EUROPEAN PEACEBUILDING LIAISON OFFICE

TERMS OF REFERENCE
Contribution Analysis External Evaluator
Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) Phase VI

Background

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a structured mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policymakers on peace and conflict. Co-financed by the European Union and managed by EPLO in cooperation with the European Commission and the European External Action Service, the CSDN has been connecting civil society expertise with EU policy processes since 2010. The CSDN's sixth phase (CSDN VI) began in October 2026 and runs until 2029.

CSDN Phase VI includes a results framework and associated monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system designed to assess programme performance and the contribution of CSDN dialogue, evidence, recommendations, relationships and knowledge products to changes in EU policy, programming, and practice.

Previous CSDN evaluations have recommended a more robust approach to assessing policy contribution. Phase VI will therefore use Contribution Analysis as the principal approach for its final external evaluation.

EPLO is seeking an independent external evaluator to undertake an evaluation inception assignment at the beginning of Phase VI, an evaluation at mid-term and a final external evaluation at the end of the programme. This assignment is designed to ensure continuity from the inception phase to the final evaluation so that the evidence required for the final evaluation is generated systematically during implementation.

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the consultancy is to provide an independent assessment of the performance, results and contribution of CSDN Phase VI.

The evaluation will assess progress against the agreed results framework and use Contribution Analysis to examine whether, how and under what conditions CSDN contributed to observed changes. It will test contribution claims against available evidence, examine other contributory factors and alternative explanations, and assess the strength of evidence supporting its conclusions.

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The consultancy will:

- establish a practical Contribution Analysis framework at the beginning of Phase VI;
- ensure that the MEL system generates sufficient evidence to assess CSDN's expected contribution pathways;
- assess CSDN's performance and results against its agreed results framework;
- identify and test a sample of credible claims concerning CSDN's contribution to EU policy, programming, and practice; and
- generate learning and recommendations for future CSDN programming and MEL.

Stage 1: Evaluation inception

Timing: December 2026 - February 2027

Indicative input: Up to 10 consultancy days

The evaluator will:

- review the final CSDN Phase VI proposal, logframe/results framework, Theory of Change and assumptions;
- review the Phase VI MEL framework and associated tools;
- review and update the draft Contribution Analysis evaluation framework guidance already developed;
- assess whether the suite of MEL tools and processes already developed will generate sufficient evidence and recommend adjustments where required;
- provide guidance and/or training (as required) to EPLO staff to enable appropriate evidence collection during implementation;
- agree responsibilities for evidence collection and appropriate points for follow-up during implementation; and
- establish the evaluation questions, methodology and analytical framework to be used for the final evaluation.

Stage 1 deliverables:

1. **Contribution Analysis and Evaluation Framework**, setting out the agreed contribution pathways, key assumptions, expected intermediate and final changes, evidence requirements, evidence-strength criteria, evaluation questions and proposed analytical approach.
2. **MEL review and recommendations**, identifying any proportionate changes required to the Phase VI monitoring and evidence-collection tools.
3. **Updated External Evaluation Guidance Note**, incorporating the agreed framework and methodology.

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EPLO will subsequently undertake routine monitoring and maintain the Policy Contribution Log throughout implementation, including periodic review of emerging evidence of change and potential CSDN contribution. The evaluator will not be expected to undertake ongoing monitoring unless separately agreed.

Stage 2: Mid term review

Timing: April - June 2028

Indicative input: Up to 10 consultancy days

The mid-term review will assess progress towards the expected results of CSDN Phase VI and examine whether the Theory of Change, contribution pathways and underlying assumptions remain relevant and plausible in light of emerging evidence and contextual developments.

It will also assess whether the MEL system is generating sufficient evidence to support the final Contribution Analysis, identify gaps in evidence collection and recommend any necessary adjustments to programme implementation and monitoring.

The methodology is expected to include:

- desk review of programme documentation, progress reports, monitoring tools and indicator data;
- review of the Policy Contribution Log and supporting evidence collected to date;
- assessment of progress against the results framework and expected intermediate changes;
- review of the continued relevance and plausibility of the Theory of Change and contribution pathways;
- targeted assessment of a sample of emerging contribution claims and their supporting evidence;
- approximately 6-8 targeted Key Informant Interviews with EPLO staff, civil society participants and EU policymakers; and
- an EPLO reflection workshop to discuss emerging findings and recommendations.

Stage 2 deliverables:

1. Mid-term review report, assessing progress, emerging results, the continued relevance of the Theory of Change and the strength of available evidence.

2. MEL recommendations, identifying evidence gaps and any adjustments needed to support the final Contribution Analysis.
3. EPLO reflection workshop to discuss findings and identify opportunities to strengthen programme implementation and monitoring.

Stage 3: Final external evaluation

Timing: August - October 2029

Indicative input: Up to 20 consultancy days

The final evaluation will assess programme performance and apply the agreed Contribution Analysis framework to examine CSDN's contribution to observed changes.

The methodology will be confirmed during Stage 1 and refined at the start of the final evaluation as necessary. It is expected to include:

- desk review of programme documentation, monitoring tools and indicator data;
- review of the Policy Contribution Log and supporting evidence;
- targeted review of relevant EU policy, programming and practice documents;
- approximately 10 targeted Key Informant Interviews, weighted towards respondents able to independently test contribution claims;
- an EPLO reflection workshop;
- selection and detailed Contribution Analysis of approximately 3-4 cases;
- assessment of other contributory factors and plausible alternative explanations; and
- a final validation workshop.

Key evaluation questions

The overarching Contribution Analysis question will be:

What changed in EU policy, programming, practice or policy processes; what role did CSDN play in that change; what other factors contributed; and how confident can we be in that conclusion?

The evaluation should address:

- To what extent has CSDN Phase VI achieved the results and targets in its agreed results framework?
- What significant intended or unintended changes occurred, and what explains areas of stronger or weaker progress?

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- What evidence is there that CSDN contributed to these changes, and through which pathways or mechanisms?
- What intermediate changes in access, relationships, understanding, framing, policy processes or use of civil society evidence can be identified?
- Which assumptions underpinning the Theory of Change appear to have held or not held?
- How strong and consistent is the evidence supporting the principal contribution claims?
- What other actors, institutional processes and contextual factors contributed to observed changes?
- What plausible alternative explanations exist, and what level of confidence can reasonably be placed in the contribution claims?
- Where, how and under what conditions does CSDN appear to make its strongest contribution?
- What lessons and recommendations emerge for future CSDN programming and MEL?

Final evaluation deliverables:

1. **Short evaluation inception/update note** confirming methodology, case selection and interview sample;
2. **EPLO reflection workshop**;
3. **Draft final evaluation report**, including the Contribution Analysis of 3-4 selected cases;
4. **Validation workshop** to test emerging findings and conclusions; and
5. **Final external evaluation report** and executive summary, incorporating agreed factual corrections and clearly presenting findings, contribution conclusions, evidence strength, learning and recommendations.

Consultant profile

EPLO is seeking an independent consultant with:

Essential

- substantial experience designing and conducting evaluations of complex programmes;
- strong practical expertise in Contribution Analysis and/or comparable theory-based evaluation approaches;
- demonstrated experience evaluating policy influence, advocacy, policy dialogue, governance and/or institutional change;
- strong understanding of Theory of Change and causal/contribution pathways;

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- excellent qualitative research skills, including interviewing, documentary analysis and triangulation;
- experience assessing the strength of evidence and alternative explanations in complex change processes;
- experience facilitating reflection and validation processes with programme teams and stakeholders; and
- excellent analytical and report-writing skills in English.

Desirable

- knowledge of EU external action, policymaking and programming processes;
- experience of peacebuilding, conflict prevention and/or civil society dialogue;
- experience working with or evaluating EU institutions and EU-funded programmes; and
- familiarity with conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive evaluation.

Applicants should confirm availability for all stages. EPLO intends to retain the same evaluator for the final evaluation, subject to satisfactory performance and continued availability.

Remuneration:
40 days' work in the range of 500-650 EUR (excl. VAT) per day.

Application procedure

Qualified and interested candidates should send their financial offer and the following documents to jobs@eplo.org (subject line: MEL Consultant) by 20 November 2026 at 23:59

Applicants should submit:

- a concise technical proposal (maximum 3 pages) setting out your understanding of the assignment and proposed approach, particularly how you would operationalise Contribution Analysis for CSDN;
- CV demonstrating relevant experience;
- details of 2-3 comparable assignments;
- one relevant evaluation report or writing sample, where available;
- confirmation of availability for all stages; and
- contact details for two professional referees.

Shortlisted applicants may be invited to an interview focused on their proposed methodology and experience of developing and testing contribution claims.