



OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews, FINLAND 2024 – Observer report by Finnish Development NGOs Fingo

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Key experiences and recommendations

- Participating as an observer member in the peer review team was a positive experience for Fingo in many ways, it was a learning process and an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the peer review of Fingo's own country.
- The peer review report is a good reflection of the material collected during the review process.
- It would be wise for DAC members to invite a civil society representative to participate in the review team when their development cooperation is reviewed.
- It would be important for the DAC to actively encourage its members to invite a civil society representative and to update its guidance for observers in DAC peer and special reviews so that the option of inviting civil society representative would be comprehensively included in the guidance.

February 28, 2025

Introduction: Historic but logical new step for peer reviews

The Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) invited Finnish Development NGOs Fingo¹ to participate as an observer in the peer review of Finland's development cooperation. We² had a meeting with the MFA representatives in December 2023 to discuss Fingo's participation and to receive information about the OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) peer reviews in general.

Fingo was grateful for the opportunity to learn about the OECD DAC peer review methodology in practice and to contribute a civil society perspective to the review process of Finnish development cooperation. Fingo's experience is an excellent example of civil society involvement that should be shared with other countries. Fingo sees the MFA invitation as a demonstration of transparency and trust between parties working in the same field, but who do not always share the same views. Fingo also thanks the OECD DAC for its openness in accepting Finland's proposal to include a civil society representative in the review team for the first time in the history of peer reviews, which have been carried out since 1962.

However, Fingo sees this new step in the composition of review teams as a logical continuation of the OECD's strategy to gradually broaden the participation of observers. As noted in the OECD guidance on the [participation of observers in DAC peer and special Reviews](#), since 2008, the DAC has stepped up its efforts to engage with development cooperation providers beyond its membership, and according to its mandate adopted in 2017, the DAC is to engage with non-DAC OECD members to ensure transparency and the relevance and inclusiveness of the DAC's work. Since 2002, DAC peer reviews have increasingly included observers from countries and sometimes institutions that are not members of the Committee. As part of this trend, DAC adopted in 2005 a guidance for Observers in Peer Reviews to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved and has revised it several times.

Fingowould like to thank the review team for their friendly, smooth and inspiring cooperation during the review process. The peer reviewers were from Austria (Luitgard Hammerer, Austrian Development Agency, and Reinhold Gruber, Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Republic of Austria) and Czechia (Hana Volná, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and Milan Konrád, Permanent Delegation of the Czech Republic to the OECD). From the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate, Anita King, Policy Analyst, served as the lead analyst for the review, together with Ashley Palmer, Policy Analyst. Renwick Irvine, Team Lead Peer Reviews, supervised the review.

¹ [Fingo](#) is an umbrella organisation of about 260 Finnish civil society organisations. Fingo's members work on a wide range of global issues in the field of development cooperation, humanitarian aid, global citizenship education and different aspects of sustainable development. They range in size from small voluntary organisations to large professional organisations. What unites them is the desire to make the world a more just and fairer place. Fingo's motto is to influence the future today.

² "We" in this report refers to those Fingo persons who were primarily involved in the review process: Outi Hakkarainen (Policy Adviser, Global Justice), Anna Hyvärinen (Policy Adviser, Advocacy), and Ilmari Nalbantoglu (Director, Advocacy). Several other persons from Fingo also contributed to the preparation of Fingo's written submission (Civil Society Assessment) for the peer review. Hakkarainen represented Fingo in the review team, with support from a background group that included Hyvärinen and Nalbantoglu from Fingo, and representatives from two member organisations: Felm (Roosa Rantala) and Operation a Day's Work Finland – Taksvärkki (Auli Starck).

Fingo's approach for participating in the review team

There were three key elements in Fingo's approach to its participation in the review team:

1. To contribute as much as possible to the peer review of Finnish development cooperation, and to make the final report visible in Finland.
2. To contribute to creating good practices for the participation of civil society representatives in DAC peer reviews.
3. To represent as much as possible the views and experiences of Finnish civil society involved in development issues, and to give these actors (many of them Fingo's member organisations) the opportunity to contribute to the peer review of Finnish development cooperation.

In practice, the first meant that:

- Fingo actively responded to the information needs of the review team during the internal discussions and by sending relevant material afterwards and asked for permission to comment in interview situations when it had relevant information for the discussion.
- Fingo structured its written submission ([Civil Society Assessment](#)) based on the [DAC Peer Review Methodology](#) to make it easier for the review team to locate Fingo's observations within the framework of the peer review,
- Fingo prepared an addendum to its submission: [Stakeholders' opportunities to comment on policy and legislative proposals in Finland, 2015–2024](#). The needs of the peer review formed the initial motivation to produce this supplement, but it largely answers also to Fingo's own long-term advocacy activities.
- Fingo issued [a press release](#) on the final report and the launch event.

The second is largely related to the first one, i.e. by actively participating in the peer review process, Fingo demonstrated that civil society actors as observer members can contribute constructively to the peer review process.

The third was realised in many ways:

- Fingo's submission was based primarily on the experience and knowledge of Fingo, its members and other Finnish CSOs (including CSO reports and statements), although it also used documents published by the MFA and the Finnish government.
- Fingo collected CS views through a survey and focus group discussions³.
- Fingo formed a background group to support its representative in the review team. There were four members, two from Fingo and two from member organisations (see footnote 2). One of these members coordinated the meeting with the CS representatives during the review team's visit to the capital.
- Fingo informed its members and other CSOs about the different steps of the peer review process.
- Fingo was asked by the MFA to make the CS commentary at the publication event in Helsinki. However, Fingo suggested that its member organisation should do this, since it had been active in the background group and had coordinated the CS meeting in

³ Fingo received responses to the survey from 11 CSOs: Disability Partnership Finland, Fida International, Finnish Education Outreach, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission FELM, Operation a Day's Work Finland (Taksvärkki), Religious Society of Friends Finland, Save the Children Finland, Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland SASK, Väestöliitto, World Vision Finland, and WWF Finland. Their ideas were extensively used in the submission. The focus group discussions were not well received, with only one person attending. However, we had an interesting discussion with her based on the results of the CSO survey.

Helsinki with the review team, and since Finland didn't include a CS representative in its delegation to the Paris meeting. We thought that it was important to give voice to another CS representative at the publication launch event, and the MFA accepted this proposal with positive feedback. Here is the [link to the speech](#).

Experience as an observer member in the review team

Fingo's experience as an observer member in the review team was overall very positive, as was the pre-planning and communication with the MFA and the DAC Secretariat prior to the peer review process.

The optimal level of observer participation, as defined in the code of conduct for observer participation, was achieved in Fingo's experience during the peer review process. Fingo's representative was able to fully participate in all discussions and activities of the review team, including all sessions during the headquarters visit and the field visit. In addition, she was able to ask questions relevant to the topics of the session in order to improve the understanding of the reviewed member's development cooperation, but also to contribute to the discussions when she had such information that would benefit the discussion. She was able to gain a full understanding of the process and see how the information received at the meetings was processed and used. Fingo's representative was invited to attend the peer review meeting with the DAC at the OECD and was able to share [Fingo's observations](#) with the Committee.

In general, Fingo's representative experienced that she was warmly welcomed as an integral member of the review team and that her views were asked for and listened to in all discussions. At the same time, there was a clear common understanding within the review team that Fingo's position was that of observer and therefore different from that of the actual peer reviewers. Fingo received encouraging feedback from all of them about Fingo's role in the review team, i.e. that it was constructive and meaningful for the peer review. One of them also expressed this view at the Paris meeting.

Observations on the peer review process

We found the whole peer review process to be very well planned and coordinated. The timetable and work plan for the peer review process were presented almost in their entirety at the beginning of the process, and even the few moving parts fell into place on time, despite being influenced by the schedules of various parties. This kind of clear overall framework made it easy for a review team member to plan her/his own timetable between work duties and peer review contributions. The DAC Secretariat provided excellent administrative support when needed, for example, in making travel arrangements.

The quality of support materials, such as annotated agendas and background documents, was excellent and relevant. They were also provided to the review team members in a timely manner. Internal communication in the review team worked well and in a clear order. It was logical that peer reviewers' reflections were given first, followed by those of the observer member, and there was always time for Fingo's reflections. The time provided for commenting on draft documents and preparing for the DAC meeting was also well-planned.

Overall, it was a pleasure to observe and be part of a review process whose methodology was so comprehensive and carefully designed to ensure that the final outcome truly serves to improve the quality of development cooperation in the country under review, and that the final

outcome incorporated all the significant data collected through various means during the review process, both from representatives of the country under review and from a wide range of stakeholders. In particular, we would like to highlight as a good methodology the systematic approach taken by the DAC Secretariat in coordinating the meetings during the visits, the daily debriefings within the evaluation team after the visits, and the handling of key observations at the end of the week with government and embassy representatives. Fingo has no corrections to suggest regarding these practices. The only unfortunate element was that the final discussion of the meeting in the capital was extended so that some members of the review team had to rush to the airport, and therefore the team did not have time to reflect together on that final discussion.

This peer review process is the first and only one Fingo has participated in, but we understand that it wasn't the easiest one to carry out, as there were significant changes taking place in Finland's development cooperation policy in the middle of the peer review process due to different approaches of the previous and current (since June 2023) Finnish governments. In addition, the main government reports were largely in preparation during the review period and were only published in the final stages of the review. The MFA was also undergoing organisational reform. However, despite these many challenges along the way, the review team was able to carry out its task well and make appropriate schedule changes where necessary. The finishing details of the final report were modified in a good and constructive dialogue with the representatives of the Finnish government, as is the methodological spirit of the peer reviews. The publishing of the final report in Helsinki in December 2024 was also a well-organised collective effort, which received considerable coverage in the Finnish media.

Fingo believes that the peer review holds Finland to account sufficiently and for the right things, and that all ten recommendations are relevant and to the point in the current context of Finnish development policy. As pointed out in [Fingo's observations](#) at the Paris DAC meeting, Fingo believes that there are shortcomings in Finland's current development policy but also scope for improvement, and that the peer review recommendations are crucial for required changes:

The foundation of Finland's development policy should be overall policy coherence and long-term commitment. This necessitates clear, far-reaching goals for development policy, which are unfortunately not currently present in the documents guiding the Finnish development policy. Nevertheless, Finland has the potential to carry out effective, evidence-based and human rights-based development cooperation. The recommendations from this peer review provide solid support for Finland in this task. Finnish CSOs are committed to promoting Finnish development cooperation, acting as implementers, public communicators, and critical friends."

Benefits gained in the review process for Fingo and its members

Participating in the peer review process was in many ways an interesting learning process and an important and relevant experience. As mentioned above, the overall methodology of the DAC peer reviews is a coherent and complex package, and it was useful for Fingo to be able to participate in such a review process and learn from the methodological tools used.

As mentioned above, our interpretation is that we have been able to serve the peer review process well, but it is important to emphasise that all our efforts have also served our own work in Finland. Our own preparations and the peer review process as a whole have given us a deeper understanding of Finnish development policy, from the past to the present and the future.

The peer review report is an important tool for our work in Finland, in following and influencing Finnish development policy and development cooperation. We will be referring to it a lot in the coming years, not only in our advocacy work but also in capacity building for Finnish CSOs. Being part of the review process, Fingo's analytical access to its contents is far better than simply receiving the report when it is published. Being involved in the review team also makes it easier for Fingo and Finnish civil society in general to follow and impact Finland's commitment to implement the recommendations of the peer review and thereby increase the impact of the entire peer review itself. The Finnish government has committed to provide a management response to the report's recommendations within six months. We shall be in touch with the MFA on this and to ask for a proper plan for responding to the recommendations.

Recommendations

Fingo recommends that DAC members consider inviting a civil society representative to participate in the review team when their development cooperation is reviewed. This message was also conveyed by the Finnish Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, Ville Tavio, in his speech in Paris when the peer review report on Finland was presented to the DAC members.

Fingo recommends that the DAC actively encourages its members to invite a civil society representative and would update its code of conduct on the participation of observers in DAC peer and special reviews to fully include the option of inviting a civil society representative. Including the following:

- The civil society representative could come from the country under review or from a country/region in which this country is conducting its development cooperation.
- Create a mechanism for civil society actors to proactively communicate their interest in participating in a peer review process.

Fingo recommends that the DAC and/or the DAC member under review cover the costs of the civil society representative's participation in the review team, if compensation is required, as economic resources should not be a barrier to civil society participation.