

Peace POLICY research

EXPLICIT-POLITICAL EVALUATION

# CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE NETWORK PROJECT

*Phase III March 2017-March 2020*

## FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAP	Annual Action Programme
CONCORD	European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
CS	Civil Society
CSDN	Civil Society Dialogue Network
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (EC)
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (EC)
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EP	European Parliament
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
EU	European Union
EUAM Ukraine	European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine
EUDEL	EU Delegation
EULEX Kosovo	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
EUMM Georgia	European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia
FIM	Funding Instruments Meeting
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (EC)
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission (EU)
IcSP	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MS	Member States (EU)
P/CVE	Preventing / Countering Violent Extremism
PMT	Project Management Team
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
VOICE	Network representing European NGOs working in Emergencies
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

# THE CSDN PROJECT AT A GLANCE

**DESCRIPTION** - The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for stimulating and convening exchanges between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues relating to the EU's peace and conflict policies and practices.

**THE CSDN SERIES** - The CSDN project first started back in mid-2010. The first phase covered the period from 2010 to 2013, the second phase of the CSDN ran from 2014 to 2017 and Phase III began in March 2017 and will end in March 2020. EPLO and the European Commission (EC) Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) project managers are in the process of exploring and shaping a fourth phase at the time of this evaluation.

**ACTION** - The main activities of the project are the organisation of different types of meetings (Policy Meetings, Geographic Meetings, Funding Instrument Meetings Member State Meetings and Training Seminars), CSDN publications, and additionally in CSDN Phase III, the production of CSDN videos.

**PURPOSE** - To continue to contribute to enhancing EU and civil society capacities to anticipate, prevent and respond to threats to stability and human development posed by violent conflict and crisis and to support conflict-affected countries in building peace

**OBJECTIVE 1** - To maintain and strengthen a robust EU-level dialogue mechanism between EU policy-makers and civil society actors on issues relating to the EU's peacebuilding policies and practices

**OBJECTIVE 2** - To continue to build the capacities of civil society actors working on peacebuilding and conflict prevention to engage in dialogue with EU policy-makers on issues relating to the EU's peacebuilding policies and practices

**OBJECTIVE 3** - To continue to strengthen EPLO's capacity to manage the CSDN through its networking, coordination, and policy functions

**MANAGEMENT** - The project is co-financed by the European Union's Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), and managed by EPLO in co-operation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

**BUDGET** - The total budget of the project is € 2.3 million co-funded by EPLO (10%) and the EU (90%) under the IcSP.

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# SCOPE OF EVALUATION

## Timing

This evaluation is taking place as the final year of the CSDN Phase III comes to a close in March 2020.

## Purpose

- A. To identify the **results** of the CSDN project so far
- B. To assess the **management** of the CSDN project
- C. To identify **challenges** in the implementation of the CSDN project
- D. To develop **recommendations** for improvement of the CSDN project

## Scope

- ➔ The overall CSDN project Phase III (but not the individual meetings and activities)
- ➔ Analysis of participant feedback on CSDN events across the different categories of meeting
- ➔ Analysis of inputs from qualitative interviews, interim narrative reports, and individual meeting documents
- ➔ Reflections on points of analysis from the evaluation of CSDN II

## EuropeAid Evaluation Framework *(Predetermined)*

**Relevance** - To assess to what extent the CSDN project continues to address a gap or deficiency in the wider project context

**Effectiveness** - To assess how effective the implementation of the CSDN has been at meeting the project objectives

**Efficiency** - To assess how well the resources of the CSDN project have been used in relation to human, financial, project management, and EPLO's own skills, knowledge and networks

**Impact** - To assess to what extent the CSDN project has been able to have an impact in the wider project context

**Sustainability** - To assess the sustainability of the outcomes and impact of the CSDN project

## Approach

The explicit-political lens that centres the *how and why* is an integral part of the Peace Policy Research approach. The report is structured according to the Evaluation Framework: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability. For each of these sections, there is an analysis of the results, challenges (and management of those challenges), an unpacking of *how and why* the project has worked or faced difficulties to identify conditions for success and points for learning. Finally, each section ends with a small number of key recommendations.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*"Dialogue' is an open ended process, aimed at creating a culture of communication that can provide common ground, confidence-building and improved understanding"*

European External Action Service, Conflict Prevention, Peace building and Mediation, 2017

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) project seems to be a valuable example of civil society (CS) - governmental collaboration in an era of shrinking space for civil society globally. The design of the CSDN responds to the complex realities of engagement in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. It reflects the need for disaggregated and diverse sets of skills and networks to address complex dynamics at multiple levels in conflict-affected environments. It aims to integrate the type of knowledge, access and skills that civil society stakeholders are often better able to provide, and it addresses the need for greater mutual understanding and collaboration between civil society and EU stakeholders. Nonetheless there are challenges such as, low levels of understanding and visibility for peacebuilding and conflict prevention work, expectations on follow-up that do not fall within the scope and resources of the project, and the perception that project is sometimes instrumentalised as an information-gathering service rather than a collaborative exchange on an equal footing. Despite this, the consistency with which participants have highlighted the importance of civil society-EU dialogue suggests that there is still a gap, and that the CSDN project helps to fill this gap.

The range of options covered by the different categories of CSDN meeting (Policy Meetings, Geographic Meetings, Training Seminars, Funding Instrument Meetings, and Member State Meetings) build much needed flexibility into the project. The meeting objectives in CSDN III continued to be varied, from initial peer-exchanges on new or cross-cutting issues, to consultation on EU policy documents or context analysis and insights from a CS perspective. The meeting objectives were sometimes technical and operational, and other times political or strategic. This variety appears to be a strength of the project as it was able to respond to different needs. The diversity of perspectives and experiences among participants - and its contribution to the high-quality of discussions - is frequently highlighted as a positive. EPLO paid increased attention to gender inclusiveness (beyond representation), notably integrating it as a lens in a policy meeting which stimulated a more complete analysis of the policy implications of a key EU policy area and addressed the practical impact of the gendered framing of the policy. EPLO has also invested in strengthening facilitation expertise for CSDN meetings to better manage convergent and divergent exchanges between stakeholders, and to connect outcomes with agenda design. A perennial challenge for the project is how to maintain the high quality of discussions and effectiveness when dealing with issues that are not already EU priorities or on the radar of EU policymakers. Nonetheless, the overall feedback confirms the project's usefulness and high regard for the quality of the meetings.

Organising the meetings under the CSDN entails a range of activities and resources linked to concept development, outreach to identify civil society specialists - and relevant EU stakeholders - for each distinct topic, followed by further outreach for invitations, planning, travel and accommodation logistics, venue selection, catering, facilitation or moderation planning, overseeing the production of the meeting summary reports and participant feedback surveys. After ten years of project implementation, EPLO has built up a solid package of internal tools and processes to facilitate the event planning responsibilities associated with the CSDN project. The development of internal standardised processes, tools and templates tailored to the organisation of CSDN events creates significant efficiencies in project implementation. EPLO has demonstrated an ability to deliver multiple different formats of CSDN meetings over the years, and has continued to experiment with new formats in CSDN III. However, as

with many civil society projects, it is a challenge to manage requests for additional project activities without the necessary additional resources.

In terms of impact, CSDN - and particularly EU - project stakeholders have placed an emphasis on written and institutionally-grounded outcomes. However, in the policy context, nurturing and sustaining a constructive dialogue between CS and EU stakeholders on sensitive and complex issues is a valuable impact in its own right. The CSDN project has been able to stimulate positive precedents on CS inclusion in EU intergovernmental deliberations and CSDN meetings have contributed to specific EU policy and programming processes that have then become part of the EU institutional 'canon'. It is unrealistic to expect that a project that organises one-off dialogue meetings would be able to shift the whole *direction* of internal EU policy and programming. Nonetheless, the CSDN meetings multiply the numbers of EU stakeholders exposed to - and able to apply - a conflict and peacebuilding lens to their work, which diffuses into the day-to-day thinking and deliberations underpinning EU actions. While the schedule of CSDN meetings leaves little time for follow-up or to strategise to maximise impact, FPI did make additional resources available in CSDN III to produce videos. This enabled EPLO to capture analysis and highlight existing CS expertise arising from CSDN meetings and the work of CS in-country. The medium of videos facilitated wider dissemination in a more accessible format, and subsequent internal EU and public screenings have further boosted the project's visibility and the reach of the analysis.

Understanding what sustainable outcomes or impact might look like for the CSDN project requires awareness of the context in which the project operates. For example, there is a high rotation of staff on the side of EU institutions, services, and member state (MS) administrations, and among civil society actors as a result of project-based staffing posts. Therefore, the dialogue element of the project does not inherently lend itself to sustainability as it is not aiming to build the kind of deep relationships that would arise from repeated exchanges among the same group of participants. Nonetheless, there is a growing alumni of EU and civil society stakeholders that have participated in the CSDN and been able to carry this experience forward with them in their roles. Sustainability also seems to come from the relationships built as part of the project. Though this is more difficult to capture, these have proved to be significant for achieving outcomes and wider impact. In interviews conducted as part of a light-touch M&E analysis in April 2019, the importance of relationships of trust was identified as one of the preconditions that led to policy-specific impact and it continues to be reiterated as both an outcome and a condition for the success of the project.

# EVALUATION ANALYSIS

## 1/ RELEVANCE

### 1.1 DID CSDN III RESPOND TO A GAP OR DEFICIENCY?

*"It can be a great opportunity for NGOs to provide feedback and learn more about EU implementation in their areas of action and advocacy."*

Evaluation Contributor

Evaluation contributors remarked that even the opportunity for civil society and EU stakeholders to be in a room together already added value. The overwhelming consistency with which this is noted suggests that there is still a gap and need for exchange between government and civil society stakeholders on peacebuilding and prevention issues. At a minimum, the design of the CSDN project responds to this. However there are particular characteristics of the CSDN that boost its value and make it a highly relevant project for its context.

#### **! The design of the project activities responds to the complex realities of peacebuilding and conflict transformation**

The overall project objective appears to be highly relevant as the complexity of conflict dynamics calls for a more disaggregated and diverse set of skills and networks, which civil society stakeholders are often better able to reflect and access. The diversity of specialisms and professional skills involved in peacebuilding and conflict prevention work is significant. Therefore, the fact that CSDN meetings create possibilities for collaboration and a division of labour among CS and EU stakeholders is of real value. The CSDN project serves as a hub for promoting this type of peer networking and opportunities for further cooperation among the different stakeholders.

#### **! The project can be seen as a valuable example of civil society-governmental collaboration in an era of shrinking space for civil society**

As shrinking space for civil society has become a global phenomenon, the importance of reiterating, maintaining and seeking ways to strengthen civil society participation in policymaking makes CSDN III topically relevant. The design of CSDN meetings places an emphasis on exchange and collaboration between diverse stakeholders. The gendered and more hierarchical nature of traditional security structures and practices means that it is even more important to promote alternative ways to engage on peace and conflict. The concept of the CSDN project (dialogue) and the activities (exchange and collaboration between CS and EU on shared concerns) is a solid basis for transforming traditional power relations between CS and EU stakeholders into more collegial, horizontal relationships.

#### **! The CSDN concept addresses the need for greater mutual understanding between civil society and EU stakeholders of each other's working contexts, processes, opportunities and limitations**

While the CSDN project's ultimate target is to influence the policies and practices that affect populations of countries at risk of, affected by or emerging from conflict, its most direct beneficiaries are civil society stakeholders (in Europe and in conflict-affected countries) and EU policy- and decision-making stakeholders (from EU institutions, services and EU Member State governments). The project provides resources that allow for civil society stakeholders working in- and outside of Brussels



to participate on their topics of expertise with counterparts working in EU administrative capitals and in-country. Through these exchanges, the CSDN project also fosters mutual awareness of the different mandates, working practices and cultures across CS and EU organisations.

**! The project design aims to promote increased transparency around policymaking processes**

The CSDN project includes training seminars on EU advocacy as one category of meeting with the explicit goal of building the capacity of civil society actors working on peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Low transparency around policymaking hinders collaboration between CS and governmental actors, making it difficult for CS stakeholders to tailor their input and methods of engagement in ways that will be most effective. Therefore, this facility as part of the CSDN project is relevant for addressing this deficiency and promoting a more equitable and targeted exchange.

**! The contract arrangements recognise the need to continually renew and update networks and knowledge to facilitate the project activities**

To ensure the project remains relevant, EPLO has to invest in continually renewing its knowledge of the working context, including developments in EU policymaking institutions, sector discussions on trends in peace and conflict, innovations in peacebuilding practice, and EU-civil society relations. This work within and outside of the scope of the CSDN project is an important foundation. EPLO has continued to work on this through engagement with its members, by participating in relevant European events, and by maintaining relationships with civil society and (EU and non-EU) governmental actors working on peace and conflict. It also maintains links with some sister networks in Europe, such as the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN), the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD), and Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE).

## 1.2 WHAT HAS POSED A CHALLENGE AND HOW HAS THIS BEEN MANAGED?

**! Peace and prevention work is hampered by low levels of understanding and visibility, making it difficult to guarantee active engagement from all relevant EU stakeholders.**

In the contract for CSDN III, the risk analysis noted the potential for insufficient participation by EU policymakers in CSDN meetings. As participation is linked to the perceived relevance of the subject matter, low levels of understanding among EU stakeholders can jeopardise this to some extent. Though this is not entirely under the control of the EPLO Secretariat, in CSDN III EPLO sought to increase the visibility and awareness of the project by investing more in reaching out to the Directors of EPLO member organisations and by working with EU counterparts to engage the High Representative / Vice President's (HR/VP) cabinet. This resulted in the Policy Meeting with the HR/VP and EPLO directors in May 2018 and a second Policy Meeting with the HR/VP on women in mediation in March 2019, which represent the most high-level meetings since the project began.

**! Few project stakeholders were clear about the structure, boundaries and purpose of the project**

Nearly all feedback references the need for more follow-up and more meetings to revisit or update insights despite the fact that this falls outside of the project structure, boundaries and purpose. CSDN meetings have more often functioned as a catalyst rather than as an ongoing platform for exchange. Likewise, few project stakeholders were aware that CSDN meeting categories (*see p. 3*) exist to structure and focus the selection of topics and maximise effectiveness within the scope of the project. This matters for the perceived relevance of the CSDN as participants appeared to have quite different expectations and understandings about what meetings could cover, what kind of expertise was needed or missing, how the activities should be focused and ultimately, whether the meeting was effective. Given that the project has to function according to particular parameters, there is room for clearer communication about this to avoid misunderstandings and unmet expectations.

**! The perception that the CSDN, as a dialogue project, is sometimes instrumentalised as an information-gathering service for EU stakeholders**

The collegial, horizontal nature of the project is part of its relevance and will determine its continued effectiveness. Feedback from many of the evaluation contributors raised the issue that EU participants were not always prepared for an exchange. This poses the risk that if CS stakeholders see little in the way of returns for their time and input, it will eventually undermine the relevance of the project as fewer CS participants will view CSDN meetings as adding value to their work. Stepping up efforts for a feedback loop should therefore be a priority for both EPLO and EU project managers.

*“Making time to participate in a CSDN has an impact on limited NGO staff resources, so it is important to know ‘What have you done with our time?’”*

Evaluation Contributor

**1.3 LEARNING: WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO - AND DETRACT FROM - THE RELEVANCE OF THE CSDN PROJECT?**

The nature of the CSDN contract, which creates a basis for a more equal partnership and active co-management by EU and CS	The facility for CS to propose topics, shape the agenda, and identify participants based on their knowledge and networks	The fact that meeting topics are not predetermined and can be responsive in raising and covering issues relevant for EU policy and practice	Underestimation of the relevance of having a dedicated platform for exchange between stakeholders with different specialisms and spheres of influence
The multistakeholder composition of the Project Oversight Group (POG), which includes the primary project stakeholders	The capacity to include EU actors from across institutions, services and MS to additionally support intra-EU exchange	When the meetings cover / raise issues that have clear topical and strategic relevance in the wider context	Lack of clarity among project stakeholders on how and why some CSDN proposals go forward (or not), particularly with respect to CS-proposed topics

## 1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ON INCREASING RELEVANCE

→	Ensure that any future phases of the CSDN project continue to respond constructively to external political trends affecting civil society and governmental relations
→	Maintain recognition of the diverse - but equally important - skills, experience, knowledge and networks contributed by both civil society and EU governmental stakeholders
→	(EPLO and EU focal points) Discuss how to strengthen EU stakeholder accountability for feedback to CS participants, even while specific documents may not be shareable
→	Look for opportunities to integrate more transparency and understanding of EU policymaking processes as part of CS capacity building in CSDN meetings outside of the Training Seminars
→	Address confusion on the project structure, scope, and boundaries to clarify <i>how and when</i> CSDN is most relevant (the right tool), and which objectives it is (and is not) designed to meet
→	Encourage CS and EU participants to play a stronger role in disseminating / discussing the insights, ideas and opportunities arising from the CSDN meetings within their own structures
→	Look for ways to be more intentional (at the planning and agenda design stage) in stimulating initial follow-up, and encouraging CS and EU participants to define follow-up activities

## 2/ EFFECTIVENESS

### 2.1 HAS CSDN III ACHIEVED ITS OBJECTIVES?

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION** - While EPLO has worked to strengthen the design of meetings in CSDN III, the lack of corresponding monitoring data that would connect the meeting outcomes to the project objectives makes evaluation challenging. The qualitative and quantitative data contained within participant feedback surveys has not been exploited by data analysis. Feedback from EU participants on policy and programming follow-up is not consistent, and there is no way to monitor CSDN contributions to EU internal thinking or discussions. Without an established feedback loop it is, therefore, not possible to thoroughly assess the 'policy influence' aspect of the project's effectiveness. Addressing this M&E gap is critical to being able to communicate the story of *how, why and under what conditions* the project is most effective. The following analysis reflects the points that were most clearly highlighted in the background documents and interviews.

**! The project seems to be an effective means of maintaining and strengthening a robust EU-level dialogue mechanism between EU policy-makers and civil society actors**

Feedback from evaluation contributors indicates that the meeting-level objectives are often met. The dialogue element is particularly valued and there is strong, consistent feedback that the CSDN project is effective at connecting EU and civil society stakeholders who would not otherwise have opportunities to work collaboratively. The room for formal and informal moments of networking and exchange are appreciated as an effective way to build relationships of trust. Though there is an inherent difficulty in engaging governmental stakeholders on peace and prevention work, which is often highly sensitive, EPLO has sought to manage this by continuing to hold the majority of CSDN meetings under the 'Chatham House Rule'<sup>1</sup> throughout CSDN III.

**! All of the topics selected for CSDN meetings and videos have reflected issues that are relevant for effective EU peacebuilding policies and practices**

The range of options covered by the categories of CSDN meeting foreseen in the contract (Policy Meetings, Geographic Meetings, Training Seminars, Funding Instrument Meetings, and Member State Meetings) serves effectiveness by building much needed flexibility into the project. The meeting objectives in CSDN III continued to vary, from initial exchanges on new or cross-cutting issues (*e.g. the Policy Meeting on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus*), to consultation on EU policy (*e.g. the Policy Meeting on the EU's conflict analysis guidelines*). The objectives were sometimes technical and operational, and other times political or strategic. This variety appears to be a strength of the project as it is able to respond to different needs. However, the perennial challenge of achieving meaningful outcomes when CS raises issues that are not yet priorities for EU stakeholders remains.

**! The diversity of perspectives and experiences among participants and its contribution to the high quality of discussions**

The capacity to *anticipate, prevent and respond to threats to stability or to human development and to support conflict-affected countries in building peace* calls for a sophisticated understanding of conflict and peace dynamics. This is inextricably linked to the diversity of knowledge and experience available to feed into CSDN analysis and exchange. Both gender and regional imbalance of participants in CSDN meetings was raised as a potential risk in the project description. However, this risk appears to have been well-managed. For CSDN III, the diversity of perspectives was frequently noted as a valued factor

<sup>1</sup> "participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed" -<https://www.chathamhouse.org/chatham-house-rule>

in participant feedback surveys, though this referred mostly to the diversity of profiles among CS, rather than EU participants.

**EXAMPLE** - Opportunities to look comparatively at lessons and draw out contextual specificities were particularly appreciated in the Policy Meeting on EULEX Kosovo, e.g. the inclusion of civil society from the North and South, and in the Policy Meeting on preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) which included wide geographic representation, e.g. Jordan, Lebanon, Kosovo, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Syria and Tunisia.

**EXAMPLE** - EPLO paid increased attention to gender inclusiveness (beyond balanced gender representation), notably in the CSDN on P/CVE, which created an opportunity to explore a more complete picture of the practical implications and experiences of a key EU policy area, and brought out insights on the gendered dynamics of the policy framing itself.

### **! EPLO has invested in strengthening facilitation expertise for CSDN meetings**

Planning for, and managing, a diversity of perspectives and experiences requires facilitation expertise. Depending on the objectives of each CSDN meetings, the aim might be to capture the range of viewpoints rather than to come to a consensus, to engage in collective analysis, to open a dialogue on a shared area of concern, to serve as a direct consultation on an EU policy or programme, or another aim entirely. This requires expertise in designing for convergent and divergent exchanges between and among different stakeholder types. In CSDN III, EPLO has increased its use of experienced facilitators and increased the Project Management Team's (PMT) focus on agenda and session design.

**EXAMPLE** - EPLO's attention to connecting the design of the agenda with the objectives was notable for the Policy Meeting on EUMM Georgia, where the decision to hold a separate lunch meeting with think tank representatives and a round-table with peacebuilding practitioners allowed for more focused discussions on strategic analysis and on analysis with operational implications.

## **2.2 WHAT HAS POSED A CHALLENGE AND HOW HAS THIS BEEN MANAGED?**

### **! The scope implied by the overall project objective would require much more varied engagement from EU stakeholders in terms of institutions and services**

A number of evaluation contributors raised the issue that EU participation is often dominated by the EEAS, with less participation from other EU institutions and services. As the project is aimed at "*enhancing EU and civil society capacities to anticipate, prevent and respond*", this implies a wider range of EU stakeholders whose portfolios and mandates are intertwined with these capacities. A perception that the CSDN project is limited to EEAS and FPI stakeholders as the primary 'donors' and managers of the project would weaken the project's effectiveness as it excludes significant other types of EU tools and mandates exercised by the European Commission (EC), the Council, MS permanent representations and capitals, and the European Parliament (EP). Given the need for diverse forms of action across multiple spheres of influence, expanding participation in (or even just dissemination and outreach on) relevant meeting topics could boost effectiveness. However, this does imply extra staff time on stakeholder identification and outreach.

**! Managing the fact that civil society participants have varying levels of pre-existing knowledge of EU institutions and policies**

The advocacy training seminars are explicitly aimed at enhancing CS knowledge of the EU, but the degree of capacity-building for CS as part of other types of CSDN meeting is unclear. EPLO maintains an updated mapping of relevant EU actors on its website. It also holds preparatory meetings with civil society participants (a long-standing feature of the CSDN project) though the format varies and does not necessarily focus on providing foundational EU knowledge. Most CSDN meetings include scheduled contributions from EU participants, however, these seemed to vary in terms of their value. Some were deemed overly focused on EU policies rather than on EU action, and did not necessarily clarify how CS and EU could cooperate in practice. There is a symbiotic relationship between the openness of EU stakeholders and quality and relevance of CS inputs and recommendations. Addressing the risk of poor quality of analysis and recommendations by civil society participants (a risk raised in the project description) is therefore linked to both the degree of capacity-building by the EPLO secretariat and to the openness of EU participants at meeting level.

**! Managing varying levels of familiarity with CS engagement and dialogue mechanisms among EU policy officials**

There is no corresponding project objective to strengthen EU capacity to engage collaboratively with CS. EU stakeholders' participation styles, which can include written remarks and detailed descriptions of mandates and policy documents are sometimes perceived as working against the effectiveness of CSDN meetings. A number of evaluation contributors noted that EU participants were more likely to make formal interventions, to extract analysis, but less likely to reflect openly and share knowledge of their own constraints and entry points. This continued challenge is not entirely within the control of EPLO and it is one of the aspects of the project which depend on joint management with EU counterparts as the bridge to other EU stakeholders. As Phase III CSDN meetings have become more interactive, there is room to explore how best to balance information-sharing versus exchange during the meetings.

**2.3 LEARNING: WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO - AND DETRACT FROM - THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CSDN PROJECT?**

<p>When a direct link between the CSDN objectives and an EU internal timeline leads to a more robust shared focus on meeting objectives</p>	<p>When meetings reflect diverse perspectives, lived experience and professional profiles, i.e. beyond stakeholder divisions or organisational affiliations</p>	<p>If the meeting and strategy is not well-communicated, resulting in a (disruptive) divergent goals or expectations among participants</p>	<p>When EU participants from among the wider EU institutions, services and/or Member States are not engaged or represented on relevant topics</p>
<p>The capacity to convene stakeholders from different contexts and locations, in particular participation from in-country civil society actors</p>	<p>When examples of how EU policies play out in practice trigger understanding of what is to be avoided or what needs be better taken into account</p>	<p>Actions that undermine collegiality during meetings, such as showing disinterest, leaving early, dominating to the exclusion of other voices</p>	<p>When CS or EU stakeholders are not well-prepared for the exchange and collaboration format of CSDN meetings</p>

<p>The ability to design meetings that generate comparative analysis and learning across different contexts and between peer organisations</p>	<p>When the relationship between EPLO and EU counterparts increases the quality, relevance and perceived value of the meeting</p>	<p>Low or no (intrinsic) incentives for EU staff to prioritise engagement on issues outside of institutional priorities or policy portfolios</p>
<p>Preparatory meetings and briefings that support participants in shaping their contributions to the meeting objective</p>	<p>Meetings that made translation services available to support better civil society inclusion</p>	

## 2.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ON INCREASING EFFECTIVENESS

<p>→</p>	<p>Consider an alternative planning process for meetings on topics that are not tied to existing EU priorities or portfolios, i.e. define and agree different outcome criteria and types of output</p>
<p>→</p>	<p>Consider ways to build the capacity - or simply better prepare - EU stakeholders to work collaboratively with CS on developing collective analysis and ideas for action</p>
<p>→</p>	<p>Work with EU project management counterparts to explore how to reach a wider pool of EU stakeholders whose mandates are also be relevant for the exchange and follow-up</p>
<p>→</p>	<p>Expand the notion of 'balance' for diversity of representation to additionally include context knowledge from local to global levels, different lived experiences, and professional profiles</p>
<p>→</p>	<p>Continue to strengthen emphasis on interactive sessions and small group work and exploring practical ways to be more inclusive (designing for different styles and formats for inputs)</p>

## 3/ EFFICIENCY

### 3.1 HOW WELL HAVE THE RESOURCES FOR CSDN III BEEN USED?

CSDN meetings are a highly efficient means of sharing knowledge, practices and developing collective analyses that represent a diversity of specialisms and experience. It convenes stakeholders in one place, anywhere from half a day to two days, and is able to simultaneously stimulate outcomes on substantive issues, capacity building, increased ties among a community of practice, and support individual professional development, concentrated into a (often) single meeting.

The project proposal for CSDN III foresaw a total of 32 such events over a 36 month period. To date, EPLO has implemented all of these, most being stand-alone exchanges on distinct topics, with a few exceptionally designed as a series to meet specific objectives. The events have been spread fairly evenly across the three years of implementation (approx. ten per year), which suggests solid oversight and management of project resources and scheduling.

#### HUMAN RESOURCES

##### ! A highly productive and efficient use of human resources

The EPLO Secretariat takes the lead on organising the meetings which entails a range activities and resources linked to concept development, outreach to identify civil society specialists - and relevant EU stakeholders - for each distinct topic, followed by further outreach for invitations, planning, travel and accommodation logistics, venue selection, catering, facilitation or moderation planning, overseeing the production of the meeting summary reports and feedback surveys. With a project management team of 10 staff dedicating between 50 and 100 percent of staff time to the CSDN (i.e. excluding other EPLO Secretariat functions and activities) this represents a productive and efficient use of human resources.

#### PROJECT MANAGEMENT

##### ! The ability to deliver multiple different formats of CSDN meetings over the years, and has continued to experiment with new formats in CSDN III.

EPLO has demonstrated the ability to implement events that cover a wide variety of meeting formats, finding new participants, and sometimes working remotely in new locations. This is a strong indicator of the Secretariat's project management skills. In-country meetings often require significant staff time to manage logistics remotely from Brussels. In some cases, EPLO has made resources available for planning visits to source and make contact for country-based logistics, such as venue identification, accommodation and stakeholder outreach. However, as in-country meetings are often highly praised by participants, these represent a good investment. Geographic meetings that have taken place in Brussels have been implemented smoothly, with consistently positive feedback, despite additional event complexities involving long-distance travel arrangements for multiple participants, including transit and visa application processes, in some cases with multiple country consulates. Policy meetings can involve more in-depth preparatory policy research and EU stakeholder outreach. The Training Seminars have a different participant selection mechanism involving an application process. The Funding Instrument Meetings are the most consistent in terms of design, but engage a higher number of participants, in some cases up to 100. The Member State Meetings foreseen in the project proposal have not taken place. These have been some of a number of meetings where ongoing liaison and planning with EU counterparts did not, in the end, result in a CSDN.



### ! The development of internal standardised processes and templates tailored to the organisation of CSDN events

After ten years of project implementation, EPLO has built up a solid package of internal processes and templates to facilitate the event planning associated with the CSDN project. As staff have often moved between logistics and policy roles, this has created a strong base of event planning skills among the majority of EPLO's staff, which according to staff, enhances the efficiency of their work as most of the PMT understand the logistical implications of decisions around agenda development, event design, and participation. Staff also noted that the logistics can be the most visible aspect of the event and is therefore crucial to the project's external credibility. Removing logistical obstacles enables participants to focus on active participation. On the flip side, there is pressure to maintain high standards for those same reasons. The practice of having two staff members working in partnership with a clear division of responsibilities has been valuable for managing all aspects of implementation smoothly.

*"When EPLO was in charge, I knew it was going to be fine"*

Evaluation Contributor

### ! The POG maximises the efficiency of joint decision-making between the key project stakeholders

In the project proposal, the POG responsibilities are listed as *reviewing past CSDN events, deciding on future CSDN events and considering issues arising from the overall implementation of CSDN III*. It is a tripartite body that meets four times per year and it is composed of a member from the EPLO Secretariat, two from EPLO Member Organisations (steering committee representatives), one member from the project management team in FPI, and one member from the EEAS Division for Conflict Prevention and Mediation Support (ISP 2). Evaluation contributors with experience of the POG confirmed that the simplicity of the POG's role contributes to efficient decision-making. However, some evaluation contributors suggested that more frequent interactions between POG meetings would allow for more meaningful planning and troubleshooting. The activities of the POG appear to have served its primary function to ensure the efficient management of CSDN activities, though it is important to clarify that its role is not foreseen as a strategic or political one.

### EPLO Knowledge and Networks

#### ! The complementarity between EPLO network activities and the CSDN Project

Some aspects of CS capacity building are reinforced by the activities of EPLO's working groups, which regularly convene to discuss EU developments, sector trends and practices. EPLO has expanded its membership in recent years, with six new member organisations joining in Year One, two more member organisations in Year Two and two in Year Three, which increases its points of connection with new civil society expertise in-countries and within the member organisations. The day-to-day activities of the network help EPLO staff to maintain an overview of key developments relating to peacebuilding and conflict prevention being discussed by EU stakeholders. Longstanding relations with counterparts within FPI 2 and ISP 2 have continued to support EPLO's background work on CSDN III on issue tracking and framing CSDN meeting proposals. EPLO's participation in emerging peacebuilding initiatives within the peacebuilding sector, such as +Peace and leadership convenings on What's Next in Peacebuilding contribute knowledge that can add value to CSDN implementation.

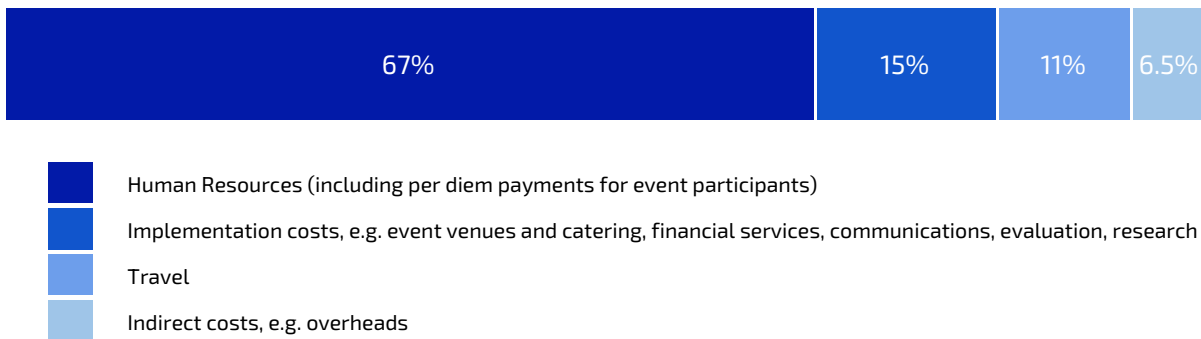
## Financial Management

### ! The budget breakdown aligns with the expected breakdown of resources necessary for the main activities of the project

The total budget for CSDN III was 2.3 million EUR over 36 months. Financing for the CSDN is composed of a 10 percent financing contribution (231,000 EUR ) from EPLO and a 90 percent financing contribution (2.1 million EUR ) from the EC's Instrument contributing to Peace and Stability (IcSP).

The budget breakdown reflects and aligns well with the expected breakdown of resources necessary for the main activities of the project, which involve (primarily) human resources for event planning, logistics, facilitation, networking and outreach, communications, policy research, and project management and coordination. CSDN meeting reports and discussion papers also call for writing and editorial activities. In CSDN III, the production of CSDN videos required additional staff activities on film production, scheduling, project management of partners, and dissemination.

#### Budget breakdown



## 3.2 WHAT HAS POSED A CHALLENGE AND HOW HAS THIS BEEN MANAGED?

### ! The need to remain stringent about the number of CSDN meetings conducted during CSDN III

In the project proposal, insufficient or excessive demand for meetings was raised as a potential risk. Having significantly over-delivered on the number of CSDN meetings in Phase I and II, EPLO met the foreseen target for meetings in CSDN III, implementing 32 events at a steady rate. The Secretariat delivered eleven meetings in Year 1, ten in Year 2, and eleven in Year 3. EPLO has had to be stringent in managing requests and expectations on the number of meetings. Sticking to the number foreseen in the contract enabled EPLO to manage the project resources more efficiently, i.e. with time for PMT members to focus on design aspects such as participation and alignment with EU internal policy processes.

### ! Managing requests for additional project activities in some cases with - and in some cases without - the necessary additional resources

The steps forward on meeting design and diversification of participation in CSDN III were enabled by stopping the overdelivery of events, and prioritising quality over quantity. Nonetheless, there have been additions to the main activities to the CSDN project that have been discussed and/or integrated during CSDN III. In one case, additional resources for the production of videos, introduced after the start of the project. These resources enabled EPLO to work with external technical experts and increase internal staff resources available to manage the production process from start to finish. The videos have proven to be an efficient method of disseminating the insights and outcomes from the CSDN to a wider

audience in an accessible way. In contrast, the development of an M&E framework which also implies additional technical capacity and staff time, has not had similar additional provisions made available, despite being highlighted as priority by numerous project stakeholders and in previous evaluations. While EPLO tentatively explored some ideas for light-touch approaches in Year Three, it is likely that the main obstacles (resources for a tailored evaluation framework and staff time to manage and integrate this) will remain unless the resource gap is addressed in future phases of the project.

### 3.3 LEARNING: WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO - AND DETRACT FROM - THE EFFICIENCY OF THE CSDN PROJECT?

<p>Longevity and trust that has been built up by the EPLO secretariat over the course of ten years of implementing the CSDN project</p>	<p>The existence of a POG that represents an efficient mechanism for presenting proposals and taking joint decisions on topic selection</p>	<p>The standardised work processes, templates, tracking tools and in-house event capacity developed after ten years of experience</p>	<p>Lack of clarity on division of labour between EPLO and EU internal focal points for outreach and interactions with wider EU stakeholders</p>
<p>A strong culture of skills-building and peer-training on international event planning and logistics among EPLO staff.</p>	<p>The responsiveness and rapidity with which EPLO can respond to EU initiatives and requests, even at short notice</p>		<p>Proposed additional activities for the CSDN project without corresponding resources or capacity to implement them meaningfully and to a reasonable standard</p>

### 3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ON INCREASING EFFICIENCY

<p>→</p>	<p>Continue to promote peer learning around event planning, design, facilitation and logistical expertise among the EPLO project management team (PMT)</p>
<p>→</p>	<p>Systematically conduct in-depth PMT debriefings covering all elements, e.g. agenda design, logistics, participant selection, outreach strategy, in order to support learning and adaptation</p>
<p>→</p>	<p>Clarify the expected inputs and division of labour among the EPLO project management team, and maintain regular contact with FPI and EEAS focal points for trouble-shooting</p>
<p>→</p>	<p>Ensure that requests for additions or adaptations to the project are analysed according to the additional / adjusted investments they imply for both EPLO and for EU project managers</p>

## 4/ IMPACT

### 4.1 WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS CSDN III MADE IN ITS WIDER CONTEXT?

*"EPLO can be ambitious in what they expect, which is important, but at the same time, they understand the EU institutional system well enough to know how to frame the events and connect with EU portfolios."*

Evaluation Contributor

Though EU bodies often integrate an element of civil society consultation into their policymaking, this rarely goes as far as a horizontal exchange between CS and EU stakeholders. Exchange on an equal footing is not a given, especially on issues that overlap with traditional security and defence structures and working cultures. The design of the CSDN project is therefore somewhat ambitious. In this light, it is easier to understand why nurturing and sustaining a constructive dialogue between CS and EU stakeholders on sensitive and complex issues is a valuable impact in its own right.

In relation to the potential policy and programmatic impact of the project, there is no explicit theory of change addressing this. It is unlikely that a project that organises one-off dialogue meetings would be able to shift the *direction* of internal EU policy and programming significantly or consistently. Indeed, it is clear from EPLO's wider experience advocating at the EU level that the EU's policy and programming documents are drafted and shaped by numerous EU stakeholders across multiple institutions, services and Member States, reflecting diverse political, bureaucratic, mandate-related considerations. Nonetheless, where the CSDN does seem to have an impact is in contributing to the rigour and efficacy of civil society and EU action by enabling the exchange of technical and context-based expertise on peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

#### **! CSDN meetings have contributed to specific EU policy and programming documents and discussions that then become part of the EU institutional 'canon' of action on peace and conflict**

CSDN - and particularly EU - project stakeholders have placed an emphasis on written and institutionally-grounded outcomes, reflecting the assumption that codified outcomes are more likely to have an impact on practice. As a result, many CSDN meetings in Phase III have been designed with this in mind. The Policy Meeting on women, peace and Security (WPS) in September 2018 - directly worked on the framing of the text for the EU Strategic Approach to WPS. The regular Funding Instruments Meetings on the IcSP Annual Action Programme continued to solicit input from CS and other actors on IcSP programming and implementation. The main points of the Policy Meeting on P/CVE were fed into the November 2017 meeting of the EU Informal Task force on WPS. The project's most high-profile meeting on women in mediation with the HR/VP was shaped to feed into and add impetus to the EU's own internal discussions and later informed an EU project. As no standardised monitoring exists to capture policy and programmatic input - and there is no specific EU commitment to share feedback - it is not possible to report systematically on this type of impact. Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate the type of policy outcome that CSDN III has generated.

#### **! CSDN meetings have expanded or contributed to a richer analysis of contexts, themes and practice**

While some CSDN meetings aimed to generate specific changes to EU policy documents, wider impact has been achieved in the numbers of EU stakeholders exposed to, and able to apply, a conflict and peacebuilding lens in their work. For example, the CSDN in Uganda drew out an emphasis on land issues within the meeting which informed thinking among programming and political staff within the EU

Delegation (EUDEL) in Kampala. This type of outcome becomes impactful as it diffuses out into the work and deliberations of EU staff. The CSDN has the potential to more explicitly work on this type of impact by engaging stakeholders who are less familiar (and perhaps less supportive of) peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

**! The CSDN mechanism has been able to stimulate positive precedents on CS inclusion in EU policy, programmatic and political deliberations**

The design of the CSDN project is more ambitious than a consultation mechanism. Its design aims to stimulate a culture of collaboration on an equal footing. Nonetheless, even after three phases, this feature of the project has to be continually emphasised and protected. At the meeting level, the CSDN has been able to capitalise on opportunities for CS inclusion, for example linking CS participants from the CSDN in Uganda into high-level EU political meetings to feed-in insights and recommendations. By aiming to be more than a consultation mechanism and by supporting the establishment of new precedents for CS inclusion, the project can be said to have had some impact on its context.

**EXAMPLE** - One of the Funding Instruments Meetings in Year 1 created a platform for international NGOs (INGOs) to voice their experiences of applying for and managing donor support for in-country CSO capacity building and initiatives, and then give recommendations on improvements. This reflects a good degree of trust among CS and EU participants to exchange on potentially challenging aspects of their partnerships.

## 4.2 WHAT HAS POSED A CHALLENGE AND HOW HAS THIS BEEN MANAGED?

**! Delivering meetings according to a schedule of approximately ten per year left less time to plan follow-up and strategise on how to maximise impact**

In order to be flexible and responsive, the focus of implementation has been on convening a variety of types of dialogue meeting on a variety of topics and the associated work of identifying participants with the specialist knowledge that will add value to each exchange. With a rate of around ten meetings per year, this leaves little time to assess and define an outcomes strategy or explore different possible types and levels of impact for each individual CSDN meeting. As meetings have moved from one topic, location and set of project stakeholders to the next, it has rarely been possible to pursue the kind of intensive outreach and follow-up needed to promote deeper impact.

**! The limited number of stakeholder that participate directly in the CSDN meetings**

CSDN policy and geographic meetings - which represent around two thirds of the meetings - are usually relatively small, involving around 25 participants. This element of the meeting design is linked to quality control and has proven to be more conducive to meaningful exchange. Nonetheless, the number of CS and EU stakeholders likely to interact with the project, therefore, remains limited. EPLO typically produces and publishes meeting reports on its website as a summary of the key insights and recommendations (with a few exceptions during CSDN III at the behest of EU stakeholders for which Internal Notes were produced). In some cases, meeting reports were actively shared further with those who had expressed interest but did not participate. However, this is not done systematically.

In CSDN III, FPI made additional resources available within the project to produce CSDN videos. The videos were used to capture analysis, communicate ideas and highlight existing CS expertise and work being done on specific peace and conflict issues. The medium of videos facilitated wider dissemination in a more accessible format. Internal EU and public screenings have further boosted visibility and reach, increasing opportunities for impact. If this becomes institutionalised in the project, it may address some of the challenges of reach.

**EXAMPLE** - The Policy Meeting on women in mediation utilised the additional resources for videos element to generate greater visibility. The combination of an event and video on women in mediation is an example of how the project was able to use a multi-pronged approach. The meeting supported internal EU work, drawing out comparative insights and experience, and the videos captured key points and ideas that the EU was then able to use to stimulate internal dialogue.

### 4.3 LEARNING: WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO - AND DETRACT FROM - THE IMPACT OF THE CSDN PROJECT?

EPLO activities to maintain an updated overview of current, upcoming <i>and</i> politically topical EU policy / programming processes	EPLO ongoing investment in outreach, renewing relationships and relationship-building, with CS and EU stakeholder allies	The perception that CS is at the service of EU stakeholders, which can undermine future CS openness to collaboration and participation	If CS stakeholders are overly focused on the donor-beneficiary dynamic or prioritise fundraising above making meaningful meeting contributions
When EU stakeholders from lead services actively engage in CSDN concept development, in planning for outcomes, and during the meeting	EPLO knowledge - and knowledge-sharing with CS meeting participants - on EU policy-making culture and effective methods of engagement	The fact that the range of types of impact from CSDN are likely to be overlooked or unrecorded due a focus on EU policy documents as the primary definition of success	A lack of availability of outcomes reporting or reflective analysis of meetings, i.e. emphasis on activity reporting and quantitative stats on participants
The potential flexibility to define meeting objectives according to what is most needed from that specific exchange	The flexibility to design the format and agenda of meetings differently, in accordance with the meeting objectives	Planning for multiple outputs from CSDN meetings to achieve different impact goals or reach different types of stakeholder	Resources to experiment with videos and dissemination that can reaches (and potentially mobilises) a wider audience

## 4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ON INCREASING IMPACT

↪	Continue to protect the more ambitious concept of exchange and collaboration in the CSDN project so it does not risk becoming just another one-way consultation mechanism
↪	Define impact more broadly, leaving room to examine the different types of impact that the project has on its wider political context, and being open to unforeseen types of impact
↪	Consider hosting an (optional) post-meeting moment / phone-call for CS participants to strategise on possibilities to generate their own outcomes and/or impact from the event
↪	Standardise the process of disseminating key insights and/or engaging interested CS and EU stakeholders who were not able to participate in the meeting
↪	Gather qualitative or quantitative data with explanatory power, <i>i.e.</i> monitor how and why certain elements worked (or not) to derive an analysis that better supports impact evaluation
↪	Review and ensure that all data that is currently collected for CSDN meetings are connected to theories of change, and are therefore useful in explaining outcomes and impact
↪	Design meeting reports to prioritise insights and analysis over event summaries to add value and interest for a wider readership and build up a library of issue-based CSDN outputs

## 5/ SUSTAINABILITY

### 5.1 HOW SUSTAINABLE ARE THE OUTCOMES OF THE CSDN PROJECT?

Though the project goal is defined as capacity building of civil society and EU stakeholders in relation to their ability to '*anticipate, prevent and respond*' to violent conflict and support countries on peacebuilding, the impact goal prioritised among evaluation contributors was often focused on the translation of insights, analysis and learning from CSDN meetings into EU policy and programme documents and high-level EU decision-making processes. This implies a theory of change that integration into the institutional administration will generate sustained impact on EU practice.

**! CSDN III has facilitated connections between civil society and EU stakeholders in a wide range of contexts and on a broad range of subjects**

Despite the one-off nature of CSDN meetings, there are sustainability opportunities as the rotation and change in participants enables the project to sensitise a wider community of EU and civil society stakeholders to collaborative exchange around peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

**! Meetings that were part of a series reflected - and iteratively enhanced - relationships of trust and collegiality between EPLO and EU counterparts**

Policy meetings on CSDP missions (e.g. EULEX Kosovo in September 2017, EUMM Georgia in January and February 2018) have been repeated at milestone moments in the EU calendar, notably around strategic reviews. This reflected the need for the EU to consult civil society. Yet, the decision to repeatedly choose to do this through the CSDN mechanism also reflects the degree of trust and positive cooperation that has been established between the EPLO and EU counterparts. This has had further impact, laying the foundations for CSDN meetings on other regions, notably the subsequent CSDN on missions in Somalia in February 2020. Though it is more difficult to capture, this type of relationship-building can be an important catalyst for project impact and achieving sustainability. In interviews conducted as part of a light-touch exploration of M&E in April 2019, the importance of relationships of trust was raised as an important precondition for - and example of - CS-EU cooperation, and this was reiterated in interviews with EPLO staff. Relationships of trust have the potential to create new norms of CS-EU cooperation that can be sustained outside of the project context.

**! The CSDN facility for civil society training seminars on EU advocacy has a particularly strong focus on designing for sustainability**

The CSDN Training Seminars, held approximately twice per year, are one of the most sustainable elements of the CSDN Project as they, by their very nature, are explicitly designed to maximise lasting outcomes for civil society participants. One evaluation contributor reported that they were able to recognise additional impact from a training seminar much later. This highlights the importance of M&E frameworks that distinguish between the immediate outcomes and longer-term, wider impact on context, allowing the necessary space and time for this type of assessment. However, as there is currently no standardised monitoring of impact arising from CSDN meetings, it is difficult to build a robust picture of sustainability.



## 5.2 WHAT HAS POSED A CHALLENGE TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT AND HOW HAS THIS BEEN MANAGED?

### ! Rotation of staff in EU institutional context and in civil society context due to project-bound posts

Understanding what sustainable outcomes or impact might look like for the CSDN project requires awareness of the context in which the project operates. For example, there is frequent rotation of staff on the side of EU institutions, services, and member state administrations, and for civil society (as a result of short-term, project-based staffing posts). On the one hand, the project focus on one-off meetings does not inherently lend itself to sustainability as it is not designed to build the type of deep relationships that would arise from repeated exchanges among the same group of participants. On the other hand, there is a growing alumni of EU and civil society stakeholders that have participated in CSDN events and been able to carry this experience with them in their roles. A strengthened communications component, through the addition of the videos, might create new ways for that 'alumni' to engage or simply stay connected with the project.

## 5.3 LEARNING: WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO - AND DETRACT FROM - THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CSDN PROJECT?




<p>EPLO knowledge - and knowledge-sharing with CS meeting participants - on EU policy-making culture and effective methods of engagement</p>	<p>An ongoing investment in outreach, renewing relationships and relationship-building, with CS and EU stakeholder allies</p>	<p>The constant generation of new and updated policy documents reduces or time-limits the potential impact on practice</p>	<p>The fact that most CS and EU interactions with the project will be around one-off CSDN meetings</p>
<p>The growing 'alumni' of CS and EU stakeholders that the CSDN project has engaged in this type of dialogue mechanism</p>			<p>The lack of monitoring data, which makes it difficult to trace - and therefore analyse - meeting outcomes and impact over time</p>

### Other Sustainability Factors

**Climate change adaptations** - The CSDN project is primarily a mechanism for face-to-face exchanges and relationship-building, through meetings. As organisations increasingly factor-in the climate change impact of their activities, such as international air travel, there will of course be a reflection on how to address this within the bounds of the CSDN. The EPLO Secretariat is already starting to institute carbon off-setting, however, what is clear from the evaluation analysis is that human connection is key to the project's effectiveness. This is the ability to meet, exchange formally (and informally), collaborate and thus, establish new relationships of trust among stakeholders from different contexts, with different specialisms, who are often located at a distance from each other. While it is technically possible to convene people through other channels, the underlying conditions for building trust through human connection might change which could, therefore, have an impact on the project's effectiveness.

**Cross-border travel in an era of heightened migration restrictions** - The EPLO Secretariat has a solid foundation of logistical skills, including the management of groups of travel arrangements, including support for visa applications. This is likely to become even more complex in the current political climate. It will, therefore, be important for the diversity and quality of CSDN meetings that there is a continuation of the positive and active support from EU stakeholders to assist in visa application processes. Indeed, this is a tangible action toward diversity and inclusion. The staff time and dedication to ensuring a smooth experience of travel and logistical arrangements for participants is a valuable - though often invisible - factor for effectiveness.

## 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY

	<p>Ensure that CSDN meeting design reflects a rigorous and (EU) context-driven theory of change on how to best to achieve sustainable EU policy and practice impact on the meeting topic</p>
	<p>Look for ways to further incorporate knowledge gained from the Training Seminars (around sustainable training and learning techniques) to the design of CSDN meetings</p>
	<p>Incorporate sustainability reflection as part of CSDN meeting debriefings to identify ideas for CS or EU stakeholders to follow up on and to stimulate wider impact</p>

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from the evaluation analysis that the design matters. *How and why* the CSDN works is as important as the activities themselves. On each aspect there have been factors that have contributed and detracted from the project. In many cases the nature of those factors calls for more shared responsibility between EPLO and the EU project management counterparts to find ways to address - or at a minimum account for - the ways in which these influence project implementation.

The scale of the project and resources places limitations on its ability to meet the expectations of all stakeholders, in particular on the issue of follow-up. However, the collaborative nature of the project lends itself to wide impact and multiple outcome pathways. Not everything is - or can be - within the EPLO Secretariat's control, and there is a large pool of project stakeholders who can each explore ways to maximise the quality of the exchanges and to follow up ideas for impact within their own spheres of influence. Framing the CSDN project as a catalyst for CS-EU exchange and cooperation would better reflect its scope and scale. This creates the possibility for the EPLO and EU project management team to play an even more intentional brokering and catalysing role to connect participants and stimulate collaborations for CSDN meetings.

At the end of the third phase of the CSDN project, the overall assessment is that it continues to be relevant, effective, efficient, and impactful though there are some built-in context and scope-related limitations on its sustainability. The following recommendations offer a few key areas for review or strengthening arising from the evaluation analysis.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELEVANCE

- ↪ Frame the CSDN project in the wider context of civil society and governmental relations in the project communications, and (continue to) promote collaboration and more equal relations between the different stakeholder groups as part of the project

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS

- ↪ Define meeting objectives according to exactly what the meeting is intended to *change or shift* - being as explicit as possible about intended the outcomes, including *where possible*, in meeting documents / preparatory meetings / CS and EU participant outreach
  - ★ *At a minimum, taking action to proactively address potential mismatched expectations among participants that might undermine the project's credibility*
- ↪ Define and disseminate participant profiles that link to the meeting / session objectives (e.g. type of experience, professional profile, level of context specialism, issue expertise etc.) to assist with participant recommendations and identification

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFICIENCY

- ↪ Clarify the expected inputs, actions, and responsibilities for the delivery of each meeting, maintaining regular contact with FPI and EEAS focal points as well as other EU counterparts to maintain a smooth and efficient division of labour

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFICIENCY** *(continued)*

- ↪ Conduct project management risk assessments for any additional requests or adjustments to the project activities to ensure that the efficiency achieved in CSDN III is maintained, and that the resources and project management roles are sufficient to guarantee tangible outcomes

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPACT**

- ↪ Define impact as widely as possible to capture the different types of outcomes and pathways of impact that arise from the CSDN meetings and the project, including those that were unforeseen
- ↪ Structure project reporting and refine existing data collection to focus on qualitative or quantitative data with explanatory power, i.e. data that is not only descriptive, but also indicates how and why certain meeting elements contributed (or not) to an outcome or impact
- ↪ Consider investing in technical support to draw out project-level data analysis from existing data gathering (e.g. participant surveys) as a foundation for an eventual evaluation framework

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

- ↪ Develop a strategy to (re)connect and engage with CSDN 'alumni' to better trace - and therefore be able to analyse - meeting and project impact over time

For more information on the CSDN project, or access to related publications documents, please visit:  
<http://eplo.org/activities/ongoing-projects/civil-society-dialogue-network/>

---END OF REPORT---

This evaluation was conducted between February and March 2020

Evaluator: Terri Beswick, Peace Policy Research

*With thanks to all EPLO staff and evaluation contributors for the assistance, insights and time they dedicated to this process. Any errors or inconsistencies in the analysis are the sole responsibility of the evaluator.*

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