

New report maps out what EU must do to protect civil society

[News](#), [Civil Rights and Freedom](#), [European Union](#)

The introduction to the latest report from the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency opens with a clear explanation of why civil society groups are so important, saying they "give a voice to people on the issues that matter to them."

The latest report from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) '[Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU](#)' acknowledges that the issue of shrinking civil society space is present, widespread, and needs to be addressed urgently.

A series of recommendations provide practical suggestions how the EU and its Member States can better protect civil society space.

Why does this report matter?

This [report](#) is a big step forward for many reasons. It gives the problems faced by groups like NGOs, community groups and local activists – often referred to as shrinking space – recognition at institutional level for the first time.

It notes that civil society face problems (to a greater or lesser extent) in all EU Member States, confirming the experiences ILGA-Europe member organisations have been reporting to us. This is not a regional issue; it affects everyone across the EU.

It is not an isolated problem either – it impacts on LGBTI activists, environmental groups, those campaigning for sexual and reproductive rights, faith-based organisations, disability advocates, anti-racism NGOs... the list is endless. This is a definite trend, one that has to be alleviated by Member States living up to their obligations to promote, protect and defend human rights.

What's next?

Member states and EU institutions need to take the trend of shrinking space for civil society seriously. From there, they need to consider how they can actively support civil society organisations in their work more than ever.

FRA's advisory 'opinions' in the report, with [recommendations for Member States](#), contain important ideas: they can lead by example by meeting with civil society on a regular and structured basis, keeping an eye on regulatory legislation and acknowledging that funding in 'changing spaces' has to be more flexible and meet the actual and changing needs of organisations on the ground.

The timing of this report overlaps nicely with the ongoing consultations on the next EU budget. Questions on how EU funding can help national organisations to support local communities, build alliances, provide safety for human rights defenders and adapt quickly to changing contexts should be at the core of the debate on funding civil society. There are several FRA opinions relating to finance and funding in the report, recommendations that could really

help the EU to shape its approach over the next few years.

ILGA-Europe are particularly interested to see how the EU can implement these recommendations in their day-to-day interactions with Member States. The state of civil society isn't something that can be checked on once a year, this should be part of all interactions between the institutions and individual Member States.

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- Download the [report in full](#) from the FRA site [here](#).