is experienced by the Recommendation's intended beneficiaries and partners.

The enabling environment for civil society is a cross-cutting priority for the Forus network and is closely linked to Forus' role as a broker of meaningful civil society participation in international and regional processes. Forus is also a partner in the [EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society](#) (EU SEE), a multi-country early warning and monitoring mechanism that provides near real-time evidence on changes in civic space and the enabling environment for civil society at national level

In 2025–2026, Forus and EU SEE members provided inputs to the DAC's implementation review process and are supporting the DAC CSO Reference Group (CSORG) to develop advocacy recommendations. This consultancy will leverage this existing evidence base and extend it through targeted member engagement to produce a sharp, public-facing report analysing the global landscape of civil society's enabling environment.

Scope and unit of analysis (important): This consultancy will not conduct a comprehensive assessment of the enabling environment for civil society "overall" across countries and sectors. Instead, it will produce a **Forus network-based evidence synthesis** analysing the enabling environment as **experienced and reported by Forus members** (national platforms and regional coalitions) as civil society coordination actors in their contexts, leveraging existing evidence (including EU SEE monitoring and alerts, Forus and member reporting). The report will use this evidence base to present a credible civil society perspective on the "state of civil society's enabling environment" and to propose actionable recommendations—without claiming exhaustive, country-by-country legal analysis. While the report will assess DAC members' implementation of the DAC Recommendation, it will also include recommendations for other relevant actors (e.g., partner-country governments where relevant, multilateral institutions, philanthropy, private sector/tech, and civil society).

2. Purpose of the Consultancy

The consultant (or team) will support Forus to develop and publish a global report that provides a civil society perspective on the state of the enabling environment based on evidence from the Forus network and existing monitoring sources. The report will: (i) synthesise what Forus members and partner monitoring mechanisms (including EU SEE) are observing regarding key enabling environment trends in 2025–2026; (ii) assess the implementation of the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance (2021) from the perspective of intended beneficiaries and partners; and (iii) propose clear policy messages and measurable actions for DAC members and other stakeholders. The report is intended for release by the end of June 2026, ahead of the DAC's own publication.

3. Objectives of the Assignment

The consultancy is expected to deliver a report and communications package that:

- Presents a clear global picture of the state of civil society's enabling environment in 2025–2026, as evidenced through Forus members' experiences and existing data sources (Forus member reporting, EU SEE, and complementary sources).
- Uses a practical enabling environment framework to describe how laws, policies, practices, funding conditions, public narratives, and digital governance shape civil society's (Forus members') ability to operate and participate.
- Assesses, from Forus members' perspective, the degree to which DAC members are implementing the Recommendation across its pillars (civic space; support/engagement; incentives for

effectiveness/transparency/accountability) and identifies the most urgent implementation gaps, leveraging existing data and input from civil society on the implementation of the recommendations (Forus members, EU SEE, and complementary sources).

- Develops a concise set of priority policy messages and measurable commitments to move from declarations to implementation, with recommendations tailored to relevant actors (DAC members and other donors; partner-country governments where relevant; multilateral institutions; philanthropic actors; private sector/tech; and civil society networks), leveraging existing input and recommendations from civil society (Forus, Forus members, EU SEE, and complementary sources), from Forus members' perspective.
- Provides visibility to the findings and recommendations through accessible products (executive summary, a 2-pager/brief, slide deck, and short communications content).

4. Scope of work

The consultant will work closely with the Forus Secretariat and will be expected to produce a robust, concise report (indicative length 30–40 pages, excluding annexes) and related products. The scope includes:

- Desk review and consolidation of existing evidence and drafts produced by Forus, EU SEE and partners for the DAC implementation review process (2024–2026).
- Synthesis of EU SEE findings and trends relevant to the enabling environment, including funding constraints, legal and administrative barriers, public narratives, and digital repression patterns.
- Design and implementation of targeted engagement with selected Forus members to complement the desk review, using a mix of tools as appropriate (e.g., short survey, key informant interviews, focus groups, and/or regional validation calls).
- Development of a coherent analytical framework to organise findings (see Section 5), with attention to regional diversity, intersectionality, and differential impacts on women-led, youth-led, Indigenous, disability-led and grassroots/community-based organisations.
- Drafting of the report and policy messages, including selected illustrative case examples and/or vignettes (with a do-no-harm approach and anonymisation where necessary).
- Facilitation of at least one online validation session with Forus members and partners (with Forus supporting interpretation where needed), and incorporation of feedback.
- Preparation of a communications pack to support dissemination and visibility of the report's messages.

5. Methodology Requirements

The consultant is expected to propose a robust methodology that includes:

- **Desk review:** synthesis of existing Forus / Forus Members / EU SEE / DAC-related materials and relevant civil society monitoring sources.
- **Member and partner engagement:** a clear sampling strategy (region; type of actor: Forus members, partners, decision-makers, etc.; risk level), inclusive methods, and an engagement plan that is realistic within the timeframe and budget.
- **Analytical framework:** an approach aligned with the DAC Recommendation, assessing the enabling environment as experienced by Forus members (national platforms and regional coalitions) and using this evidence base to draw out broader enabling environment trends affecting civil society. Forus expects the report to use a practical framework such as six inter-related dimensions: (i) fundamental freedoms; (ii) legal and regulatory frameworks; (iii)

resources and funding conditions; (iv) open and responsive state (participation/accountability); (v) public discourse and narratives; and (vi) secure digital environment. Findings should be mapped to the DAC Recommendation's pillars, and recommendations should be linked to concrete "action asks" developed by Forus and civil society coalitions working around the Recommendation.

- **Safeguarding and do-no-harm:** protocols for handling sensitive information, anonymising cases, obtaining informed consent, and protecting participants (including digital security considerations).
- **Quality assurance:** triangulation of sources, clear use of evidence, and an approach that supports future updates/replication.

6. Tasks of the Consultant

The work is expected to be organised in phases (indicative timeline below):

Phase 1 — Inception (early April 2026)

- Kick-off meeting with Forus to confirm objectives, audience, structure, and risks.
- Submit an inception note: methodology, detailed workplan, proposed outline, sampling/engagement plan, and risk mitigation.

Phase 2 — Evidence review and research design (April 2026)

- Desk review of relevant documentation and extraction of key findings.
- Design engagement tools (survey/interview guides/FGD prompts) and propose a short list of case examples to explore.

Phase 3 — Member engagement and synthesis (late April–May 2026)

- Implement agreed engagement methods (survey / interviews / FGDs / calls).
- Produce an interim 'Key Findings + Draft Policy Messages' memo for Forus review.

Phase 4 — Drafting (May 2026)

- Draft full report (v1) and share with Forus for feedback.
- Revise to v2 reflecting feedback and additional evidence as needed.

Phase 5 — Validation and revision (late early June 2026)

- Facilitate at least one online validation session with members/partners.
- Incorporate feedback and strengthen clarity, accuracy, and usability of recommendations.

Phase 6 — Finalisation and handover (by end of June 2026)

- Submit final report and companion products (executive summary, 2-pager/brief, slides, and short comms text).
- Provide a light handover note (sources list, interviewee list anonymised if needed, and suggestions for updates).

7. Deliverables

Indicative deliverables (to be confirmed in the inception phase):

- **D1. Inception note** (methodology, detailed workplan, proposed outline, engagement plan, risks/mitigation).
- **D2. Evidence synthesis pack**: annotated bibliography + short synthesis of key trends and preliminary findings; finalised engagement tools.
- **D3. Interim memo**: key findings + draft policy messages (for Forus internal review).
- **D4. Draft report (v1) and revised draft (v2)** after Forus feedback.
- **D5. Validation session package**: agenda, slides, and short summary of feedback.
- **D6. Final report (EN) + executive summary + 2-pager/brief + slide deck + short comms package** (key messages, 3–5 social media posts or newsletter blurbs).

8. Profile and Qualifications of the Consultant or Team of Consultant

Key qualifications:

- Proven expertise in civic space / enabling environment analysis and civil society policy issues.
- Strong understanding of development co-operation ecosystems, donor practices, and the OECD-DAC context (including the DAC Recommendation).
- Demonstrated experience with mixed-methods research (desk review + consultations) and producing evidence-backed policy reports.
- Ability to translate complex evidence into sharp, credible and actionable messages for policy audiences.
- Experience working with global networks and delivering inclusive, multilingual-friendly processes.
- Excellent writing and editing skills in English; French and/or Spanish is an asset.

9. Location, Duration and Costing of Research

Location: Flexible. The consultant will work remotely. Applicants must still specify the location of the legal entity that will issue invoices. All activities (literature review, interviews, consultations, workshops) can be conducted online. Forus will support interpretation for key sessions, if need be.

Duration: April to end of June 2026. Estimated 25–35 working days (indicative) over the period.

Costing: The maximum budget is €15,000 (all taxes included). Bidders should submit a detailed budget (day-rates, number of days, and any direct costs). If proposing optional design/layout support, please provide a separate costed option.

Payment schedule (linked to deliverables):

- 20% on D1 approval,
- 40% on D4 acceptance,
- 40% on D6 acceptance.

10. Composition of the Application and Deadline

Eligibility / contracting restrictions:

This consultancy will be contracted under EU funding eligibility rules. As a result, Forus can only contract consultants/legal entities established in an EU Member State or in an eligible ODA recipient country. This means that Forus cannot accept proposals from legal entities established in (non-exhaustive list): the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, or South Korea. Consortium applications are welcome, but the contracting entity must be eligible and able to invoice Forus.

The application file should include:

- **Motivation letter** addressed to Forus' Advocacy Coordinator.
- **Technical proposal** (max 10 pages): understanding of the assignment, proposed methodology and analytical framework, engagement plan, risks/mitigation, and detailed workplan.
- **Financial proposal**: day-rates, number of days, direct costs, and confirmation that VAT/taxes (if applicable) are included (plus optional costed design/layout option if relevant).
- **CV(s) of consultant/team members** (max 2 pages each).
- **Two writing samples** (policy/advocacy/research).
- **Two to three references** from comparable assignments.
- **Proof of eligibility of the contracting entity** (country of establishment/registration).

Selection process:

Applications will be assessed on: (i) understanding and quality of methodology; (ii) relevant experience; (iii) feasibility and value for money; and (iv) ability to deliver a sharp, policy-relevant product within the timeline.

Application deadline:

Applications should be submitted by COB 19 March 2026 in electronic format to: recruitment@forus-international.org (subject line: "Consultancy – State of Civil Society's Enabling Environment report").

For questions about these terms of reference, please contact: recruitment@forus-international.org.