HUMANITARIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE INITIATIVE

CISU - Civil Society in Development
Renewal Audit - Summary Report - 2026/01/23

1. General information

1.1 Organisation

Type	Mandates	Verified
☒ International ☐ National ☒ Membership/Network ☐ Direct Assistance ☐ Federated ☒ With Partners ☒ Pooled Fund Agency	☒ Humanitarian ☒ Development ☒ Advocacy	☒ Humanitarian ☒ Development ☒ Advocacy
Legal Registration	CVR-nr: 19348407	
Head Office location	Århus, Denmark	
Total number of organisation staff		32

1.2 Audit team

Lead auditor	Dorte Busch
Second auditor	
Third auditor	
Observer	
Expert	
Witness / other participants	Adrien Muratet (trainee auditor)

1.3 Scope of the audit

CHS:2024 Verification Scheme	Independent Verification
Audit Cycle	Second cycle
Type of audit	Renewal Audit
Scope of audit	CISU in Denmark and CISU's 15 funding modalities are covered in the scope of this audit
Focus of the audit	The Renewal Audit will focus on CISU's entire organisation, including its board, management and staff at the Head Office, Assessment Consultants and Grant Committee Members

1.4 Sampling*

Sampling unit	CISU's funding modalities
Total number of sampling units	15
Sample size	4
Total number of onsite visits	1 Uganda was selected for onsite visit to partners and communities for three individual projects representing 3 funding modalities. The partner for one project under the CISU CSF Neighbourhood Funds Project Modality was interviewed in Denmark
Total number of sampling units for remote assessment	Online interviews were undertaken with three grantees for each of the sampled pooled funding modalities.
Sampling Unit Selection	
Random Sampling – onsite/remote	**Purposive Sampling – onsite/remote**

#8 Civil Society Fund (CSF) Neighbourhood Funds Project - not selected	#1 CISU Pooled Funding Modality for Information Sharing - selected
#9 CSF Neighbourhood Fund Development Grant - selected	
#11 Danish Emergency Relief Fund (DERF) Anticipatory Actions - not selected	
#12 DERF Rapid Response - selected	
#3 CSF Projects - selected	

Any other sampling considerations:
For each of the four sampled pooled funding modalities, three grants were selected. The selection was done purposively to ensure that the sampled grants reflect: a geographic spread; a range of different grantees; different project grant size and duration. For the CSF pooled funding mechanisms grants which follow CISU's revised guidelines and procedures from 2025 were purposively selected.

The sampling criteria also took into consideration that at least one grant from each funding modality should be implemented in the same country. The country selected for the on-site visit was Uganda, as this was one of the few countries that met this criterion. Since there is no geographical overlap between #9 CSF Neighbourhood Fund Development Grant and all of the three other selected pooled funding modalities, one project implemented in Moldova was selected for remote consultations with the partner.

The auditors selected CISU interviewees based on a list provided by CISU. The list included board members, CISU staff and grant assessment consultants and assessment committee members. The selection took into consideration CISU's organisational structure as well as CISU's group structure, and consideration was also given to staff roles that related to specific Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) commitments. All grantees implementing the sampled projects were interviewed remotely. Implementing partners and community groups from the sampled projects were consulted on-site in Uganda and remotely in Moldova. The community groups were selected in collaboration between the auditors and the partners to accommodate audit timing and access to communities.

Sampling risks identified:
Given that the audit is based on a sample of the pooled funding modalities, there is a representation risk linked to the broad spectrum of types and sizes of Danish Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that receive CISU grants and have varying capacity and experience to apply the CHS. This sampling risk has been mitigated by the purposive selection of grants for analysis with a range of size and experience of grantees.

The purposive selection of projects from the CSF funding modalities following CISUs new guidelines means that many sampled projects are new or even in the start-up phase. The risk of not being able to assess how communities are engaged in the longer run, is mitigated by most partnerships dating well back in time, and the partners in most cases having worked in the same areas for longer periods of time.

The auditors are confident that the combination of the analysis of CISU's organisational policies and procedures, together with the combination of random and purposive sampling of the pooled funding modalities, the grantees, and the projects, ensure that the findings of the audit are robust.

**It is important to note that the audit findings are based on a sample of an organisation's activities, programmes, and documentation, as well as direct observation. Findings are analysed to determine an organisation's systematic approach and application of all aspects of the CHS across different contexts and ways of working.*

2. Activities undertaken by the audit team

2.1 Opening Meeting

Date	2025/10/29	**Number of participants**	12
Location	Remote	**Any substantive issues arising**	No

2.2 Locations Assessed

Locations	**Dates**	**Onsite or remote**

CISU in Denmark	2025/10/29 - 2025/11/14	Remote
Grantees in Denmark	2025/11/05-2025/11/07	Remote
Uganda	2025/11/23-2025/11/28	Onsite
Moldova	2025/12/05	Remote

2.3 Interviews

Level / Position of interviewees	Number of interviewees		Onsite or remote
	Female	Male	
CISU in Denmark			
Board	1	1	Remote
Management	1	2	Remote
Staff	5	5	Remote
Assessment committees and consultants	4	1	Remote
Grantees, Partners and Stakeholders			
Grantee management and staff	5	10	Remote
Partner management and staff	7	9	Onsite
Stakeholders	2	5	Onsite
Total number of interviewees	25	33	58

2.4 Consultations with communities

Type of group and location	Number of interviewees		Onsite or remote
	Female	Male	
People whose stories were filmed	2	2	Onsite
Refugee heads of households, Kyangwali Settlement, Uganda	10		Onsite
Elderly refugees, Kyangwali Settlement, Uganda	14		Onsite
Refugee village and block leaders Kyangwali Settlement, Uganda		6	Onsite
Members of SDG village farmer group, Mpigi, Uganda	8		Onsite
Members of SDG village farmer group, Mpigi, Uganda		8	Onsite
Total number of participants	34	16	50

2.5 Closing Meeting

Date	2025/12/09	**Number of participants**	11
Location	Remote	**Any substantive issues arising**	No

3. Background information on the organisation

3.1 General information

CISU - Civil Society in Development (CISU) is an independent association of approximately 300 Danish CSOs. Membership is open to all Danish CSOs, non-profit organisations and foundations with an interest in international development who align with CISU's statutes and pay the annual membership fee. The membership fee is tiered, based on annual turnover for member organisations. CISU's membership, therefore, reflects the diversity of the Danish CSOs and includes smaller Danish CSOs as well as CSOs with a higher annual turnover who hold strategic partnership agreements with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DMFA). CISU was founded in 1995.

CISU's statutes outline CISU's aims: 1) to support its members to be qualified and accountable partners in development cooperation which contributes to poverty reduction and strengthening of the civil society in developing countries; 2) to support its members to share knowledge and engage in debates in Denmark about the living conditions of poor people in developing countries and global relations underpinning this; and 3) to advocate for civil society space. The statutes state that CISU may manage pooled funding modalities on behalf of the DMFA or others, upon approval by CISU's Board.

CISU's vision, mission and strategic goals are described in its strategy 2022-25 "Working Together for a Better World". The strategy outlines CISU's ambition to be a platform for exchange of experience and knowledge-sharing; building capacity, promoting mutual learning and innovation, and strengthening popular participation in development work. It also outlines CISU's ambition to ensure the availability of resources for a multitude of organisations and initiatives through administration of public funding mainly emanating from the DMFA.

CISU as a Pooled Fund Agency

At the time of this audit, CISU manages three pooled funds for the DMFA: The Civil Society Fund (CSF), the Danish Emergency Relief Fund (DERF), and the Information and Civic Engagement Fund (OpEn). In 2025, CISU entered a new agreement for the CSF. Funding is based on annual approval of the Danish Fiscal Act. DERF is managed jointly by a CISU and Save the Children and the agreement to do so has been extended till 2028. OpEn is managed jointly by CISU and the Roskilde Fond. The agreement with the DMFA has been extended to 2029. CISU also manages the EU grant "Connect for Global Change" together with 11 other EU CSOs. The Connect for Global Change funding period is 2024 - 2027. Both OpEn and Connect for Global Change focus on information and communication with Danish civil society.

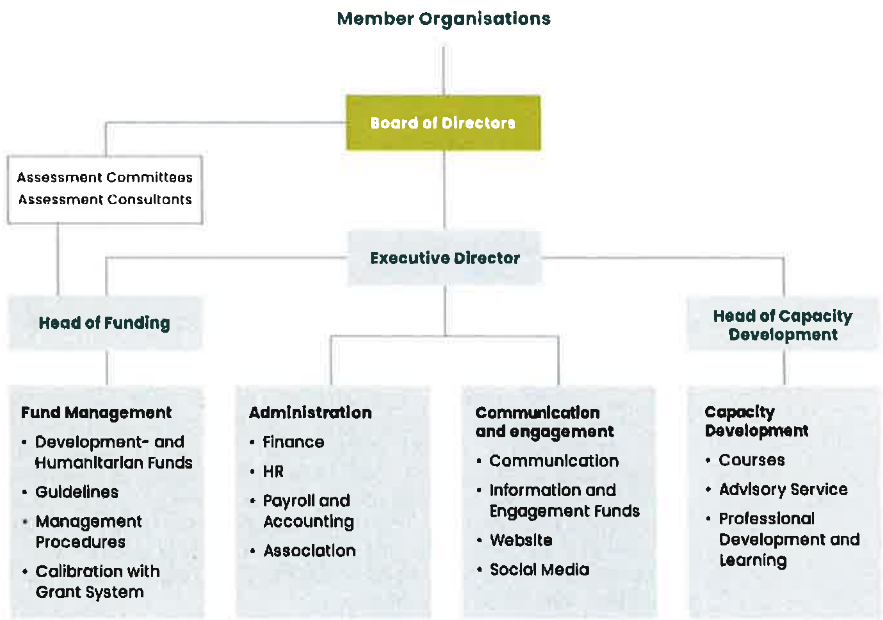
The four pooled funds include 15 funding modalities. DERF funding modalities are: anticipatory action and rapid response. CSF funding modalities are: Information sharing, Small Projects, Large Projects, Small Programmes,Medium Programmes, Large Programmes, Neighbourhood Fund - Small Projects, Neighbourhood Fund - Large Projects, Neighbourhood Fund - *Udviklingsindsats,* Neighbourhood Fund - Resilience and Democratic Development Ukraine, Support for Application Process (incl. Neighbourhood Fund), Co-funding (incl. Neighbourhood Fund), and Capacity Analysis.

3.2 Governance and management structure

CISU's General Assembly determines CISU's strategic direction and approves the annual narrative report and financial accounts presented by CISU's Board. The General Assembly also approves the budget for the upcoming year and decides on specific thematic focus areas. All members of CISU who have duly paid their membership fee are eligible to participate in the General Assembly with one vote.

CISU's annual General Assembly elects the Board and CISU's Internal Auditor. The board has seven members and three alternates. Board members are elected for a two-year period. Alternates are elected for one year only. The board constitutes itself with a chairperson, a vice chairperson and a treasurer. All CISU members are eligible as members of the Board, however at a given time, only two CSOs with strategic partnership agreements with the DMFA and pooled fund agencies can be represented in the board. The board provides the strategic direction for CISU's secretariat and monitors if the secretariat fulfils the agreed goals in accordance with CISUs strategy. At a minimum, the board meets five times. a year. In addition, Board members participate in ad-hoc meetings with the Secretariat, the DMFA and CISU members. All CISU members can participate in the regular board meetings as observers. Board members receive an annual remuneration.

The Secretariat undertakes the daily management of CISU's activities. CISU's Management comprises the Executive Director, the Head of Funding, and Head of Capacity Development. The Board hires the CISU Management. The structure of the secretariat is depicted below. CISU has established an accountability group of staff who reports to the Executive Director. Staff also engage in cross cutting themes through a group structure.



CISU has established a firewall between its advisory services and the grant assessment process. CISU's advisors guide applicants when they develop the application with the partner. Assessments of applications and recommendations for funding of projects are undertaken by Assessment Committee members appointed by the Board for CSF and the Steering Committees for DERF and OpEn. The Assessment Committee's decision is based on recommendations from Assessment Consultants. Assessment Committee members and Assessment Consultants are external to CISU and contracted on time-limited contracts.

3.3 Work with partner organisations

CISU promotes that its members effectively collaborate with partners across the globe to improve lives of people living in adverse circumstances, and as a learning platform CISU builds capacity, promotes mutual learning and innovation, and strengthens popular participation in development work for its members and their partners.

As a pooled fund agency, CISU engages directly with Danish CSOs who apply to be CISU grantees. CISU provides advisory services to the CSO's and enters into an agreement with the CSOs who fulfil CISU's quality and accountability standards. CISU applies a risk-based approach based on the principle of proportionality, with less requirements to smaller CSOs who build capacity though the implementation of smaller grants.

For medium and larger programmes under CSF, a thorough monitoring visit (organisational and financial) to the Danish applicants is undertaken by CISU as part of the assessment process.

Danish grantees are required to partner with local CSOs, and CISU requires that grantees enter into a contract with the partner stating the roles and responsibilities of each party to the agreement and their adherence to the DMFA clauses on anti-corruption, anti-child labour, anti-terror, and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH), including accessible complaint and feedback mechanisms.

CISU monitors project and partnership performance through reviews of financial and narrative reports and through monitoring visits to the grantee and the partner.

4. Overall performance of the organisation

4.1 Internal quality assurance and risk management mechanisms

CISU has a robust risk management and internal quality assurance system.

Before applying to be manager of a new pooled funding modality, CISU's secretariat undertakes a risk assessment considering organisational, reputational and political risks. The Secretariat also assesses if the funding is in line with CISU's principles and priorities. The assessments are presented to the Board for their decision. There are examples of CISU deciding not to engage in a new pooled funding modality.

CISU systematically monitors the performance of the pooled funding modalities, and it consolidates data from individual grants in the data base "Our CISU". CISU reports on an annual basis to the Board and to the DMFA. The reports include results achieved in terms of capacity building and in the provision of grants. The reports also discuss learning from monitoring visits.

CISU's risk mitigation approach includes that grantees need to document that they can implement smaller projects (< DKK 200,000) before they can qualify for grants above DKK 500.000. When assessing the capacity of grantees, CISU considers project performance, previous mismanagement of funds, and the grantees organisational capacity, including Code of Conducts (CoCs) and complaints and feedback mechanisms being in place.

The contracts between CISU and grantees include four clauses stating zero tolerance to fraud and corruption, sexual, exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH), child labour and terrorism. Grantees are required to state the same clauses in their contracts with partners and must immediately report misconduct to CISU. CISU reports substantiated cases of irregularities to the DMFA. CISU monitors grantee and partner performance based on risks. Since 2019, CISU has had rolling 4-year plans for all CISU monitoring and thematic travels to grantees and partners. Planning of supervision activities, both Danish and locally, is carried out in accordance with the agreed considerations with DMFA, i.e. risks, relevance, competencies, and resources. In 2025, CISU agreed with the DMFA to increase the resource allocation for monitoring visits.

On an annual basis CISU's secretariat presents a risk assessment to the Board. The risk assessment presented to the Board addresses organisational, reputational and political risks. The secretariat also presents an overview of complaints received as well as an overview of corruption and PSEAH cases and their status.

As per CISU's statutes, CISU's annual accounts are audited according to international standards by an external auditor appointed by the board. All grants over DKK 200,000 are audited by an external auditor engaged by the grantee. Grants under DKK 200,000 are audited by an auditor appointed by CISU. CISU's audited accounts, and CSF, DERF and OpEn annual reports are publicly available on the CISU website.

CISU's Internal Auditor is elected by the General Assembly. The internal auditor role includes overseeing general financial management, the board decisions and organisational risks.

4.2 Level of application of the CHS	CISU has substantially strengthened its commitment to the CHS since the previous audit. CISU's strategic focus on localisation shows a strong level of alignment with the CHS. CISU strengthens local capacities by ensuring that partners have genuine decision-making power and by piloting "reverse lead" models where local partners take the primary role. Partners consistently describe their relationship with CISU and grantees as respectful, with clear divisions of roles and based on mutual learning. CISU also ensures that communities and community leaders are engaged during project design to ascertain that support provided is in accordance with needs, and that feedback from communities is used to adapt project implementation to changes in context and needs. Additionally, CISU has strengthened its accountability approach. Grantees and partners are required to commit to zero tolerance to corruption, SEAH, child labour and terrorism. This "four red lines" policy requires that clauses of zero tolerance are included in all contracts. Based on the principle of proportionality, CISU requires that grantees and partners have policies and procedures in place in support of the zero tolerance commitments. CISU's website displays guidelines and good practice papers to support grantees. CISU has also strengthened its complaints and feedback mechanism. which is now accessible on both the English and Danish website with clear distinctions of sensitive and non-sensitive complaints channels. As part of the zero-tolerance policy, CISU also requires that all grantees and partners provide communities access to file complaints. Requirements to the actual complaints and feedback mechanism are proportionate to the size of the grant. A stronger focus has been given to reduce negative environmental impacts in CHS 2024. While progress has been made in this area, CISU has not yet included a systematic environmental assessment as a formal criterion for funding decisions. Similarly, there are challenges remaining regarding the systematic assessment of partner capacity to manage sensitive data during the application stage. Finally, gaps remain in the systematic monitoring of whether communities understand expected staff behaviour and in assessing the timeliness of complaints handling as part of CISU's monitoring visits.
4.3 PSEAH	CISU has established a coherent organisational approach to PSEAH to ensure that grantees' and partners' projects are based on an understanding of SEAH risks and that grantees and partners work in ways that prevent all forms of exploitation, abuse and harassment. All CISU contracts with grantees as well as contracts between grantees and partners include a clause of zero-tolerance to SEAH. CISU requires that grantees and partners with a CISU portfolio above DKK 1 million have a PSEAH policy. CISU also ensures that grantees and partners establish mechanisms for people and community members to safely file concerns or complaints related to SEAH. This audit identified several areas for improvement in CISU's approach to PSEAH. These include that CISU does not monitor if grantees and partners systematically inform communities about the ways staff are expected to behave, and if partners manage data and information related to SEAH safely. CISU also does not monitor if communities understand how a SEAH complaint will be handled, and if grantees and partners take timely and appropriate action to address SEAH complaints.

4.4 Organisational performance against each CHS Commitment

Strong points and areas for improvement	Average score*
Commitment 1: People and communities can exercise their rights and participate in actions and decisions that affect them.	2.3
CISU's strategy 2022- 25 and guidelines for the CSF and DERF funding modalities emphasise that CISU pursue a rights-based approach with a focus on participation, accountability, non-discrimination and transparency. The focus on community participation is further emphasised in CISU's application formats, in assessment criteria and in reporting formats. CISU's requirement that grantees work with local partners ensures that projects are based on a good understanding of the local contexts and culture. For larger grants, the partner is responsible to develop the context analysis. Working with partners also ensures that communication is easily understood by communities and partners are responsible to ensure that people and communities can participate in decisions and actions in ways that are	

relevant to them. CISU requires that grantees and partners regularly monitor project progress, and CISU is flexible and accepts changes to budgets and activities if needed due to changes in the context. CISU has strengthened its communication around its zero tolerance to PSEAH and guidelines and information about good practices can be found on the website. CISU has strengthened its commitment to ensure that diversity, equity and integration is considered, however, while this is assessed during project design, consideration to diversity, equity and inclusion is not followed through in reporting formats for the CSF funding modality. CISU does also not assess if information is shared about expected staff behaviour as part of monitoring visits. Finally, CISU does not ensure that new grantees engaging in information sharing projects are informed about the requirement to obtain consent from the individuals displayed on information materials, neither are they informed about the need to inform people how information gathered will be used.	
Feedback from communities: Communities valued their engagement in decisions and actions related to the projects. They reported that partners and grantees are respectful and understand the local culture, and that partners consider differences in needs when designing a project. Communities also reported that partners share information about the project, the rights of people and communities to take part in decisions and give feedback. Communities confirmed that they know how staff should behave.	
Commitment 2: People and communities access timely and effective support in accordance with their specific needs and priorities.	3
CISU shows strong commitment to ensuring that people and communities access timely and effective support in accordance with their needs and priorities. Grantees work with partners in long term partnerships and partners are well connected with local government structures and, in cases of humanitarian action, with the humanitarian structures established for the crisis situation. CISU's assessment criteria for applications emphasise the engagement of the partner and communities in the design. See also Commitment 1 above. In this way CISU ensures that community needs are addressed and that the criteria for selection of people for the support are fair, impartial and transparent. CISU displays the assessment criteria used for applications in its guidelines for CSF and DERF. CISU's guidelines and application formats also require that possibilities for coordination with others are considered. Evidence supports that partners are well acquainted with the local context and collaborate with local government, humanitarian actors and other community-based organisations (CBOs). Support is delivered in a timely manner, and activities supported by DERF rapid response funds are initiated within seven days of the signing of the contract. CISU application formats ensure that grantees and partners consider SEAH risks and SEAH risk assessments form part of CISU's monitoring of grantees, partners and projects.	
Feedback from communities: Communities confirmed that they were consulted, and that local knowledge was respected. Communities provided examples of how local capacities were integrated in the project. Communities confirmed that the criteria used by the partners for selection of people for support are fair, impartial, and that it was transparent why people were supported. Communities found that the support provided by partners effectively addressed their needs and was in line with their priorities. They noted that the materials provided were of good quality and that the support was timely. Communities furthermore found that partner staff had the necessary technical and inter-personal skills.	
Commitment 3: People and communities are better prepared and more resilient to potential crises.	3
CISU demonstrates a consistently high level of performance in fostering community resilience and ensuring long-term positive effects. The organisation's strategic emphasis on localisation translates into effective and systematic support for both formal and informal community leadership structures. This approach empowers locally-led efforts to reinforce community resilience from the ground up. Programme planning and implementation are designed to contribute to lasting positive impacts on people's lives and livelihoods. This is systematically embedded in funding requirements, which mandate the integration of exit strategies and sustainability plans from the outset of an intervention. CISU's approach also ensures that local ownership of	

resources and decision-making is supported from the very beginning of its work with communities. This consistent, systems-based focus on local leadership and sustainability ensures that interventions are meaningful contributions to a community's long-term strength and self-reliance.	
Feedback from communities: Communities found that projects had a positive effect on their lives and livelihoods and actively contributed to long-term resilience. Communities mentioned that they were consulted from the initial stages of project design, allowing them to influence the intervention to ensure it targeted relevant needs. Communities confirmed that local leaders were actively engaged throughout the project cycle. People in visited projects also confirmed that they were actively engaged and trained to enhance their skills, which they perceived as effectively reducing the risks of future crises	
Commitment 4: People and communities access support that does not cause harm to people or the environment.	2.4
CISU has robust systems for identifying, preventing, and addressing potential negative social impacts on people and communities. This includes a focus on risks related to SEAH, which is integrated into application and reporting formats. There is a coherent organisational approach to protecting the safety, dignity, and rights of people, reinforced through contractual requirements and the mandatory DMFA "red line" clauses. Regarding environmental harm, CISU's approach varies by modality; while the DERF modality utilises a systematic Environment Marker, the CSF applies a proportional, case-by-case approach. The current lack of documented criteria to trigger deeper environmental assessments represents an opportunity to further strengthen the consistency of this approach across all funding streams. Additionally, gaps exist in ensuring that partners have the capacity for safe and ethical data management. This is not systematically reviewed as a formal requirement during grant assessment, leading to inconsistent data protection practices driven primarily by other donor requirements rather than a unified CISU approach	
Feedback from communities: Communities express a high level of trust in the partner organisations, confirming that projects do not create tensions. They attributed this to the community-based approach and effective mitigation measures employed by the partners. Communities felt confident that they could use the established feedback mechanisms to raise concerns safely if any negative impacts were to arise. For projects with an explicit environmental focus, such as organic farming, communities confirmed that no harm was done and that the activities contributed to environmental protection. Regarding data management, communities expressed high levels of trust in the local project staff.	
Commitment 5: People and communities can safely report concerns and complaints and get them addressed.	2.3
CISU has strengthened its approach to ensure that people and communities can safely report concerns and complaints. CISU's four red lines policy requires that CISU, its grantees and partners have a zero tolerance to corruption, SEAH, child labour and terrorism, and clauses about the zero tolerance are included in grantee contracts and are also displayed in the contracts between grantees and partners. CISU's complaints and feedback mechanism is accessible and is displayed on the website in Danish and English. The website informs how CISU will handle different types of complaints, including: complaints about grant management; complaints on internal matters and CISU employees; and complaints about CISU's grantees and partners, including their employees. Complaints including SEAH are received and handled by the CISU management group, unless it is a complaint about misconduct of the management. CISU also requires that grantees and partners have complaints and feedback mechanisms which are accessible and safe for communities. The requirement follows CISU's principle of proportionality, whereby grantees and partners with smaller grants are only required to have a telephone number or similar mechanism to receive complaints. CISU's monitoring visits to grantees and to partners include an assessment if complaints and feedback mechanisms are accessible and safe. Following the latest DMFA monitoring visit, CISU has committed to increase the resource allocation for monitoring visits to grantees and partners.	

CISU's monitoring visits do not systematically consider if grantees and partners inform people and communities about how staff and volunteers are expected to act to prevent harmful behaviours, including from SEAH. CISU can also further strengthen its applications of a victim/survivor centred approach for complaints handling and to ensure that partners inform communities about how they will handle concerns and complaints.	
Feedback from communities: All communities consulted were aware of the partner's complaints and feedback mechanisms and they were aware of how staff were expected to behave. Communities expressed that it was safe to file a concern or complaint, however, not all communities were aware of how a concern reported would be handled.	
Commitment 6: People and communities access coordinated and complementary support.	2.8
CISU demonstrates strong performance in coordination and partnership. The organisation has robust systems to ensure its work is coordinated with and complementary to the actions of local actors and other stakeholders, effectively minimising duplication. There are also well-established processes for regularly assessing the quality and effectiveness of partner relationships, allowing for corrective action when needed. This is underpinned by a coherent organisational approach that ensures partnerships are equitable, based on mutual respect for the roles and responsibilities of each entity. CISU actively supports partners in applying quality and accountability commitments by providing access to extensive support materials and online courses. While participants evaluate CISU's courses positively, some interviewees mentioned that they rarely took part in CISU's courses as they found them less useful. CISU is currently exploring ways to increase the practical application of its trainings to ensure they remain highly relevant to all partners.	
Feedback from communities: Communities confirmed that coordination among local actors worked well, that there was no duplication of efforts and that there was good complementarity between interventions, such as those addressing WASH and nutrition needs simultaneously.	
Commitment 7: People and communities access support that is continually adapted and improved based on feedback and learning.	2.8
CISU's commitment to continuous learning and improvement is reflected in its vision and mission and strategy which describes CISU's role as a platform for networking, exchanging experience, and learning. CISU continuously adapts and improves the way it works based on feedback from member satisfaction surveys, network meetings with grantees and partners and evaluations of members satisfaction with training courses and CISU's advisory services. Learnings from surveys and evaluations are consolidated and shared with CISU's board and in annual report to CISU members, donors and stakeholders. As a member of a number of Danish and international networks CISU shares learning with other Danish and international organisations, and CISU has a dialogue with other Danish pooled fund agencies and Danish networks. At grant level, grantees and partners regularly discuss project performance, and partners regularly meet with communities to discuss their perception of the project. Applications and reporting formats include considerations about how communities are engaged in the project design and provide feedback. As mentioned under Commitment 1 and Commitment 2 community and partner feedback lead to changes in project activities as feasible CISU uses "Our CISU" to compile reports on project and grantee performance. Delay or mismanagement is recorded and followed up on. Findings from monitoring visits to grantees and their partners are also recorded, with timelines for follow-up on observations and recommendations. Based on the draft reports from monitoring visits, requirements and recommendations to the grantees involved are discussed and calibrated between CISU grant managers, controller and CISU management. The information and learning is incorporated into the reviews of CISU guidelines. However, CISU does not establish an overview of findings from monitoring visits. This could further strengthen CISU's approach to systematic learning.	
Feedback from communities: Communities reported that they met regularly with partners, and they confirmed that they had regular opportunities to provide feedback to the partner and that the feedback was considered and appropriately acted upon. They appreciated being consulted also prior to project start and found that their time constraints were respected as was their willingness to share information. Finally, communities confirmed that partners discuss feedback with them and share the learning which leads to changes in the project.	

Commitment 8: People and communities interact with staff and volunteers that are respectful, competent, and well-managed.	2.7
CISU has an organisational culture which promotes quality and accountability by leaders and staff in the secretariat. CISU has a solid organisational approach to ensure that human resources are managed effectively in a fair, non-discriminatory and transparent manner, in line with recognised good practice. The organisational approach includes biannual workplace assessments and annual dialogues between management and individual staff about staff performance, welfare and interests for capacity development. Workplace assessments show that CISU has a culture based on trust, fairness and inclusion. Staff welfare surveys show that staff acknowledge that they are given possibilities for developing their competencies. Employment is based on merit and positions are advertised. CISU considers diversity of its staff. CISU's CoC is comprehensive and staff are required to know the content of the CoC and agree to follow it. Staff are introduced to the CoC when employed and during staff assessments and development talks. CISU has strengthened its focus on accountability. Its four red lines policy clearly states requirements to grantees and partners in terms of having mechanisms in place to ensure the zero tolerance to corruption, SEAH, child labour and terrorism and adherence is actively monitored. CISU displays its commitment to accountability on the website. CISU's accountability requirements to grantees and partners follow the principle of proportionality. CISU has procedures in place for timely action to address misconduct of its own staff and staff of grantees and partners. Recommendations from monitoring visits are uploaded and followed on "Our CISU", and form part of assessments for grantees to receive further funding CISU does not systematically monitor if grantees and partners provide safe, confidential and accessible ways for all staff and volunteers to raise concerns and report misconduct related to SEAH. Neither does CISU monitor if grantees and partners ensure appropriate protection for those reporting misconduct related to SEAH, and if the partner's and grantee's handling of complaints is timely.	
Feedback from communities: Communities found that partner staff and management were competent with excellent technical and personal skills. Communities also confirmed that staff behaved appropriately, that they were respectful, nice and did not cause any harm.	
Commitment 9: People and communities can expect that resources are managed ethically and responsibly.	2.8
CISU's performance in resource management is generally strong, with robust systems in place for ethical and effective stewardship. The organisation ensures it has adequate capacity and resources to meet its commitments and demonstrates responsible financial management with strong internal controls. The processes for fundraising and fund allocation are ethical and designed not to compromise the organisation's values. Furthermore, CISU has strengthened its approach to organisational risk management, with established procedures for assessing risks related to corruption and fraud. The organisation manages a high volume of interest through its open application process, which reflects the sector's strong engagement with CISU's funding modalities. While this high demand occasionally places pressure on administrative efficiency for both CISU and applicants, the organisation maintains effective controls. There are ongoing opportunities to further optimise resource allocation by a more stringent management of the application process and by systematically integrating environmental criteria across funding decisions, ensuring that resource management aligns consistently with environmental responsibility.	
Feedback from communities: Communities found that funds were spent for their intended purpose and they did not observe any visible waste in the projects. Communities expressed high satisfaction with the capacity of the partner organisations and the resources that were made available to implement the interventions that directly affected them.	

** Note: Commitments are scored by taking the mean average score of the requirements, i.e. the sum of all the requirement scores in a commitment divided by the number of requirements in that commitment. Except when a major non-conformity/weakness is issued, in this case the overall score for the Commitment is 0 (CHSA Verification Framework - Scoring Grid, 2024).*

5. Summary of open weaknesses

Weaknesses	Type	Status	Resolution timeframe
2025-1.5-CISU does not systematically ensure communications representing people and communities, including those used for advocacy and fundraising, have their informed consent, and that people know how their information and images will be used.	Minor	New	By the 2028 Renewal Audit
2025-1.6-CISU does not have a coherent organisational approach to ensure transparent information-sharing, communication and meaningful participation of people and communities in the actions and decisions that affect them.	Minor	New	By the 2028 Renewal Audit
2025-4.3-CISU does not ensure during the grant assessment process that the grantees and partners have the capacity to ensure safe, ethical and effective management of data, nor does it provide sufficient guidance on the topic.	Minor	New	By the 2028 Renewal Audit
2025-5.2-CISU does not systematically monitor if grantees and partners ensure that people and communities understand how staff and volunteers are expected to act to prevent harmful behaviours, including from SEAH.	Minor	New	By the 2028 Renewal Audit
2025-8.5-CISU does not systematically monitor if grantees and partners provide safe, confidential and accessible ways for all staff and volunteers to raise concerns and report misconduct related to SEAH, and that appropriate protection is available for those reporting misconduct related to SEAH	Minor	New	By the 2028 Renewal Audit
Total Number of open Weaknesses	5		

6. Claims Review

Claims Review conducted	☒ Yes ☐ No	**Follow-up required**	☐Yes ☒ No

7. Lead auditor recommendation

In my opinion, CISU demonstrates a high level of commitment to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability and its continued inclusion in the Verification scheme is justified.	
Name and signature of lead auditor: Dorte Busch	**Date and place:** 2025-12-22 Copenhagen, Denmark

8. HQAI decision

Certificate renewed:	☐ Issued ☐ Preconditioned (Major CARs)
Start date of the current certification cycle: YYYY/MM/DD Next audit before YYYY/MM/DD	
Registration in the Independent Verification Scheme maintained:	☒ Accepted ☐ Refused
Start date of the current verification cycle: 2026/01/23 Renewal audit completed by 2029/01/23	
Name and signature of Head of quality assurance: Victoria Lyon Dean	**Date and place:** Geneva, 23.01.2026

9. Acknowledgement of the report by the organisation

Space reserved for the organisation	
Any reservations regarding the audit findings and/or any remarks regarding the behaviour of the HQAI audit team: *If yes, please give details:* Please refer to the CISU response to HQAI Renewal Audit & verification on the following page	☑ Yes ☐ No
Acknowledgement and Acceptance of Findings: I acknowledge and understand the findings of the audit I accept the findings of the audit	 ☑ Yes ☐ No ☑ Yes ☐ No
Name and signature of the organisation's representative: Ms. Iben Westergaard Rasmussen, Head of Secretariat	**Date and place:** 5th February 2026, Aarhus, Denmark

Appeal

In case of disagreement with the quality assurance decision, the organisation can appeal to HQAI within 14 workdays after being informed of the decision.

HQAI will transmit the case to the Chair of the Advisory and Complaint Board who will confirm that the basis for the appeal meets the appeals process requirements. The Chair will then constitute an appeal panel made of at least two experts who have no conflict of interest in the case in question. The panel will strive to come to a decision within 45 workdays.

The details of the Appeals Procedure can be found in document PRO049 - Appeals Procedure.

Additional CISU observations to HQAI regarding the verification, which is interlinked to the responses above to the minor weaknesses

In 2021-2022 the first verification process of CISU took place; a pilot for both CISU, HQAI and the CHS Alliance, with regards to pooled funding arrangements. After the audit process completed in 2022, CISU submitted a cover letter stating some of the issues of the verification process that was not taking into account that CISU is a pool of funds manager, and not an implementing organisation with direct partners.
Some of these issues are again present during this renewal process. One of the most conspicuous issues is the fact that the Danish MFA guidelines describe that pooled funding arrangements, like CISU, must apply the principle of proportionality in relation to grantee technical and administrative capacity and in relation to the size of the grants so as to maintain a broad-based popular anchorage and work towards facilitating that grants can be applied for by a wide range of CSOs, including small volunteers-driven and new organisations. The HQAI renewal verification process did not reflect the proportionality as agreed with the Danish MFA, which is evident given that most of the minor weaknesses are related to the local partners and the absence of complete and systematic review or oversight from CISU - irrespective of the proportionality requirements relative to the grant size, i.e. PSHEA etc.
The aspect of proportionality was also a challenge for some of the grantees and partners selected as part of the HQAI renewal audit sampling. This fact was discussed with the auditors during the selection/sampling process. CISU strongly recommends that HQAI develops questionnaires for different types/sizes of grantees/partners.
The weakness 2025-1.5 relates to the revised 2024 CHS and this in part constitutes the 'root cause' of the minor weakness and relates to some of the other weaknesses. In February 2024 CISU submitted progress/status on the initial 2022 HQAI audit. Later in March 2024, the revised CHS was launched. This did not give CISU a chance to readily be expected to conform - across its funding modalities - to the newly revised CHS already in late 2025. During 2024, CISU undertook a major revision process of its Civil Society Fund (CSF) Guidelines. Conducting revisions across pools and funding modalities as well as their entire management system - right down to community levels and within a limited timeframe - is arguably structurally inappropriate, risks confusion and adds to already weighty compliance demands. Hence, the new CHS indicators regarding environmental impact, consent etc. are indicators that CISU could not readily act on within such a tight timeframe. Most of the CISU grants, except for the DERF grants, undergo a long assessment process and have Intervention periods averaging 1,5 - 3 years. If CISU were to change guidelines and requirements in e.g. 2024, these would not be evident in the grants/projects until 2027 at the earliest.

Annex 1: Explanation of the scoring scale*

Scores	Meaning for all verification scheme options, including self-assessment and third-party audits	Guidance for scoring requirements
0	Your organisation does not currently meet the requirement and indicates a major issue that is so significant that the organisation's ability to meet the commitment is compromised. **For third-party auditing schemes:** Independent verification: A major weakness. Certification: A major non-conformity that compromises the integrity of the commitment which leads to a major corrective action request (CAR).	To give a score 0, **not all** of the measurable components of the requirement are verified to be in place **and** the issue(s) identified are so significant that the organisation's ability to meet the **commitment** is compromised.
1	Your organisation does not currently meet the requirement. **For third-party auditing schemes:** Independent verification: A minor weakness. Certification: A minor non-conformity that compromises the integrity of the requirement which leads to a minor corrective action request (CAR).	To give a score 1, **not all** of the measurable components of the requirement are verified to be in place.
2	Your organisation currently meets the requirement, but there is an opportunity for improvement that deserves attention so that the requirement is not compromised in the future. **For third-party auditing schemes:** Independent verification: Requirement is met with an observation. Certification: Conformity with an observation.	To give a score 2, **all measurable components** of a requirement are verified to be in place, however, one or more opportunities for improvement are observed which deserve attention so that the requirement is not compromised in the future.

3	Your organisation meets the requirement,-with organisational systems ensuring it is being met consistently throughout the organisation. **For third-party auditing schemes:** Independent verification: Requirement is met. Certification: Conformity.	To give a score 3, **all measurable components** of a requirement are verified to be in place.
4	Your organisation meets the requirement in an exemplary way, demonstrating innovation and/or special recognition of performance, and organisational systems ensure this high quality throughout the organisation. **For third-party auditing schemes:** Independent verification: Requirement is met in an exemplary way. Certification: Conformity in an exemplary way.	To give a score 4, **all measurable components** of a requirement are verified to be in place. **In addition**, the following must be verified: • An organisational system (or systems) that demonstrate an innovative approach to meeting the requirement at a high standard throughout the organisation are in place. and/or • The organisation has been awarded special recognition of performance in relation to meeting the requirement at a high standard, and this is built into organisational systems so that the high quality is ensured throughout the organisation.
	Guidance notes for scoring commitments: • Commitments are scored by taking the mean average score of the requirements, i.e. the sum of all the requirement scores in a commitment divided by the number of requirements in that commitment. • Except when a major non-conformity/weakness is issued, in this case the overall score for the Commitment is 0.	

* Scoring Scale from the CHSA Verification Framework 2024