

# A THRIVING CIVIC SPACE FOR UPHOLDING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS IN THE EU: LOOKING FORWARD

## SEMINAR 3: Support

**THEME: SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS THROUGH FUNDING**

**CO-ORGANISERS: The European Commission and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)**

**WHEN: 19 June 2023 from 9:00 to 15:30**

**WHERE: Albert Borschette Conference Centre**

### CONCEPT NOTE

The seminar will look at how civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders are supported in their work, looking specifically at financial support. It will be organised by the European Commission in collaboration with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

CSOs and human rights defenders need sufficient financial resources to carry out their work effectively. In the consultations carried out in support of the 2022 Annual Report on the Application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights <sup>1</sup>, as well as in FRA's annual civil society consultations on civic space, CSOs and human rights defenders identified lack of funding, as well as challenges in accessing available funding, as a key challenge to their work. They also reported that, in many Member States, there are few funding opportunities, in particular for work focused on the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights <sup>2</sup>, notably as regards funding for advocacy and watchdog activities.

The 2022 Charter Report examines the numerous challenges that CSOs and human rights defenders face in the field of funding, regarding in particular what is funded and how funding can be accessed. Member States and the EU are trying to tackle this problem by increasing financial support to CSOs, diversifying the type of support available, and simplifying the procedures for accessing and reporting on this support.

The discussions of this seminar build on promising practices from several key players. Notably, the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Value (CERV) programme is the biggest ever EU programme for promoting and supporting actions on democracy, equality, fundamental rights, and the rule of law. Its budget is more than twice as large as that of its predecessor programmes. In addition, it specifically focusses on the protection and promotion of Union values by providing support to civil society organisations active in promoting and cultivating those values and rights. The seminar will present the outcomes of the recent calls under CERV, including the recent first call to implement a system of intermediaries, and the priority on strategic litigation. Also the new CERV priority aimed at empowering civic space will be presented. Representatives from donors and civil society organisations will elaborate on needs as well as showcase good practices, such as initiatives taken to simplify and speed up access to funding, or on funding covering specific needs such as peer exchange, network building, or security-related issues including mental health support for activists.

This seminar aims at a concrete, practice-oriented exchange among civil society actors, Member States, EU institutions, international organisations, and public and private donors, about the funding needs of civil society actors, methods to increase and diversify the type of funding available, especially for CSOs and rights defenders under pressure, and

<sup>1</sup> A thriving civic space for upholding fundamental rights in the EU. 2022 Annual Report on the Application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, COM(2022) 716 final.

<sup>2</sup> FRA targeted consultation EU umbrella CSOs summary report, p. 22.



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on how to overcome obstacles to accessing funding. The purpose is to advance the discussion beyond an analysis of challenges towards concrete and feasible measures that the EU and Member States can take to ensure that civil society actors can pursue their essential work across the EU.

This seminar is the final one in a series of three targeted seminars on maintaining an open civic space in the EU. The first seminar took place on 10 May 2023 and focused on protecting civil society actors. The second seminar of 7 June 2023 was focused on empowering civil society through participation in decision-making.

## STRUCTURE

The morning discussion will be organised in two sessions. In the first session, there will be an introductory scene setter, which will explore the current situation as regards the funding of civil society organisations and human rights defenders, including an overview of challenges. The rest of the session consists of a panel dedicated to the funding needs of civil society organisations and human rights defenders.

In session 2, the discussion will focus more specifically on recent efforts taken by donors to increase the effectiveness and the impact of funding, including by diversifying funding, combining funding to “capacity building” programmes, and simplifying funding administration, including through online processes. The panel will also cover recent experiences on assessing the effectiveness of funding in light of pre-established indicators, and discuss the takeaways from these efforts.

The afternoon part will be based on a harvesting of ideas format and will invite all participants to contribute with suggestions for how the CERV calls on civil society funding might be further enhanced to address existing needs and challenges.



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*Draft programme / provisional list of speakers:*

## Moderator: The European Commission / DG JUST

**9:00 – 09:30**      **Registration** (morning coffee)

**09:30 – 11:15**      *Session 1: Funding CSOs and human rights defenders - best practices*

**09:30 – 10:15**      *Introduction – setting the scene*

*Introduction and welcome* – **Joachim Herrmann**, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Reynders

*Challenges and needs in funding civil society under pressure* – **Waltraud Heller**, Project Manager: lead on civic space, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

*CERV programme as a leading funding provider for civil society, with focus on regranting and operating grants* – **Maria Tomassetti**, Head of Unit (Programme management), DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission

*Perspective of a CERV intermediary* – **Veronika Móra**, Ökotárs-Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation

**10:15 – 11:15**      *Civil society's funding needs*

*Experiences from the EEA Norway Grants' civil society support programme* – **Simona Constantinescu**, Head of Development and Advocacy, Civil Society Development Foundation

*The perspective of a national organisation* – **Ewa Kulik-Bielińska**, Executive Director, Batory Foundation

*Funding for holistic security* – **Natacha Kazatchkine**, Head of Team on Rule of Law and Civic Space, Open Society Foundations

*Open discussion*

**11:15 – 11:30**      **Break**



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11:30 – 12:30

## *Session 2: Promising practices from donors*

*Combining funding with capacity building: the Funding Plus approach* – **Roy Virah-Sawmy**, Programme manager, CIVITATES

*Simplifying funding practices, a philanthropist organisation's perspective* – **Hanna Surmatz**, Philea

*Co-creating funding programmes and small-scale funding* – **Sylvia Ivanova**, Council of Europe

*Open discussion*

12:30 – 13:30

**Lunch**

13:30 – 15:00

## *Extracting suggestions for the CERV programme*

13:30– 14:45

*Harvesting of ideas* – with all seminar participants to identify proposals for continuous improvement

14:45 – 15:00

*Closing words – reflection on the way forward: **European Commission***