

Terms of Reference (ToR): Mid-Term External Evaluation of the The Askold & Dir Fund programme Supporting Ukrainian Civil Society Organizations

Background and Context

The Askold & Dir Fund programme “*Strong Civil Society of Ukraine – a Driver of Reforms and Democracy*” is implemented by ISAR Ednannia with financial support from the Governments of Norway and Sweden through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The programme represents one of the largest civil society support mechanisms currently operating in Ukraine and is designed to strengthen the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in democratic governance, policy dialogue, inclusive recovery, and community resilience during wartime and recovery.

The programme operates in the context of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has significantly affected governance systems, public service delivery, civic participation, and local development processes. At the same time, Ukrainian CSOs have assumed increasingly important roles in humanitarian response, recovery, evidence generation, advocacy, service provision, and citizen engagement. The programme was designed to support these evolving functions while strengthening the long-term institutional resilience of civil society.

The programme is currently in its implementation phase, combining direct grant-making with organizational development and capacity-strengthening support, with an overall budget of NOK 108 million. Programme support is delivered through a portfolio of approximately 400 grant agreements and related capacity-strengthening interventions reaching approximately 484 civil society organizations. The programme applies a multi-level support model combining financial assistance, organizational strengthening, learning support, networking opportunities, and support to policy engagement. Grant modalities include organizational development initiatives, recovery and resilience interventions, advocacy and governance projects, evidence-generation activities, monitoring and research initiatives, and actions supporting participation of underrepresented groups.

The programme is implemented across local, regional, and national levels throughout Ukraine, including frontline, border, and high-risk areas. Supported organizations operate across a wide range of sectors, including democratic governance, local development, recovery, social inclusion, participation, advocacy, accountability, citizen engagement, community resilience, and policy reform.

The programme Theory of Change assumes that strengthened and resilient CSOs, supported through grants and organizational development mechanisms, will be better positioned to contribute to democratic governance, evidence-informed policymaking, inclusive participation, and sustainable recovery processes. The intended change pathways include: (1) strengthening organizational capacity and resilience of CSOs; (2) enabling CSOs to contribute to inclusive and sustainable recovery; and (3) strengthening CSO engagement in advocacy, policy dialogue, democratic governance reforms, and evidence-based decision-making.

Monitoring data collected during implementation has documented contributions to policy and institutional change, evidence use in policymaking, recovery-related interventions, gap-filling activities, participation mechanisms, and inclusion of underrepresented groups. The programme therefore combines direct service and recovery support with broader governance, advocacy, and systems-change ambitions.

Purpose and Evaluation Approach

The primary purpose of the evaluation is to *generate practical learning* on what approaches, interventions, and organizational support mechanisms are *producing the strongest results within the programme*, for whom they work, under what conditions, and why. Given the scale and diversity of the portfolio, the evaluation should move beyond assessing implementation progress alone and *provide evidence* on the factors associated with successful organizational development, advocacy, governance, recovery, and policy influence outcomes.

The evaluation shall *identify promising practices, implementation models, and pathways of change emerging across the portfolio*, while also examining barriers, constraints, and contextual factors that may limit achievement of results. Particular attention should be given to understanding *why some supported CSOs demonstrate stronger progress and emerging outcomes than others*, and what lessons can inform future programme implementation and grant-making strategies.

As a mid-term exercise, the evaluation should focus on implementation quality, adaptation, organizational strengthening, contribution pathways, emerging outcomes, and learning opportunities rather than long-term impact. The evaluation shall apply *a utilization-focused mixed-methods approach*, combining portfolio-level *quantitative* analysis with *qualitative* inquiry to *generate actionable lessons and recommendations*.

The evaluation shall seek to establish **attribution** where the available evidence, programme design, and data permit. Where attribution cannot be credibly established due to the complexity of change processes, multiple influencing factors, or methodological limitations, the evaluation shall assess the programme's **contribution** to observed outcomes and changes.

Evaluation Objectives

(1) Assess implementation progress against programme objectives and planned results. (2) Identify and analyse approaches, interventions, and support modalities that demonstrate *the strongest evidence of effectiveness* or show the greatest promise for achieving programme outcomes. (3) Examine factors that facilitate or hinder organizational development, governance improvements, advocacy achievements, recovery initiatives, and policy influence among supported CSOs. (4) Assess emerging outcomes at organizational, institutional, community, and policy levels and document evidence of change where available. (5) Compare patterns of progress across different groups of supported organizations to better understand why some organizations achieve stronger results than others. (6) Identify implementation bottlenecks, operational risks, and contextual factors affecting programme performance. (7) Assess sustainability prospects, institutionalization pathways, and the likelihood that emerging results will be maintained beyond the programme period. (8) Review the validity of programme assumptions and the Theory of Change, including the extent to which observed results align with expected contribution pathways. (9) Generate *evidence-based recommendations to strengthen programme implementation*, grant-making strategies, organizational support mechanisms, and future portfolio design.

Evaluation Questions

(1) To what extent has programme implementation progressed as planned, and how effectively have programme modalities adapted to wartime operational conditions? (2) Which implementation approaches, grant modalities, and support mechanisms appear most effective and relevant? (3) What operational bottlenecks, implementation constraints, or management challenges affect programme delivery? (4) Whether the grant and support modalities deliver value relative to effort and cost, and which are most cost-effective for which types of organization? (5) What organizational risks are emerging among supported organizations? (6) What evidence exists of influence on policy dialogue, governance processes, participation, inclusion, and representation? (7) How the programme complements and coordinates with other recovery and civil-society actors, donors, and national reform processes, and where there are gaps or overlaps? (8) To what extent are programme interventions demonstrating sustainability, institutionalization, and local ownership? (9) To what extent do the programme assumptions and the Theory of Change remain valid under changing contextual conditions? (10) To what extent and through what mechanisms supported CSOs are beginning to influence governance, advocacy, and inclusion outcomes, recognising that definitive impact cannot yet be judged? (11) To what extent do the programme's indicators, baselines, and the logic linking outputs to outcomes provide an adequate basis for tracking and demonstrating progress, and what adjustments would strengthen it before the final evaluation?" (12) To what extent have programme design, targeting, and implementation been responsive to gender dynamics, inclusive of underrepresented groups, and sensitive to conflict dynamics and displacement patterns? (13) To what extent has the programme generated unintended positive or negative effects, and what factors have contributed to these outcomes?

Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation shall cover programme implementation from the beginning of the current programme phase until the agreed evaluation cut-off date. Given the scale and diversity of the portfolio, the evaluation is expected to assess the programme at *both portfolio and sampled levels*.

The evaluation shall include all major programme streams, grant modalities, organizational development interventions, advocacy and governance initiatives, recovery-related programming, participation and inclusion activities, and evidence-generation components. *Portfolio-wide analysis* shall draw on programme monitoring systems, grant documentation, reporting data, and other available evidence sources to assess overall implementation progress, emerging outcomes, and patterns of performance across the portfolio.

Recognising that an in-depth assessment of all grants and interventions is neither feasible nor necessary for a mid-term evaluation, *the evaluation team shall propose a sampling and prioritisation strategy during the inception phase*, subject to approval by ISAR Ednannia. The sampling approach should ensure adequate representation of different grant modalities, thematic areas, organizational profiles, geographic contexts, and stages of implementation.

The evaluation is expected to combine broad portfolio coverage with deeper analysis of selected programme streams, thematic clusters, organizational development pathways, or groups of CSOs through *case studies and targeted qualitative inquiry*. Selection criteria may include factors such as scale of investment, strategic relevance, evidence of results, innovation, learning potential, geographic diversity, and contribution to programme objectives.

As a mid-term exercise, the evaluation is not expected to assess long-term impact or fully consolidated systemic change. Rather, it shall focus on implementation progress, emerging outcomes, organizational strengthening, contribution pathways, adaptation processes, and the conditions that may support or constrain the achievement and sustainability of intended results.

Donor Engagement and Review Process

The draft evaluation report *will be shared with ISAR Ednannia, Norad, and Sida* for factual review and comments prior to finalisation. The evaluation team will be expected to consider and respond to comments received from programme management and donors while maintaining full independence in its analysis, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

The evaluation process will include *a validation and learning session* during which preliminary findings will be presented and discussed with key stakeholders. Representatives of ISAR Ednannia, Norad, and Sida will be invited to participate in the validation workshop and presentation of findings.

The final evaluation report shall include an explanation of *how substantive comments received during the review process were addressed by the evaluation team*.

Methodology and Sampling Requirements

The evaluator shall apply *a mixed-methods approach* combining *document review, MEL data review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, case studies, outcome harvesting, and contribution analysis*.

The evaluator shall develop *a sampling strategy ensuring representation across geographic areas, intervention types, grant modalities, and organizational profiles*. The sample shall include relevant programme staff, supported CSOs, external stakeholders, and beneficiaries where appropriate.

All major *findings shall be supported by triangulation from at least two independent sources*. The report shall explicitly discuss methodological limitations, evidence gaps, and data quality considerations.

Evaluation Matrix Requirement

During the inception phase, the evaluator shall develop an evaluation matrix linking evaluation questions, judgment criteria, indicators or analytical dimensions, data sources, methods, sampling approaches, and limitations.

Existing Monitoring and Programme Data Available to the Evaluation

The programme has generated a substantial body of monitoring, reporting, and analytical data that will be made available to the evaluation team. Available evidence sources are expected to include:

- programme monitoring and reporting data, including indicator tracking tables and progress reports;
- grant application and grant management records;
- periodic narrative reports submitted by supported CSOs;
- organizational capacity assessment data and organizational development monitoring records, where available;
- programme-level survey datasets covering organizational strengthening, policy and institutional influence, recovery-related contributions, participation, inclusion, and evidence use in policymaking;

- documented case studies, outcome harvesting records, and examples of policy, legal, and institutional change;
- policy tracking and document review materials;
- communication and visibility monitoring data;
- beneficiary and stakeholder feedback collected through programme activities, consultations, workshops, and participatory processes;
- programme grant portfolio data.

The programme has also generated several analytical datasets covering approximately 484 supported CSOs and a portfolio of roughly 400 grant agreements. Existing programme surveys have explored organizational capacity development, policy influence, advocacy outcomes, contribution to recovery processes, inclusion of underrepresented groups, and the use of evidence in policymaking.

Baseline data are available for selected programme components and indicators. However, availability varies across outcome areas and indicators. The evaluator will be expected to assess the adequacy, quality, and limitations of existing baseline and monitoring data during the inception phase.

The evaluation team will be granted access to relevant programme documentation, monitoring datasets, and supporting evidence, subject to applicable confidentiality and data protection requirements.

Gender, Inclusion and Conflict Sensitivity

The evaluation shall incorporate gender-sensitive, inclusion-sensitive, and conflict-sensitive approaches and examine participation barriers, representation dynamics, and inclusion of underrepresented groups where relevant.

Field Access and Security Considerations

The evaluator shall apply flexible and risk-informed approaches to data collection. Remote or hybrid methodologies may be used where direct field access is not feasible or safe.

Deliverables

Deliverable	Expected Content	Deadline
Inception Report	Methodology, evaluation matrix, sampling strategy, workplan	31 Jul 2026
Preliminary Findings Presentation	Initial findings and validation discussion	4 Sep 2026
Draft Evaluation Report	Full draft report	11 Sep 2026
Final Evaluation Report	Final report	25 Sep 2026
Executive Summary	5–7 pages	25 Sep 2026
Recommendations Matrix	Management-response ready recommendations	25 Sep 2026

Indicative Timeline and Level of Effort

Phase	Period
Inception	17 – 31 Jul 2026
Methodology and Tools	3-7 Aug 2026
Data Collection	3 – 14 Aug 2026

Analysis	17 Aug – 3 Sep 2026
Validation	4 Sep 2026
Reporting and Revision	7 Sep - 25 Sep 2026

Indicative level of effort: **40–50 working days**.

Evaluation Governance, Ethics and Independence

The evaluator shall maintain full analytical independence and methodological autonomy. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations shall remain the sole responsibility of the evaluator.

The evaluation shall be conducted in accordance with UNEG Norms and Standards, including principles of independence, impartiality, transparency, confidentiality, informed consent, and do-no-harm approaches. The evaluator shall ensure that all data collection and analysis activities comply with applicable data protection requirements and ethical research standards.

As part of the inception phase, the evaluator shall prepare **an Evaluation Ethics and Risk Management Plan** describing: (i) procedures for obtaining informed consent and protecting respondent confidentiality; (ii) data management and data protection protocols; (iii) security and contingency arrangements for field-based data collection; (iv) safeguarding measures for engagement with vulnerable respondents; and (v) a fallback strategy for fully remote data collection should security conditions, access constraints, or operational circumstances prevent in-person fieldwork.

Particular attention shall be given to *conflict-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches* when conducting interviews, focus group discussions, or other data collection activities involving participants from frontline, high-risk, recently de-occupied, or otherwise conflict-affected areas. The evaluator shall take all reasonable measures to minimize risks to participants, programme staff, and partner organizations throughout the evaluation process.

Conflict of Interest

Applicants shall disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest. Failure to disclose relevant conflicts may result in disqualification or termination of the assignment.

Evaluator Qualifications and Expertise

The evaluator or evaluation team shall demonstrate substantial experience conducting complex programme evaluations, strong mixed-methods skills, expertise in civil society, governance, recovery, resilience, or organizational development programming, and experience working in conflict-affected environments.

At least one key evaluation team member *shall be fluent in Ukrainian* and capable of independently conducting data collection activities, reviewing documentary evidence, and *contributing to analysis and reporting based on primary-source materials in Ukrainian*.

The evaluation team shall ensure that language capacity is sufficient to engage directly with relevant stakeholders and review programme documentation without creating material limitations for data quality, analysis, or stakeholder participation.

Proposal Submission Requirements

Applicants shall submit a technical proposal, financial proposal, CVs of key personnel, examples of relevant work, and references.

Selection Criteria

Criterion	Weight
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Methodological quality and analytical robustness	25%
Qualifications and experience of proposed team	20%
Conflict-sensitive and adaptive evaluation expertise	15%
Relevant sectoral expertise	15%
Feasibility and proportionality of methodology	10%
Financial competitiveness and value for money	10%
Quality of previous evaluation work	5%

Data Protection, Confidentiality and Ownership

All information collected during the evaluation shall be treated confidentially and handled in accordance with applicable ethical and data protection standards. All outputs produced under this assignment shall remain the property of ISAR Ednannia unless otherwise agreed.

Payment Schedule

40% upon approval of the Inception Report; 30% upon submission of the Draft Evaluation Report; 30% upon approval of the Final Evaluation Report.

Annex: Logframe

Note on interpreting current values against endline targets:

Endline targets in this logframe were set against the full anticipated portfolio (approximately 484 supported organisations). Current values reported for several indicators – including Indicators 1.1 and 1.2 – are calculated only on the subset of organisations that had completed grant implementation by the end of the reporting period (112 of 484). This denominator will continue to grow as more grants reach completion, and reported percentages may shift accordingly. Current figures should therefore be read as early trajectory indicators based on a partial and non-final sample, not as a like-for-like comparison with the endline target.

The evaluator is asked, under Question 11, to assess whether the logic and structure of the results framework – including how indicators are calculated as the portfolio matures – provide an adequate basis for tracking progress, and what adjustments would strengthen it for the remaining implementation period.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE:	INDICATORS	BASELINE	ENDLINE	SOURCES OF VERIFICATION
Strengthened CSOs contribute to inclusive and sustainable recovery and to promoting democratic governance reforms in Ukraine.	Narrative Indicator: Observed and documented policy, legal, or institutional changes at national or local level.	Narrative description of existing challenges and gaps in policy, legal, and institutional frameworks relevant to civil society participation in recovery and democratic governance. Established through synthesis of national research and representative baseline cases.	Documented policy, legal, and/or institutional changes at national and/or local level with verifiable CSO contribution, presented as an updated baseline narrative demonstrating institutionalised participation mechanisms.	Annual reports; case studies; CSOmeter; success stories validated by Ednannia.
	Quantitative Indicator: % of supported CSOs whose initiatives led to concrete policy, legal, or institutional changes at national or local level.	0%	5-7%	
	Contribution Indicator: Documented cases where CSO actions filled sectoral gaps (e.g., research, community development, recovery projects) and ensured inclusive or transparent processes.	To be established based on a review of documented CSO contributions during the first implementation cycle.	150 documented cases	
Outcome 1. Strengthened organizational capacity of CSOs				
CSOs are more resilient, better managed and able to sustain operations	1. % of CSOs that improved their operational resilience and management capacity as a result of Fund interventions.	0%	90%	CSOs Sustainability Index, grantee self-reports; financial and narrative reports; Ednannia monitoring data.
	2. % of CSOs maintaining or expanding activities after initial Askold& Dir Fund support ends.	0%	70% after 6 month	
Outcome 2. Enhanced ability of CSOs to contribute to inclusive and sustainable recovery				
CSOs influence and deliver recovery	2.1 % of municipalities where recovery policies, plans or services were shaped by CSO input	0%	70%	

OVERALL OBJECTIVE:	INDICATORS	BASELINE	ENDLINE	SOURCES OF VERIFICATION
processes that respond to citizens' needs.	supported by the Askold& Dir Fund.			Community surveys; municipal decisions; project reports.
	2.2 # of recovery or development initiatives in which CSOs stepped in to fill sectoral gaps (e.g. community services, research, projects not implemented by state/private actors).	To be established based on an initial review of supported initiatives during the first implementation cycle.	80	
	2.3 % of citizens in targeted communities reporting improved access or quality of services after CSO-led recovery initiatives.	To be established through an initial citizen perception survey conducted in targeted communities prior to CSO intervention.	70% improvement	
Outcome 3. Strengthened CSO role in advocacy and democratic policy dialogue				
CSOs influence democratic governance processes and amplify citizens' voices.	3.1 # of advocacy initiatives by supported CSOs that are reported to have led to policy or regulatory changes.	0	10	Advocacy monitoring; policy tracking; media references; grantee reports.
	3.2 # of evidence-based research or monitoring reports by CSOs used in policymaking	To be established after an initial review of CSO research and monitoring outputs during the first implementation cycle.	10	
	3.3 % of supported CSOs that successfully engaged underrepresented groups in decision-making processes.	0%	20%	