



**SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY**



OUTCOME DOCUMENT

EU SEE Regional Learning Exchange 2025 - Asia & Pacific

Methodology Track: Practical tips and strategies for common implementation challenges

What this document is for

A practical companion for EU SEE researchers and Network Members implementing the project methodology. It consolidates challenges, solutions, strategies, and recommendations gathered during the 31 October 2025 regional learning exchange in Bangkok among Asia and the Pacific Network Members.

Date

31 October 2025

Place

Bangkok, Thailand

Participants

Network Members from Asia and the Pacific

Focus

Country Focus Reports, Access to Information and Data Sources, and Safety and Security challenges

OVERVIEW

Purpose and structure

The first day of the 2025 Regional Learning Exchange created space for a semi-structured exchange on experience implementing the EU SEE Methodology. Before the event, Asia and Pacific Network Members identified their most pressing challenges and gaps. A small committee of members who contributed to the agenda design selected the top three issues to discuss in person with regional peers.

How to read this document

Each thematic section presents the challenge in plain language, followed by practical strategies shared by Network Members and Consortium Partners, plus methodological recommendations where relevant.

1

Country Focus Report

Panel preparation, data gathering, participation, scoring and consensus.

2

Access to Information & Data Sources

Legal barriers, knowledge ecosystems, media sources and evidence quality.

3

Safety & Security Challenges

Adaptations for sensitive contexts, expert protection and secure research practice.

SECTION 1

Country Focus Report

Challenges appeared across the full lifecycle of the methodology, from preparing panels to managing security.



Core methodological reminder

The dimensions are scored in general terms. Use the justification section to capture contextual specificities, civil society diversity and relevant nuance.

Common challenge	Solutions / strategies shared and recommendations
Experts are unavailable, have exited the project, or have not been adequately prepared.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send invitations early and keep backup experts available. • Frame participation as an opportunity for experts to amplify their voice in their field of work and interest. • Invite subject-matter experts and summarise the methodology and its principles before the panel. • Allocate sufficient funds in the annual budget to cover travel expenses. • Use hybrid meetings to expand reach and gather data before the panel takes place.
Panel members feel overwhelmed by the number of questions and workload.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit the right experts so preparation time is focused on understanding the methodology rather than compensating for weak expertise. • Brief subject-matter experts in advance so they can prepare concrete insights from their areas of expertise. • Use scorecards to pre-collect information and carry out research before the panel meeting. • Use panel time for discussion, validation and synthesis rather than starting from zero.

<p>It is difficult to include information and panellists from outside the capital.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use part of the budget to enable diverse participation and inclusion. • Map accessibility needs, including hearing and sight requirements, and accommodate them where possible. • Carry out provincial or local consultations before the panel to inform the discussion. • Where security concerns exist, contact the Network Facilitator to explore alternative options.
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Common challenge	Solutions / strategies shared and recommendations
<p>Data is inconsistent, anecdotal, confidential, or difficult to link to public sources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use qualifying language when findings are based on expert panel discussion, as foreseen in the CFR methodology. • Triangulate perspectives by including diverse expert voices and conducting prior research. • Prioritise hyperlinks to verifiable sources when explaining scoring reasoning, as this supports transparency and review. • Where formal citations are unavailable, provide clear justification based on expert experience or first-hand knowledge. • Acknowledge the value of expert perspective even when formal citations are not possible.
<p>Experts are reluctant to score dimensions as low or critical because of fear or protective instincts toward the principles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a learning session before the panel to clarify the purpose of the Country Focus Report. • Store data securely to prevent risks to individuals. • Contact the Network Facilitator if security concerns arise. • Keep individual panelist scores anonymous and do not share them with the consortium or external parties. • Share only the agreed final score of each dimension; the average by principle is the figure made public.
<p>The scoring methodology or the category in the vignette is unclear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that scorecard definitions are intentionally general to allow flexibility across contexts. • Use the narrative justification to capture contextual nuance and the diversity of civil society realities. • When needed and possible, translate the methodology into local languages.

Consensus is hard when experts have different levels of expertise or when there are too few experts in each field.

- Ask experts to score principles within their own domain thoroughly and provide general comments on other principles.
- Use a preliminary scoring exercise to identify common ground before deeper discussion.
- Use participatory tools such as Mentimeter to support broader participation.
- Bring in a trusted external facilitator to enable a neutral environment and support agreement-building.
- Convene intergenerational panels where appropriate; this was identified as a beneficial practice.

SECTION 2

Access to Information & Data Sources

The exchange highlighted that evidence work depends not only on data availability, but also on relationships, rights, trust and source diversity.

Key message for researchers

Civil society's added value is not only technical data collection. It is also the capacity to reach communities, access first-hand knowledge, and surface under-represented information that other stakeholders may not be able to obtain.

Common challenge	Solutions / strategies shared and recommendations
<p>Limited resources, time and delays discourage CSOs from requesting information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with larger networks to build collective capacity and access more data. • Encourage donors and partners, such as UNDP, to support the production or collection of information that is unavailable or unreliable. • Consider support for periodic state of civil society reports where this helps fill evidence gaps.
<p>CSO networks struggle to sustain information exchange because of insufficient resources and time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map and rebuild local knowledge ecosystems according to current needs and actions. • Use civil society actors to access first-hand information from confidential or under-represented communities. • Encourage donors to recognise that national indicators often lack sub-national or regional granularity and may be delayed when enabling environments deteriorate.
<p>Institutional knowledge is lost, or backup sources disappear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archive previous data sources and partner contacts for future access. • Use systems that preserve source content in case digital material later becomes unavailable. • Maintain institutional memory across reporting cycles and staff transitions.

Common challenge	Solutions / strategies shared and recommendations
<p>Public or government data is hard to access because of institutional and legal barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use right-to-information laws to formally request data, including when access was previously denied. • Create volunteer groups to test and document how information laws are applied, for example youth volunteers requesting information from agencies and recording responses. • Try different government instances when one authority refuses, delays, or claims it lacks authority. • Document denials, bureaucratic blockages and accountability gaps as part of the evidence landscape.
<p>Government actors may present a positive image while hiding information or delaying requests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify allies within government who can provide first-hand information about developments. • Engage Members of Parliament strategically, recognising their limited intervention capacity and framing requests around common interests. • Use Open Government Partnership platforms and similar initiatives where they exist. • Partner with CSOs on the ground to obtain first-hand information.

Media, alternative sources and evidence quality

The exchange stressed the need to diversify sources and treat media evidence critically, especially where public narratives are controlled or distorted.

Common challenge	Solutions / strategies shared and recommendations
<p>Media sources may be unsafe, censored, biased, corrupt, or unavailable in certain regions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with national or international journalists operating outside the country who can report more freely on domestic events. • Work with independent investigative journalists, organisations and think tanks. • Partners with universities and academic institutions that are collecting or could collect useful data. • Conduct direct interviews and establish civil society focal points across regions and provinces beyond the capital. • Build a pool of trusted journalist sources and cross-check media reports with civil society accounts.
<p>Some information exists mainly on social media, where content may be restricted, deleted or manipulated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement social media monitoring systems to identify useful content and accounts to follow. • Save source content where appropriate and safe, because digital content may disappear. • Treat social media as one source among many, not as the only evidence base.
<p>Misinformation, disinformation and heavy reliance on government narratives affect evidence quality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify claims with first-hand sources of information wherever possible. • Combine diverse tools: quantitative indicators, interviews, focus groups, legal frameworks and expert testimony. • Use UN UPR reports and donor-funded perception studies where relevant. • Adapt the research effort by principle; do not assume that all principles have equal data availability.

Some information is confidential, informal, or not yet safe to make public.

- Use confidential and closed-door channels with care and ethical judgement.
- Protect the identity of sources when disclosure would create risk.
- Use clear qualifying language when evidence cannot be publicly verified.
- Explain the basis of judgement transparently without exposing people or sensitive details.

Evidence-building practice

Collecting first-hand information can amplify under-heard voices and strengthen evidence-based advocacy, but it requires careful triangulation, safe handling and contextual judgement.

SECTION 3

Safety & Security Challenges

Highly sensitive contexts may require adaptations to the CFR methodology, particularly when bringing experts together in person raises risk.

The exchange identified that communication with the Network Facilitator is essential when a context becomes more restrictive. Security threats evolve over time: moments of decreased threat can be used for increased activity, while countries experiencing lower threats should proactively prepare for emerging risks.

Common challenge	Solutions / strategies shared and recommendations
<p>Experts are reluctant to participate because of fear of retaliation, reputational damage, online discussion risks or the “foreign agent” narrative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult the Network Facilitator before adapting the methodology in restrictive contexts. • Use anonymised methods as a safe measure for participation. • Anonymise panel lists and store them securely, because experts may be identifiable from lists. • Avoid displaying logos where this could create risk. • Build intergenerational and trust-based panels where possible.

Open panel discussion may expose participants in highly sensitive contexts.

- Use closed, vetted expert groups whose members know and trust each other.
- Let participants know who will be in the room to support informed consent.
- Where needed, meet individually or outside the country, including around international conferences or unrelated events.
- Offer confidential one-to-one input as an alternative to open discussion.
- Use secure communication platforms such as Signal, ProtonMail or the EU SEE platform, and avoid regular email for sensitive exchanges.

Convening trusted experts is difficult when fear and monitoring are high.

- Use a trusted consultant with strong networks to convene the expert panel.
- Time panels to avoid politically sensitive moments and periods when government monitoring may increase.
- Stick closely to the methodology points and move efficiently after objective scoring.
- Mobilise civil society solidarity in defence of experts where needed.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Government pressure, surveillance and preventive measures

The strongest message is blunt: do not treat methodology as separate from security. The research design must adapt to the risk environment.

Common challenge	Solutions / strategies shared and recommendations
<p>Government pressure, accusations of defamation and online attacks undermine the legitimacy of data and experts.</p>	<p>Mobilise solidarity and collective defence where appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame the work in local terms to reduce misinterpretation or externalisation of the agenda. • Avoid public promotion of data during sensitive periods. • Use moments when repression decreases, such as large international events in the country, to advance safer activity.
<p>Surveillance, checkpoints and carrying documents during travel create risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use separate phones to mitigate risks, including personal and professional separation. • Avoid carrying or providing printed documents that could be seized. • Integrate preventive security measures into planning rather than treating them as an afterthought.
<p>Raids of offices and prosecution of human rights defenders create direct operational risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen security protocols before activity begins. • Prepare alternative data collection and validation options. • Document risks without exposing individuals. • Review risk level continuously because threats evolve over time.

CLOSING CHECKLIST

Practical research reminders

Use this checklist before finalising a panel, evidence review or methodological adaptation.

Prepare early

Invite experts early, brief them clearly and keep backup options.

Diversify evidence

Combine sources, methods and perspectives; do not rely on a single evidence channel.

Make scoring safe

Keep individual scores anonymous and share only agreed final scores externally.

Build beyond capitals

Use local consultations and regional focal points to improve representation.

Protect contributors

Anonymise where needed and store sensitive data securely.

Qualify carefully

Use transparent language when evidence is based on expert judgement or confidential inputs.

Capture nuance

Use narrative justification to reflect differences across civil society and country contexts.

Escalate risk early

Contact the Network Facilitator when methodology adaptations are needed for security reasons.