



# A N N U A L R E P O R T

JULY 22  
JUNE 23

01 JULY 2022 – 30 JUNE 2023

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

-  OVERVIEW
-  KNOWLEDGE GENERATION
-  PUBLIC DISCOURSE
-  ADVOCACY
-  BUILDING COUNTERPOWER
-  STRONGER SUPPORT ECOSYSTEMS
-  INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING
-  FINANCIALS



## FOREWORD BY SG AND BOARD CHAIR



### Dylan Mathews

BOARD CHAIR

*“WE HAVE EVERY REASON TO DESPAIR, AND YET WE DON’T. CIVIL SOCIETY’S RESILIENCE AND CAPACITY TO ACT IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY GIVES US REASON FOR HOPE.”*

Over the past year we have witnessed the deepening of regressive trends affecting many aspects of our lives and impacting most drastically on those already the most excluded. Conflicts are raging in several parts of the world, bringing misery for millions. The upsurge of conflict in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories is seeing civilians deliberately targeted and long-established international human rights and humanitarian laws openly flouted, and it’s far from the only example. The escalating climate crisis is producing catastrophic weather events of increasing frequency. Health crises could turn into the next pandemic at any time. Democratic freedoms are under attack in many countries.

Motivated by a global food, energy and cost of living crisis, people are taking to the streets but are facing increasing repression. Social tensions are being exploited by populist and nationalist forces to sow division, polarisation and roll back human rights. Multiple crises are driving growing numbers of people to flee their homes, turning them into migrants and refugees who are met with institutionalised hostility. Solidarity with them and other excluded groups is increasingly being criminalised.

We have every reason to despair, and yet we don’t. Civil society’s resilience, optimism and capacity to act in the face of adversity gives us reason to hope. As shown in our 2023 State of Civil Society Report,

civil society has continued to mobilise at every level and in every available arena. It has employed an increasingly wide array of tactics and forged diverse partnerships and alliances to demand democracy, inclusion and climate justice. It has urged reforms of global governance institutions to put them at the service of the rights of the many rather than the privileges of a few.

Over the past year, we have documented the challenges civil society faces and the victories it continues to achieve. The CIVICUS Monitor has identified hotspots, clusters of restrictions and repressive tactics, and sounded the alarm through country reports and policy briefs. Its Watchlist, highlighting sudden and severe setbacks in respect for civic space, has guided targeted advocacy efforts. CIVICUS Lens has documented civil society action based on firsthand accounts from people on the frontlines of change. We have passed the mic to those most affected by the major issues of the day and helped them share learnings and find common ground across diverse struggles for rights.

We have been no passive observers but rather active supporters of civil society’s struggles. We have done this through a combination of advocacy, networking and solidarity, with priority given to groups affected by the combined impact of civic space restrictions and structural discrimination.

At the United Nations in Geneva and in New York, we have both participated in high-level discussions, bringing in the perspectives of global south civil society, and supported grassroots activists to come and speak for themselves.

When protests at rising prices of essential goods and services took place in repressive contexts, violent repression followed. In response, much of our work has focused on defending freedom of peaceful assembly, including by supporting protesters through much-needed financial and non-financial emergency help.

As clampdowns on civic space tightened, we stood in solidarity with people fighting back, including through our #StandAsMyWitness campaign, which profiles imprisoned civil society leaders and calls for their release. Over the past year, 15 profiled human rights defenders were freed.

Our Strengthening Central America Civil Society Initiative supported civil society organisations working in severely restricted civic space. And to further enable civil society worldwide, we launched two new actions

targeted at local global south civil society groups, especially from marginalised communities: the Digital Democracy Initiative, aimed at supporting their effective use of digital technologies to strengthen civic space and inclusive democracy, and Local Leadership Labs, supporting inclusive spaces for local civil society alongside decision-makers to drive context appropriate policies and solutions.

We turned our attention to the young activists who are rapidly changing the face of civil society, pushing the boundaries and challenging assumptions about what civil society is, what it looks like and how it works. Young activists are reinvigorating social movements and creating new structures of participation, embracing creative tactics and new technologies. They practice intersectionality in their everyday organising, with young women increasingly in the lead and people from excluded groups asserting the value of their knowledge and perspectives. They are powering movements for climate action, racial justice and gender equity. They are challenging preconceptions, and the backlash they are experiencing is proof of their impact: they are shaking the system, and the guardians of the system are responding in full force.



- 1 CIVICUS
- 2 Global Witness
- 3 Greenpeace International
- 4 HelpAge International
- 5 Article 19

To help young activists gather the support they need to continue their vital work, we produced a Youth Playbook offering tools and recommendations for potential funders and allies. We supported a team of young researchers to work with CIVICUS's Youth Action Team to deepen understanding of the trajectories, challenges and learnings of global south youth activists. We aim to turn this research into further advocacy tools.

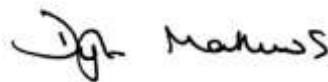
The Grassroots Solidarity Revolution Campaign promoted locally led public deliberations and context-relevant analyses in a range of languages and locations. The initiative included online and in person Jam Sessions created by and for activists to address issues of personal and collective wellbeing, resourcing and organising. We supported global south activists to share their experiences through video to humanise their work and make it easier to reach out to donors.

We supported seven partners through our Solidarity Fund, which we made more accessible by reducing barriers in the application process. We published an updated and expanded edition of the Donor Finder, targeted at smaller, less formal local groups, along with a new Rapid Response Donor Finder to improve responses to crises, emergencies and attacks and help mitigate threats.

Our first Membership Engagement Month provided multiple training and networking opportunities for our expanding membership. More than 3,000 of our members engaged with us over the year. Together we became stronger.

We are committed to leading by example. Internally, we are in the process of implementing a racial justice plan and have already changed our hiring guidelines. We earned the top spot in the Fair Share of Women Leaders Monitor, which measures the proportion of women on staff and in leadership positions. As an active member of Accountable Now, a global platform that works with civil society organisations to improve transparency and accountability, we have continued to report on our internal and external practices.

Collectively, we are experiencing the biggest setback for democracy and human rights in decades. But we are many and, when working together, we are powerful. We believe that another world is possible and standing alongside each other gives us the courage to strive for as long as it takes to make that better world a reality.



**Dylan Matthews**

Board Chair of CIVICUS  
Chief Executive Officer at Peace Direct



**Lysa John**

Secretary General of CIVICUS



## Lysa John

SECRETARY GENERAL

*"WE EARNED THE TOP SPOT IN THE FAIR SHARE INDEX, WHICH MEASURES THE PROPORTION OF WOMEN ON STAFF AND IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS."*



22

COUNTRY SUBMISSIONS TO THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL



4727

ENGAGEMENT MOMENTS WITH AROUND

31  

MEMBERS

90+ 

GLOBAL SOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS, LEADERS AND EXPERTS FEATURED IN



154

CIVICUS LENS ARTICLES PROVIDING TIMELY ANALYSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ISSUES AND TRENDS

CIVIC SPACE RATINGS FOR

197

COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES AND RECEIVING

316 

CITATIONS ACROSS ACADEMIA, CIVIL SOCIETY, INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND MEDIA

CIVICUS WAS MENTIONED IN

1176

MEDIA OUTLETS



The New York Times



Argentina Star



## THREE KEY SHIFTS

In our first year delivering our new strategic plan, we embraced three new approaches:

- 1) One overarching goal to strengthen civil society and citizen action for expanded civic and democratic space.
- 2) An explicit focus on working with and for groups affected by the combined impact of civic space restrictions and structural forms of discrimination.
- 3) A clearer articulation of our contribution to long-term, systemic change.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Under the new strategy, five strategic objectives are the basis to monitor and evaluate our work and communicate lessons from our progress. Our theory of change acknowledges that our strategic objectives reinforce one another to contribute to long-term, systematic change.

The strategic objectives section of this report aligns to the new shifts of the 2022 – 2027 strategic plan and holds us to account by reporting against our published annual plan narrative for this reporting period.



## WHAT WE DID: We Produced Actionable Research and Analysis on Civic and Democratic Space.

*CIVICUS's knowledge generation draws inputs from diverse civil society voices.*

### GLOBAL ANNUAL PUBLICATIONS



### BY THE NUMBERS

- 154 CIVICUS Lens articles
- 128 Civil society interviews published
- Civic space data for 197 countries and territories
- 316 Citations of CIVICUS Monitor



We continued to draw inputs from diverse civil society voices with a view to advancing rights, particularly those of the excluded from a global south perspective. For example, CIVICUS Lens interviewed 128 civil society activists, leaders and experts featured in 154 CIVICUS Lens articles. Across our interviews, the most frequent response received to the open-ended question on the support that civil society needs from the international community was the greater visibility of their struggles.

We monitored the trajectory of civil society mobilisations and actions around the world through the 12<sup>th</sup> annual publication of the 2023 State of Civil Society Report. The report explored the trends in civil society action at every level and in every arena including struggles for democracy, inclusion and climate justice to demands for global governance reform. The value of our knowledge leadership is found in the growing demand for presentations tailored for specific audiences and as input for further reflections and discussion as reflected in the invitations to multiple forums including global and regional organisations, academic and resourcing agencies.

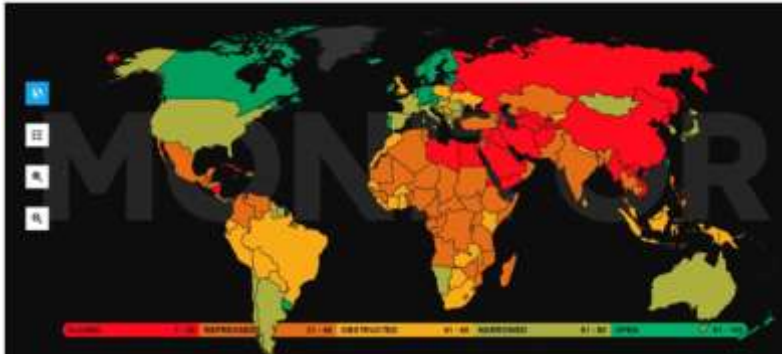






## CIVICUS Monitor

For its seventh year, CIVICUS Monitor curated data and information on civic space for 197 countries and territories. For the first time, we published the numbers behind the scores and updated methodology (link below). Driven by civil society requests, we created targeted country briefs, infographics and Watchlist reports. We captured 316 citations across academia, civil society, intergovernmental organisations and media for these knowledge products. This included such citations by the British daily newspaper, [The Guardian](#), extensively quoting the CIVICUS Monitor data and reasoning for downgrading the UK’s civic space to ‘obstructed’ in March 2023. We also saw the UN citing the Monitor statistics, including in The UN Development Programme’s 2023 [publication](#) on Youth Participation to sustain peace during the electoral process.



CIVICUS Monitor country scores and ratings

Methodology Paper

March 2023

## CIVICUS Watchlist

The knowledge also provided data to power our campaigning efforts. For example, a Sri Lanka Watchlist country report was actively used to support advocacy and solidarity efforts with networks in the country and region. This includes a report to the 137th session of the UN Human Rights Committee on the state of civic space in Sri Lanka ahead of its review of the state’s implementation of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in March 2023. We also released a public statement with twelve international organisations to end on the excessive forces by police to protesters in Sri Lanka.





## CIVICUS'S GROWING IMPACT

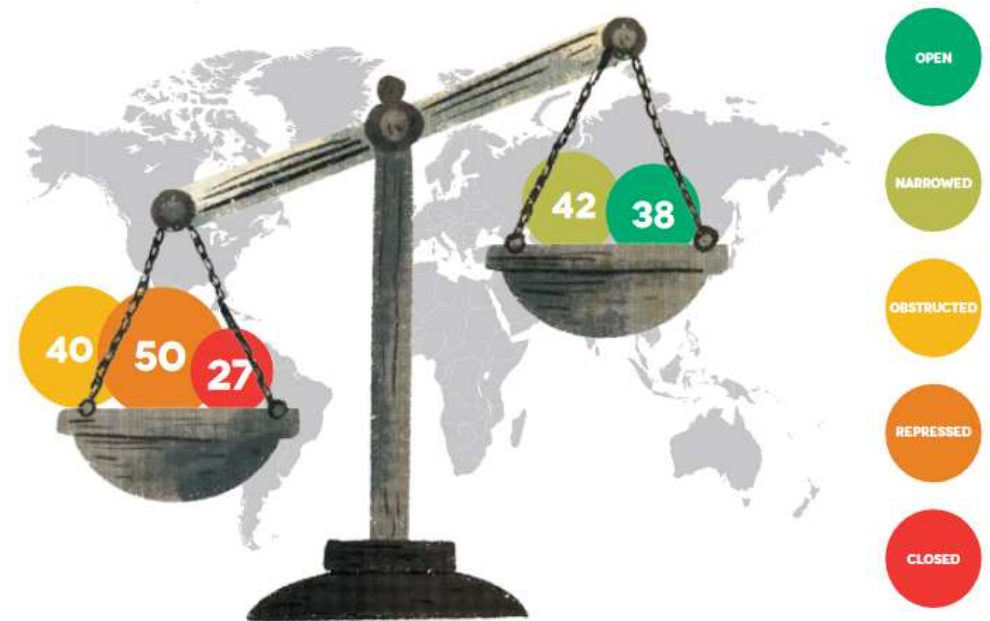
CIVICUS is a trusted source, and utilisation of its publications is increasing in number, scope and impact. For example, the CIVICUS Monitor team attended expert meetings organised by financial institutions in the Netherlands to explore how financial institutions can strengthen human rights risk assessments of business activities in areas where civic space is restricted. After the meetings, they launched a report, "[No news is bad news](#)." CIVICUS's definition on civic space and the 2021 Monitor findings in its People Power Under Attack publication are referenced throughout report, and of the eleven expert contributors to discussion were both CIVICUS's Chief Programmes Officer, Mandeep Tiwana and Civic Space Research Cluster Lead, Marianna Belalba Barreto. The report suggested the CIVICUS Monitor as a source of information when performing risk assessment.

*"It may also be useful to add to these processes information from civil society, such as from the CIVICUS Monitor, regarding the quality of information available for a specific geography. The existing CIVICUS Monitor provides red flags about restricted civic space on a country basis. This can provide a useful indication of the level of risk and the quality or completeness of risk information, even before specific risks are assessed."*

### PEOPLE POWER UNDER ATTACK 2022

A report based on data from the CIVICUS Monitor

#### UPGRADES





**LEARNING QUESTION:** What critical components are required to accompany our knowledge and analysis to improve its value to our target groups.

The quality of our knowledge products, our media outreach strategy and close partnership with local groups directly affected by the issues we raise have played a key role in enabling the uptake of our analyses by media and advocacy platforms in a range of contexts, as evidenced by the citations of our work.

- CIVICUS produces high-quality grounded research products supported through regional research partners and interviews with civil society. We have long held a strong reputation for our products with international bodies, but we have been achieving a broader recognition, including as a verified Google News source last year.
- Information is timely. Monitor updates, Lens stories, interviews and open letters are being released just before events happen or when events happen. Example: The interview by David Kode, CIVICUS's advocacy and campaign lead, with International Press Service about civic space conditions released just before the Nigerian elections called for the need to allow protests and rallies. It highlighted that if people could not protest peacefully, they could resort to violence to have their voices heard. The interview emphasised participating in the elections was their way to make change.
- Our quality and credibility have helped amplify our outreach and partnerships to reach a more diverse and wider audience. Some

of the proven outreach tactics used this year have included the continuous and consistent use of key international days and moments to do targeted outreach, increased engagement with the CIVICUS Online Community, launching reports in different countries and collaborating with well-established media houses in a particular region or country, such as partnering with the Mail and Guardian in South Africa, and content partnerships with outlets such as Inter Press Service and Alliance Magazine to publish and cross-post content.

Our wide media uptake amplifies the voices of civil society on the ground, empowering and legitimising their existence and work at a time of increasingly daunting challenges. Several members and partners said the sharing of successful tactics encourages other civil society organisations to use them as well.



## Global Assessment on Protest Rights 2022





**WHAT WE DID:** Amplifying grassroots narratives with media pieces and coverage. Contributed to increased public trust in civil society through advancing peer accountability practices within civil society.

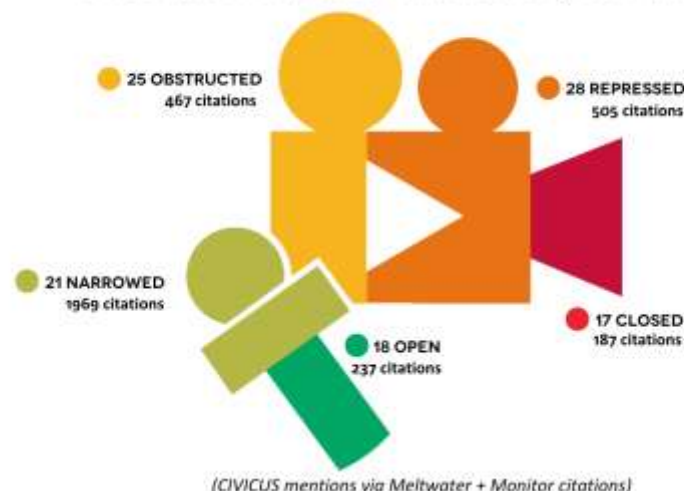
*CIVICUS's knowledge generation provided platforms to improve public discourse on civic space.*

- 1,176 media outlets mentioned CIVICUS in 118+ countries using 58 different languages
- 26 Analytical op-eds and 14 blogs respond to key civic and democratic space developments
- 5 Locally led Jam Sessions
- 6 episodes of CIVICUS Voices podcast
- 121,500 views of Grassroots Solidarity Revolution Campaign videos



The release of our two flagship reports, People Power Under Attack and the annual State of Civil Society report provided opportunities to centre public discourse on civic space and the impacts of civil society action, placing the need to defend and support civil society higher on the policy agenda. This includes presentation to civil society organisations, government, academic, media and philanthropic forums such as Spotify's Equity and Impact team; Building Resilience and BUILD network meetings; ideation meetings hosted by Global Citizen and MIT as well as other national and regional engagements hosted by CIVICUS peers and members.

## CIVICUS MEDIA MENTIONS 2022 – 2023





## AMPLIFYING GRASSROOTS NARRATIVES

Amplifying grassroots narratives is a way to strengthen public discourse on civil society by allowing civil society to share their lived experiences in their own words. Several initiatives across CIVICUS have done this including the following:



The Grassroots Solidarity Campaign's Jam Sessions were created by and for activists as an attempt to protect and nurture the mental, physical and emotional energy that drives activists and groups individually and collectively. The sessions addressed this overlooked need of grassroots activists by offering safe and informal spaces to connect with peers beyond their pressing work agendas, cultivate relationships, unwind and laugh, support their individual and collective wellbeing, and exchange knowledge and skills.



The CIVICUS Voice Podcast season two featured voices of people, communities and organisations defending civil liberties and human rights. The golden thread between the season's six episodes was a focus on the right to protest by providing analysis on protest restrictions as well as interviews with protest leaders from a range of social justice movements. It has over 1700 downloads.



The Strengthening Civil Society in Latin America videos present a short series of civil society resilience and challenges told in their own words and voice. Please see more about this under strategic objective: Contributing to stronger emergency and sustained support ecosystems for activists and organisations at risk.



The Grassroots Solidary Revolution videos were viewed 121,500 times in the first month. Followers of the grassroots collective partner, Bogotart, provided 90% of the views. Bogotart produced stories about five Colombian activists. The storytellers appreciated the independence and creative freedom to produce their stories for audiences important to them. The reach was also amplified through the CIVICUS network and the creators appreciated CIVICUS's collaboration.





**LEARNING QUESTION:** What types of narrative support for activists and organisations at risk are resulting in changes in local narrative in which contexts and why?



During the Grassroots Solidarity Revolution (GSR) Campaign, it became clear that to improve the resourcing realities of grassroots activists, they must be able to share their challenges, humanise their work, and make their demands to donors known in their own words.

Unfortunately, few have resources to create quality content and they have limited visibility to promote what they do. To address this gap, in 2023, the GSR campaign funded five activists with storytelling experience from Haiti, Colombia, Nigeria, Chile and India through a public call for proposals. Each was granted 5,000 USD to produce a video story aligned with key topics of the campaign with total creative freedom to produce what they wanted.

Narrative support in form of investments and freedom to produce and disseminate content in the language, formats and channels that make sense to them were highly valued. Support included small grants and accompaniment to produce quality content; support to amplify and disseminate these messages with global audiences; connecting with other storytellers and learning from respective ideas and creative approaches.

The documented and compelling stories amplified grassroots voices about the realities, funding struggles, stigma, dangers and daily challenges facing grassroots activists, as well as demonstrate the positive impact their work is having on their communities. In the first month, the videos were viewed 121,500 times.





## PEER LEARNING

### Accountability Practices

Another way CIVICUS strengthens public discourse is by promoting accountability practices that build trust in civil society. CIVICUS also supports key peer-to-peer constituent accountability activities such as Global Accountability Week and the Accountability Accelerator. These focus on three practices of dynamic accountability: giving account, taking account, and holding account to enhance civil society responsiveness and relevance, and in turn build public trust in civil society.

One of CIVICUS's key networks, the Affinity Group for National Associations (AGNA), alongside the Global Standard for CSO Accountability and Accountable Now, hosted three online events for the Global Accountability Week during October 2022. The Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice, a joint initiative by Accountable Now, CIVICUS and Restless Development, provided the introduction to the online events. The community of practice provides an ongoing space to ask questions and encourage the accountability journey throughout the year. With the dedication of the AGNA network and accountability partners, the Global Accountability Week was held in 2022 despite having no funding. However, with no funding or political will secured for the next one, there would be neither Global Accountability Week in 2023 nor accompanying activities and resources. Previously, with support from the CIVICUS AGNA Coordination Team, CIVICUS Resilient Roots and Rendir Cuentas, 15 AGNA members signed up for and concluded the 90 Day Accountability Challenge and shared resources on the Transparency Platform to enhance organisational legitimacy, transparency and constituent accountability. Resourcing opportunities to continue the activities in 2024 is being pursued.

However, the Accountability Accelerator course content was significantly updated and expanded, building on the successfully facilitated version of the course in early 2022. It is now available to participants in a self-paced video-based format on the member community platform and includes accompanying peer-learning opportunities.





## DYNAMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

### Shifting public discourse in Madagascar

In 2018 Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) joined the CIVICUS Resilient Roots (RR) initiative and began their dynamic constituent accountability journey. They developed and tested a paper-based [“Constituent Voice” magazine](#) about their comprehensive sexuality education programme. The magazines were meant to improve PJL’s transparency and build trust by collecting and responding to feedback from their partner school communities. Through this approach, PJL was able to prevent and address misconceptions and misunderstandings about the content and purpose of their in-school sexuality education programme. Excitingly, the feedback mechanism also enabled PJL to generate and document a critical mass of support and demand for their programme from constituents across Madagascar.

What follows is a brief description of how that internal organisational journey in constituent accountability inspired PJL to create a feedback loop for local to national level decision-making.

In 2021, PJL won the Pitch, a competition by Knowledge SUCCESS, allowing them to extend a concept started while part of RR initiative. PJL created a [magazine series](#) designed to create a critical loop between local knowledge on youth sexual reproductive health and national level decision making

processes in Madagascar. Four locally oriented magazine issues were distributed to nearly 20,000 youth, parents, school officials and other community members across three regions of Madagascar with blank pages inserted for their feedback. PJL used stories, articles and questions to inspire readers to share their reactions and lived experiences on key topics in youth sexual reproductive health. The PJL team received 8,498 written comments from community readers.

The feedback resulted in community-informed solutions on the “hot topics” that were relevant, feasible, and pressing for the Madagascar context. PJL then developed four issues for decision-makers focused on what constituents – including people and youth from marginalised rural communities - wanted national decision-makers and technical advisors to do differently in their work for that topic. The PJL team uses the magazines to open a conversation and build meaningful and lasting relationships with these national stakeholders.

PJL is now the preferred sexuality education provider for Madagascar’s Ministry of Education and is expanding their efforts into rural public schools with widespread public support – a milestone they say would not have been possible without their journey in dynamic constituent accountability.

*“Our journey in dynamic constituent accountability was transformative for our organization; We were inspired to take it to the next level, apply the same principles and values, and work to shift public discourse in Madagascar.”*

Laura Leeson  
Director of Evaluation and  
Strategic Development at PJL







**WHAT WE DID:** We worked with civil society at national, regional and international levels.

### BY THE NUMBERS

- 8 agreement changes towards defending or expanding civic space at the UN.
- 22 Universal Periodic Review submissions which are comprehensive country reports on civic space restrictions and submitted to the UN Human Rights Council.
- 64 Statements, letter, and resolutions negotiated in Geneva with UN bodies.
- 121 direct advocacy actions (includes financial, technical & research support).
- 94 indirect advocacy actions (includes relationship/coalition building & in-kind support).
- 17 open letters providing targeted response to developments related to civic and democratic space and upon requests from members and partners.



UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Our work at the United Nations Human Rights Council draws on both our research and our networks to conduct advocacy for improved norms on civic space and monitoring of states commitments to democratic space. We leveraged our relationships with the UN, and examples include engaging UN experts and using our consultative status to enable our members and partners to represent their concerns. We link our national advocacy work to regional and UN mechanisms.



CIVICUS has UN hubs in both New York and Geneva. As part of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, CIVICUS took part in a participatory process to shape priorities for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for the period of 2024 - 2027. In Geneva, CIVICUS organised multi-stakeholder and bilateral meetings with delegations and UN human rights experts, supporting them to deliver statements at the Human Rights Council (HRC) and in the context of other UN human rights mechanisms. On the margins of UN Human Rights Council sessions CIVICUS organised side events with the participation of activists from Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Africa, Cambodia, Zimbabwe and Philippines. We also facilitated our members to raise civic space issues directly at the Council through formal statements (Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Venezuela, etc.) and through briefings (e.g., Myanmar).

CIVICUS added value in the UN Geneva system can be found in its connection and everyday work with a broad network of activists, human rights defenders and fellow CSOs, many of which are part of Human Rights Commission Network. For example, through our Freedom of Peaceful Assembly stream, we enabled actions of a diverse group of activists. Six groups contributed to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association analysis of accountability for violations to FoPA. Innovation for Change South Asia Hub, and Global Study on the Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Civil Society and Civic Space (Global Study) ecosystem actors contributed to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights while countering terrorism on her analysis of the impact of counter-terrorism measures on human rights and historically marginalised groups.



CIVICUS also provided advocacy, technical, and research assistance for 22 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) submissions to the HRC. Through the UPR process, each UN Member State periodically undergoes a peer review of its human rights record. CIVICUS works with civil society in the respective countries undergoing review to build coalitions to submit comments to be included and then monitor their countries' progress against commitments. Members express gratitude at having access to elite spaces, decision makers and understanding how they can better leverage the international bodies for their work in their communities.



**HIGHLIGHT:** Arbitrary detention of human rights defenders, peaceful protesters and media workers included for the first time in UN Resolution

For the first time, the UNHRC resolution on Arbitrary Detention included a new paragraph on human rights defenders, peaceful protesters and media workers. During informal negotiations on the resolution, CIVICUS sought inclusion of “peaceful protesters” in the list of actors that states must protect from arbitrary detention. Full text is on the right.



*“To give full effect to the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and ensure that human rights defenders, peaceful protesters, journalists and other media workers are not deprived of their liberty as a result of their activities, recognizing their role in safeguarding the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and in this regard strongly urges the release of all persons detained or imprisoned in violation of the obligations and commitments of States under international human rights law for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including in relation to cooperation with the United Nations or other international mechanisms in the area of human rights;”*



## NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ADVOCACY

CIVICUS's UN advocacy is linked to its national and regional advocacy. For example, we work within Algeria with civic society and linked them to Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. At regional level, we continue to work with coalitions of civil society of organisations to respond to civic space restrictions in Asia, Latin America and Africa. For example, we previously contributed to "The Guidelines on Freedom of Association and Assembly" and are now working with partners and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to raise awareness and use of the guidelines with local authorities. Below are a few examples of our national advocacy.



### Algeria - Increased solidarity was noted amongst Algeria's CSOs

Due to increased restrictions on civil society, divisions and high levels of mistrust existed amongst the CSOs in Algeria to the extent many could not even be in the same space with each other. Over the last several months we helped bridged these divides by coordinating a series of online events with 100+ CSOs. Many are now working together and are convening on their own without our support.

*" In the face of adversity, the consultations and capacity enhancement sessions led by CIVICUS became a beacon of unity for Algerian HRDs. Despite the confines of restrictions, these gatherings roared with the passion of a thousand voices, proving that no obstacle can stifle the spirit of human rights. Together, they ignited a flame of collaboration, reminding us all that even in the digital realm, the strength of solidarity knows no bounds."*

*- Executive Director of a Human Rights organisation in Algeria*



## ESWATINI – Supporting pro-democracy activists

The government continued brutal retaliatory tactics against pro-democratic activists including the assassination of Eswatini human rights defender Thulani Maseko. CIVICUS mobilized over 390 organizations working at national and regional level to call for an independent investigation into his murder. CIVICUS also supports detained protesters with funding and by linking them to the African Commission and UN Special Rapporteurs.



## GUATEMALA – Congress reversed restrictive bill

In 2022, the Guatemalan Congress passed Bill 5272 known as the Law for the Protection of Life and the Family as Decree. This action increased penalties for abortion and banned same-sex marriage and the teaching of sexual diversity in schools. Protests began and mobilisation by local partners with CIVICUS raised the cost the government would pay if it validated the congressional decision. Congress reacted by reversing and shelving the law.

## ADVOCACY LINKS TO OTHER OBJECTIVES

Our advocacy works together with #StandAsMyWitness campaign, Vuka! Coalition for Civic Action, Consortium for Human Rights and Media Development in Sub-Saharan Africa (CHARM), Defender and Diplomats Dialogues and the Crisis Response Fund which are elaborated on in the following objectives of building counter power with the most affected groups and their movements and contributing to stronger emergency and sustained support ecosystems for activists and organisations at risk.

**STAND AS MY  
WITNESS**

CHARMAFRICA





**LEARNING QUESTION:** What aspects of our advocacy support are contributing the most to national/local members' and allies' effectiveness in achieving their goals?

### **Sustained advocacy on civic space restrictions in Zambia achieved through the creation of district caucuses of civil society organisations**

In Zambia, the Governance, Elections, and Advocacy Research Services (GEARS) organisation developed District Civil Society Organisation Caucus Groups and media engagement forums in the cities of Kabwe, Kafue, and Lusaka. These groups provided sustained advocacy on civic space restrictions in Zambia, particularly working on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2019, the Non-Governmental Organisation (Amendment) Bill, 2020, and on the repeal of the Public Order Act. Through concerted efforts, advocacy and lobbying, the amendment did not take place and the status quo was maintained. The amendment would have posed difficult circumstances for CSOs' operations. Also, through sustained advocacy, the NGO Act and Public Order Act were amended, the new Bills are already in place for final debate in the national assembly.

Prior to the establishment of these district forums, the political climate in Zambia did not encourage the effective engagement of all stakeholders in the problems pertaining to the governance of their country. The development of the district platforms boosted effective contact with politicians and enabled communities to mobilise, influence, and confront issues pertaining to civic space, including the need for a constitutional stay.

CHARM contributed through financial support to the project "Democracy Building and Citizens' Engagement on Shrinking Civic Space ahead of the 2021 General Elections in Zambia." The purpose of the project was to encourage the effective participation of citizens in governance, as well as the mobilisation and training of local communities, the formation of advocacy district networks, and the engagement of the media to strengthen democratic institutions.





**WHAT WE DID:** Forged alliances with groups dually affected by structural discrimination and restricted civic space.

## BY THE NUMBERS

- 15 Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) on the #StandAsMyWitness Campaign Released
- Four thematic research publications on most affected groups published.



CIVICUS has made traditionally excluded groups a focus of their new strategic plan 2022 - 2027. We have several learnings from co-design initiatives from our previous strategic period in working with such groups, specifically CIVICUS's work on Youth. CIVICUS's thematic research pieces, op-eds and blogs often document and highlight work and challenges by LGBTQI+, youth, Indigenous Peoples, also providing a knowledge base for further action.

CIVICUS also supports spaces that coordinate solidarity actions with formal and non-formal movements through our advocacy work, Online Community and the Vuka! Coalition for Civic Action. In addition, our advocacy team has hosted a series of events with Indigenous Peoples to strengthen solidarity with others HRDs, awareness of rights around FoPA and organize effectively around the upcoming Climate Change Conference (COP28).

In Johannesburg, South Africa, we brought together over 20 network and community leaders from Asia, Latin America and Africa. A key outcome of the meeting was an agreement on tactics for influencing and solidarity in a range of contexts. This builds on our previous work on advancing climate justice through increased recognition and protection of land and environmental defenders for [COP27](#). Our key initiative for building counter power with most affected groups and their movements is the #StandAsMyWitness campaign.





## THE RIGHT TO PROTEST:

The need for an intersectional and transfeminist approach

One example of our thematic research addressing those most affected includes the CIVICUS's Innovation for Change worked with the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) in Argentina to publish, "The right to protest: the need for an intersectional and transfeminist approach." This research found both women and transgender people are more likely to experience a violation of Freedom of Peaceful Assembly (FoPA) compared to cis males. Furthermore, the report showed that Black women and Indigenous women in Latin America are more exposed to violence while protesting than their white counterparts. Prior to the research, CIVICUS knew there was a need to approach FoPA with both an intersectionality and transfeminist approach.

However, the report's case studies documented examples across Latin America of the impact of the absence of an intersectional approach when dealing with abuses and protection of protesters. Based on this research, CIVICUS is using its Programme Quality and Innovation framework to address the depth of impact of race, gender, sexual orientation, indigeneity, class and other intersectionalities, especially in its support of those most affected exercising their right to FoPA. This is part of the larger work embedding outcomes and learning related to new models of organising, collaboration and resourcing from the Innovation for Change initiative across CIVICUS.



**the right  
to protest**

the need for an  
intersectional and  
transfeminist approach







## Challenging Barriers: Investigating Civic Space Limitations on LGBTQI+ Rights in Africa

This paper therefore also builds on research findings from CIVICUS’s People Power under Attack 2022 report which found that LGBTQI+ people were the group most involved in civic space incidents in the Africa South of the Sahara region that year.



## Youth Trends in Activism

For years, CIVICUS’s research has found youth to be powerful change agents. Led by the 2022-23 CIVICUS Youth Action Team (YAT), this research maps youth-led activism and youth participation in intergenerational social movements. After launching their brief, “Youth Trends in Activism,” CIVICUS’s Youth Action Team (YAT) contributed to conversations on resourcing youth-led consultations. And upon request from the Global Youth Movement, YAT designed a mentoring programme for their new Youth Accelerator initiative.



## Youth Action Lab Playbook

This year, CIVICUS Youth published the Youth Action Lab Playbook for funders and intermediaries on how to include youth and other non-formal movements. It uses the experience and lessons learned during the Youth Action Lab pilot project 2019 - 2022. To further share these learnings, they created learning circles with eleven members of peer organisations such as Restless Development, WINGS, Save the Children, Porticus, LGBTQI+ Youth Fund, Fenomenal Funds and The Movement Trust to discuss practices to foster meaningful inclusion with youth and non-traditional civil society organisations.





## GROWING IMPACT: #StandAsMyWitness Campaign

### Profile-raising advocacy for the release of prisoners of conscience

CIVICUS continued its targeted advocacy for releasing arbitrarily imprisoned Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) through the #StandAsMyWitness (#SAMW) campaign, first launched on Nelson Mandela Day in 2020. #SAMW builds partnerships and amplifies voices calling for the release of unjustly imprisoned civil society activists. This approach has resulted in the release of 15 HRDs this past year, and we received personal letters thanking us for our work.

However, campaigns are not over with the HRD release, such as with the eight Guapinol River defenders in Honduras that we reported on last year. In January of this year, Aly Domínguez and Jairo Bonilla were shot dead in broad daylight. In response, more than 100 human rights organisations including CIVICUS called for compliance with international obligations to guarantee access to justice and measures of non-repetition.

This year also created interactive chronology of HRD Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja. Bahraini human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is a prominent member of Bahraini civil society and well-known human rights activist in the gulf. Since 1980,

Abdulhadi and his family have faced systematic harassment and intimidation from the government of Bahrain for his human rights work. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is currently serving a life sentence. Working with his family, this timeline includes personal, advocacy and persecution events.

FrontLineDefenders also featured this timeline on their webpage calling for solidarity on his behalf. #SAMW obtains success through ongoing, sustained and collaborative action. The campaign works closely with family members, colleagues and lawyers of the profiled HRDs, who keep the campaign team updated with relevant dates, events and advocacy opportunities. Every month we identify entry points at national level and engage in solidarity with the civil society community and decision makers calling for their release. We hold an annual convening and campaign on 18 July – Nelson Mandela Day to shed light on all HRDs profiled in the campaign.

Over the last few months HRDs from Nicaragua, Philippines, India and Burundi have been released thanks to advocacy efforts from the campaign and solidarity with civil society. We continue to support those released by linking them up with organisations that provide relocation and psychosocial support as well as other resources.



**Medardo Mairena and Pedro Mena**  
Nicaragua



**María Esperanza Sánchez García**  
Nicaragua



**Professor Muhammad Ismail**  
Pakistan





## GROWING IMPACT: #StandAsMyWitness Campaign

Ten human rights defenders in the Philippines accused of perjury were acquitted by a local court. Prior to the hearing and verdict, CIVICUS together with its member Karapatan and other human rights organisations issued public statement to the media, an open letter to the relevant diplomatic missions in the Philippines, and a public campaign on Twitter to reach a wider audience. CIVICUS also featured the case in the joint UPR report for the Philippines 4th cycle together with Karapatan. We received a letter of gratitude from the human rights defenders sent by Cristina Palabay of Karapatan.

CIVICUS advocated for the release of detained human rights defender Germain Nkina in Burundi who was sentenced to five years in prison in 2021 and accused of collaborating with armed groups. We shared details of his arrest and detention with the UN Special Rapporteur for HRDs Mary Lawlor and together with regional groups continued to advocate for his release. The Supreme Court later quashed the sentence and ordered that Germain be released.

Even before the #SAMW campaign began, CIVICUS has been working to highlight the arbitrary imprisonment of Pakistani civil society activist Professor Muhammad Ismail and his wife. In February this year, they were acquitted in the terrorism, sedition and criminal conspiracy case by the Peshawar Anti-Terrorism Court.

We have also partnered with Global Citizen, using their networks and global reach to engage citizens in different countries to take actions for HRDs detained and call for their release.

- Ahmed Mansoor, United Arab Emirates HRD: +34,000 actions
- Chow Hang-tung, Hong Kong pro-democracy activist: +29,000 actions
- Virginia Laparra and Claudia Gonzalez, Guatemalan human rights lawyers: +4,000 actions
- Yorov Burzurmehr, Tajikistan HRD: +11,000 actions



## CIVICUS SUPPORTED NETWORKS FOR BUILDING COUNTER POWER

In addition to its research, its #SAMW campaign, CIVICUS supports several networks around the world.



### Vuka! Coalition for Civil Society

Another space for supporting mobilisation for change supported by CIVICUS is the Vuka! Coalition for Civil Society of over 250 civil society groups to regain civic space. Between July and November 2022, Vuka! released a final report and next steps on “Dialogue on corporate accountability and cooperation to protect and promote civic space”, held a dialogue nurturing civil society well-being, released an analysis of civil society needs from the Vuka! Right to Protest survey identifying needs such as water and safe space for creation of banners to exercise FoPA rights. Vuka! held consultations with the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs working on a thematic report on issues related to migration, refugees and asylum and the realisation of the guidelines for lawyers in support of peaceful assemblies were held for Europe, Central Asia, MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa regions. Over 40 organisations identified common experiences, assessed threats and opportunities and explored prevention and protection measures. The Vuka! Rapid Response team had coordination calls for El Salvador, Myanmar, Russia, Ethiopia and Tanzania.

### Global Resource Hub Partners

Forum Asia, Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), EuroMed rights, and Urgent Action Fund – Africa.

### Global Resource Hubs

Six regional Global Resource Hub (GRH) partners exchanged tools and strategies and built solutions and solidarity with others around FoPA. Extensive consultation with partners and networks yielded an unexpected gap in FoPA – prevention, particularly the prevention of FoPA violations against vulnerable groups. However, the consultations also yielded 65 solutions to FoPA's most pressing prevention challenges such as encouraging use of the arts and creative expression for raising awareness and developing resources for holistic safety of protestors. In addition, the consultations found that alliances and coalitions for FoPA specifically are quite weak and usually focused on specific causes such as women's rights or climate change. Therefore, GRH partners will provide a link from local to regional - a critical gap identified in a prevention approach to FoPA violations in three thematic areas: innovative tools and tactics, building alliances and counterpower, and financial and non-financial resourcing.



## Consortium for Human Rights and Media Development in Sub-Saharan Africa (CHARM)

*CHARM's seven partners work collectively to protect democratic space and build resilience among civil society and independent media. CHARM focuses its work on sub-Saharan African countries where civic freedoms are obstructed. However, there is still space to speak out, organise and act, including pockets of resistance that can be supported to strengthen human rights and democratic freedoms.*

*From October 2019 to June 2023, CIVICUS was a member and coordinated CHARM. While CIVICUS continues to be an implementing partner, the coordination function transitioned to DefendDefenders in June 2023.*



With the generous support of



### CHARM project support ignites Climate Resilience and Empowerment

In Uganda, the CHARM project through its local partner Action for Youth Development (ACOYDE) has demonstrated the transformative power of community-based initiatives, turning challenges into opportunities for growth and positive change. This follows the support and sustained training conducted under the CHARM project. Their work in the grassroots community is a shining example of how targeted interventions can empower individuals and communities to create a more sustainable and equitable world.

In Uganda, the devastating effects of climate change were becoming increasingly evident, disproportionately impacting women who, despite being breadwinners in most rural families, had limited access to

resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making structures, technology, training, and extension services. Recognising the urgent need for change, CHARM provided financial support to ACOYED, a local organisation dedicated to supporting the grassroots community, through sub-grant funds. With a focus on youth and women empowerment, ACOYDE implemented various CHARM-supported programmes aimed at strengthening economic independence, promoting gender equality and conserving the environment.

One of their most impactful initiatives was the creation of climate justice clubs in schools, where students learned about water conservation, sustainable agriculture and the importance of reducing waste. This hands-on approach empowered young people to become climate change activists by planting trees and using eco-friendly alternatives to reduce pollution in their communities.



## LEARNING QUESTION: How do we effectively imbed successful best practices for catalysing joint action for mutual solidarity and collective impact?

CIVICUS envisioned the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be a galvanising moment for the CIVICUS alliance. We committed to co-designing and activating our networks and campaigning engagements. To catalyse such joint action for mutual solidarity and collective impact, we needed additional time to integrate the learnings from the Global Resource Hubs, select the partners and co-design the campaign. The result was the WeRise! Campaign to strengthen civil society vigilance to act locally and globally to uphold, protect and improve the framework of internationally protected FoPA rights.

The campaign's cohort of 16 members from 11 countries were carefully selected ensuring alignment with organisational mandates, campaign goals and geographic representation of areas where FoPA has been threatened or violated in the recent past. WeRise! partners are designing campaigns for changes in national laws and policies related to FoPA relevant to their own contexts. Going forward, we plan to support WeRise! partners with financial and non-financial resources to focus on changes to policy at the national level and link them to the Global Resource Hub (GRH) partners.

GRH partners will be supported financially for both the coordination and scaling up of FoPA solutions. By shifting programmatic and financial funds to provide this national to regional link, we aim to increase trust among national and regional actors for FoPA. Through these connections, we intend to establish a robust network proactively rather than in reaction to future FoPA violations. This alignment, along with the link to the GRH partners, provides a sustainable element to the campaign, which is critical for success.



Illustrator: Laura Díez Estrada



**WHAT WE DID:** We strengthened activists and civil society organisations to promote human rights agendas in restrictive environments and make civic space resourcing more equitable and effective.

## BY THE NUMBERS

- +17 consultations and dialogues engaging +350 grassroots activists calling for greater access to resources, partnerships, equitable relationships with donors and allies.
- 121 subgrants
- 3.6 million USD subgrants
- +300 human rights defenders and members of the diplomatic community brought together in Defender and Diplomats Dialogues.
- 3 Resource finders enhancing access to resources for smaller, less formal groups.



## TOP 10 GOOD PRACTICES

that grassroots activists appreciate and need from donors and allies

- 1 Promoting close collaboration and partnership in every phase of the grant journey.
- 2 Assigning funds to cover salaries and expenses related to skill building and well-being.
- 3 Offering tools and frameworks to help simplify grant management and reporting.
- 4 Providing networking opportunities to connect with new potential donors and allies.
- 5 Listening to local communities, trusting them and following their lead.
- 6 Investing directly in grassroots activists, groups and movements.
- 7 Providing timely funding, resources and support.
- 8 Cultivating quality relationships with grantees that last beyond the grant.
- 9 Understanding and respecting the local contexts.
- 10 Maintaining open communication channels to share opinions and concerns.





## ENABLING CIVIL SOCIETY IN RESTRICTIVE CONTEXTS

### Strengthening Central America Civil Society Initiative

From Dec 2019 until Nov 2022, the Strengthening Central America Civil Society initiative focused on 22 civil society organisations from four countries El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, which all have restricted civic space. With the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Costa Rica and its strategic alliances, the initiative was able to help organisations to promote human rights through an online advocacy course, seven short films, 20 workshops to 400 civil society organisations, and 147,000USD in grants for equipment and project implementation, and EXPLORADOR a publication providing organisations with financial and non-financial resources.



These restrictions on civic space are not uniform: they target specific groups that mobilize around causes that are often considered political or threatening to powerful interests, including human rights, freedom of expression, the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the environment, labour rights, the rights of LGBTQI+ people and women, and sexual and reproductive rights. Hence, the protagonists of this initiative are feminist, LGBTQI+, and specifically trans organizations and activists, farmers, workers, students and journalists.

### Digital Democracy Initiative

The new Digital Democracy Initiative Continues the work of enabling civil society in restrictive contexts. The initiative forwards our digital expression of civic activism strategy by strengthening the resourcing ecosystems for improved use of digital technology among local civil society in restrictive contexts. The initiative builds upon our past work to better understand the digital realities of the CIVICUS membership such as their struggle to access reliable internet and is supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.







## CIVIL SOCIETY RESOURCING



. Illustrator: Laura Díez Estrada

### GRASSROOTS SOLIDARITY REVOLUTION CAMPAIGN

Another aspect to our ecosystem strengthening support included the Grassroots Solidarity Revolution campaign. The campaign was co-created with and for grassroots activists to centre the needs, visions, voices, stories, and demands of grassroots activists and groups on how donors, INGOs, and other key actors can become (better) allies and offer more relevant resources to grassroots activism. The campaign calls for an overhaul in relationships, mindsets, narratives, and solidarity practices supporting grassroots activism. It humanised grassroots groups and activist and promoted more trust-based relationships and approaches through awareness-raising content on social media but also through unusual dialogue spaces and conversations amongst activists and with donors/allies.

This year, the campaign held Jam Sessions and supported the Grassroots Solidarity Revolution Campaign videos spoken about under the strengthening public discourse objective. In addition, the campaign also hosted Countering toxic narratives about grassroots activists at the PARTOS Innovation Festival. We released a publication with five key asks to donors from grassroots groups based on insights gathered from experiences of over 140 respondents.

And following 2019 research on the same topic, we further deepened our analyses and understanding of the resourcing landscape for Civil Society in Latin America, looking this time at the barriers and costs experienced by the sector in the region when seeking grants, especially smaller, less formal, and recently established groups in Latin America, as well as the inequities and inefficiencies produced in the ecosystem by the donors' grant-making processes.



**LEARNING QUESTION:** Where have we evidenced how support offerings have resulted in impact, and how can we use this knowledge to determine the most effective approaches and scale our work and to improve the support ecosystem for activists and organisations at risk?

## KNOWLEDGE GENERATION SHIFTING POLICIES AND RESOURCING APPROACHES

Funded by Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) from 2018 – 2023, Strengthening 21<sup>st</sup> Century Citizen Action has encompassed several initiatives including Youth Action Lab, Grassroots Solidarity Revolution, and support in CIVICUS Solidarity Fund Learning Journey and the co-creation of the emergency response referrals and coordination mechanism (Building Responses Together).

Our commitment to creating knowledge was a common thread across all work. Outputs include products offering compelling evidence, stories and know how to attract attention, encourage dialogue and debates, and inform agenda setting approaches and substantiate demands and priorities by the program and its direct stakeholders. Nine key publications produced between 2018 and 2023 contributed to nearly 60 documented requests for advice.

This led to both recognition and change in approaches to supporting and funding grassroots movements and youth. In particular, CIVICUS work helped shift the compensation policies and resourcing approaches of other organisations such as Global Fund for Children and UK Lottery Fund. Several of these initiatives were referenced as examples of good practice in the report [“Dollars and Dissent: Donor Support for Grassroot Organisation and Nonviolent Movements”](#) published by the International Center for Non-violent Conflict.





## SOLIDARITY MECHANISMS

CIVICUS supports a range of financial and non-financial mechanisms to support the ecosystem to sustain civil society.

### CRISIS RESPONSE FUND

#### Crisis Response Fund

Offered by CIVICUS as part of the Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund since 2011, the Crisis Response Fund provides urgent funding to civil society actors facing urgent threats to freedom of assembly and association (FOAA) to conduct advocacy activities to counter these civic space restrictions. This year 34 organisations in 33 countries were awarded grants advocacy and resilience grants totalling 466,579 USD. The organisations used the funds to build counter narratives responding to smear campaigns against civil society, hold workshops and lobbying policymakers and key actors to amend restrictive laws governing FoAA. Our support was not only financial; we also supported partners by coordinating meetings with embassies, our donor governments and UN special mandates.

We were intentional about adopting a feminist intersectional approach in our grant making by fostering connections with the most impacted in crisis moments i.e indigenous and traditionally marginalized groups.

We supported a number of feminist and WHRDs collectives and organizing on the multilayered restrictions WHRDs and women face as a result of systemic and institutionalized patriarchy. In Lesotho, we supported an initiative centered around women's experiences in the textile industry due to Lesotho's Labour Code Order No.24 of 1992, particularly section 85 (1) (2)(iv), which has in effect limits the workers freedom of association. In South Africa, we supported work countering legislation to restrict rights to FoAA and access to funding for CSOs at the nexus of thinking through technologies of resistance for WHRDs in the face of mounting cyber-attacks. The partner also hosted a side event on the margins of Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 67<sup>th</sup> session on physical and digital protection in line with this year's CSW theme and developed a shadow on the situation of WHRDs in SA.





## Target Groups for Rapid Response Donor Finder

-  Activists or groups focused on sexual and reproductive rights
-  Artists and artists
-  Climate activists
-  Community leaders and organisers
-  Defenders of indigenous people's rights
-  Defenders of the rights of migrants and/or refugees
-  Disability rights groups, activists/ people/defenders with disabilities
-  Environmental human rights defenders
-  Ethnic, religious or other minority groups
-  Trade unions
-  Victims/survivors of human rights violations or abuses and their relatives
-  Writers and bloggers
-  Women human rights defenders
-  Youth-led groups and youth activists

Complete target group list [here](#).

## Building Responses Together (BRT)

A CIVICUS-led co-design in 2019 led to the Building Responses Together collective to provide referrals and coordination of rapid response mechanisms across 10 organisations and coalitions with the goal to enhance the responsiveness, reach and support available. It does so by facilitating secure partner verification, referring partners to the most appropriate mechanism to address immediate threats, supporting partners with match funding for impactful work that requires additional resources and avoiding duplication and double funding.

Although now being coordinated by Global Focus, CIVICUS's ongoing participation in the collective primarily through the Crisis Response Fund allowed CIVICUS to safely refer partners to other donors who were best placed to support them. Our work with the BRT enabled us to facilitate safe and trust-based information sharing with the view to enhance both short-term responses as well as grantees' resilience & sustainability in the medium- and longer-terms.



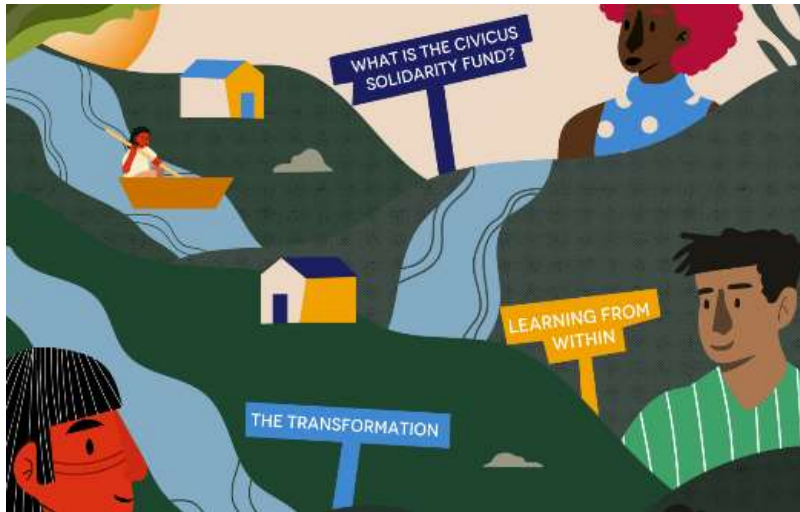
## Donor Finder & Rapid Response Donor Finder

An updated and expanded edition of the Donor Finder was published enhancing access to resources for smaller, less formal groups. It has been updated to contain a list of progressive donors offering funding and non-financial resources to civil society, including informal groups and individual activists.

The Donor Finder attracts some of the most attention and receives high praise from its users. An online event about it attracted 721 registrations, 234 unique attendees and scored 86 Net Promoter Score widely interpreted to excellent on the -100 to 100 scale. The recent Donor Finder edition has been downloaded 1643 times in its first four months.

Additionally, the Rapid Response Donor Finder – curated together with the Building Responses Together network – was released as a new and separate directory listing rapid response mechanisms that issue timely support for activists, civil society organisations and informal civil society groups to respond to attacks, sudden emergencies, crises, or advocacy opportunities and to avoid and mitigate threats. It has been downloaded 770 times in its first two months.





## CIVICUS Solidarity Fund

Each year the Solidarity Fund along with the Membership Advisor Group, distributes CIVICUS membership fees. This year it funded seven grantees in November 2022. This member-funded, member-selected fund earned recognition for its journey in reducing barriers and extractive practices in its application process. For example, Conducive Space's Learning Note publication "Innovative Practices: Changing the international system to better enable local leadership", which recognised the fund as an innovative practice and invited us to conduct a training for Danish INGOs on how to make their funding practices more inclusive and participatory. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development listed the fund as an example of lessening administrative and financial burdens in its toolkit for implementing Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance.

## Defender & Diplomats Dialogues

The dialogues are locally organised, recurring events that enable embassy representatives to interact on an ongoing basis with groups working to defend human rights and civic space. They provide space for stakeholders to assess and respond to civic space and human rights developments in local contexts. CIVICUS and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs have coordinated dialogues since 2020. This year's dialogues were held in nine countries bringing +300 human rights defenders and members of the diplomatic community together. In Mozambique, human rights defenders enhanced their understanding on ways in which they could approach diplomatic missions for support and partnerships when civic space restrictions happen. In Benin diplomats and diplomatic missions identified advocacy strategies to address restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. In South Africa, human rights defenders working with grassroots communities were introduced to diplomats who are now able to engage with them bilaterally, provide small grants, protection and diplomatic support after relationships were built during the initial dialogue hosted by CIVICUS. In both Mozambique and Benin, dialogues were continued between the embassies and human rights defenders demonstrating the relevance of creating these spaces.

## Rebuilding for Good

The Rebuilding for Good recommendations advocated for meaningful support during the COVID-19 crisis and recovery, discussing and exploring ways to advance the priorities and ideas collated by CIVICUS and allies. In November 2022, AGNA and Youth members convened to come up with a common vision canvas and overarching narrative to complement these recommendations with an inspiring narrative supporting a vision for civil society fit for the 21st century.





## CIVICUS'S GROWING IMPACT: Sustained member advocacy for stronger ecosystems

In March 2023, a representation of CIVICUS grassroots members had the opportunity to engage directly with senior staff of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of USAID's consultation to revise a new "Local Leadership" indicator they were planning to introduce in their metrics framework.

This effort is still related to the follow-up of the open letter that CIVICUS, the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) & other allies sent to USAID Administrator Power alongside 1289 southern civil society signatories calling for a meaningful operationalization of the new USAID localisation commitments.

Another element directly following up from that advocacy letter was the organization of five meetings engaging over 100 participants representing diverse CIVICUS members and key stakeholders (including USAID and various other donors) to sense-check a possible new initiative that could help address some of the asks identified in the joint letter, and that informed the joint CIVICUS/NEAR initiative "Local Leadership Labs" which started in April 2023 thanks to the financial support from the Hilton Foundation.



Member advocacy from open letter to USAID to consultations to new financial support from Hilton Foundation for Locally-Led Development.



Main feedback gathered by CIVICUS during five consultation meetings with 100 participants to discuss a proposal for Locally-Led Development.





*CIVICUS was established in 1993 and has proudly been headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa since 2002. CIVICUS hubs in New York and Geneva connect CIVICUS and its alliance to key UN bodies. CIVICUS has +70 staff with half based in South Africa and the other half based in +20 countries.*

A key organisational priority this year has been the transition to our new Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027. Our strategy implementation workplan included elements on aligning ways of working, how we track our contribution to change and how we engage our alliance in the delivery of our strategy. Key structural and programmatic changes are as follows:

Based on a Ways of Working analysis, we are deepening our programmatic focus through three new cross-cutting workstreams: Evidence & Engagement, Advocacy & Solidarity Action, and Innovation & Sustainability – each one will be led by a Chief Officer, increasing the Senior Leadership Team from four to five people. In response to changes in programme priorities and project funding cycles we transitioned our Capacity Development and Innovation for Change teams. We also saw the approval of two new core teams, namely Resource Mobilisation and Partnerships and Innovation and Quality Management, as well as a new Media Lead, increasing our core capacity to deliver our strategy.



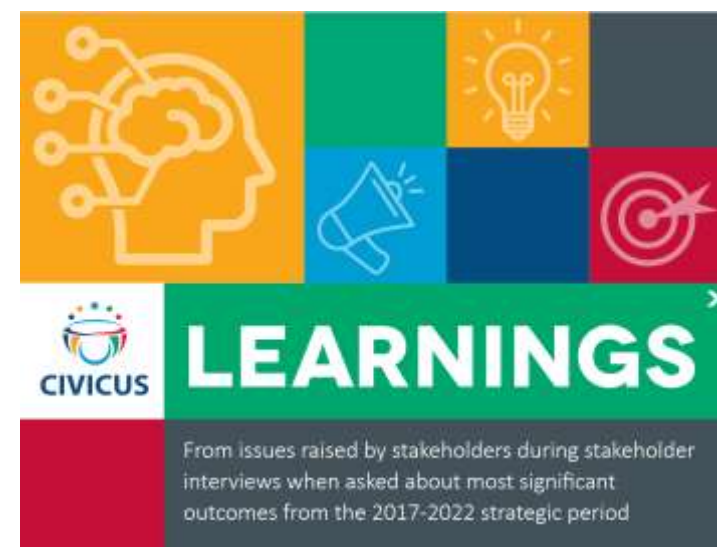
CIVICUS staff in South Africa for all staff retreat in 2023.

## NEW PROJECTS

CIVICUS also initiated two new projects the Digital Democracy Initiative (DDI) and Local Leadership Labs (LLL). DDI will be driven by partners to strengthen financial and non-financial support infrastructure for civil society in the global south to safely harness digital technologies in pursuit of greater civic and democratic freedoms. LLL is building on our civil society resourcing programme by convening inclusive, context-appropriate spaces in different geographies for local civil society groups - especially from marginalised communities - to engage with governments, donors and other key allies and enablers.

## EMBEDDED LEARNINGS

This year we also conducted a review of CIVICUS's work over the 2017 - 2022 strategic period for an assessment of its most significant outcomes. The review was undertaken through a two-stage process which included an in-depth, external review of key strategic documents and fifty interviews with selected CIVICUS staff, alliance members and external partners to corroborate the information collected and assess the most impactful stories. In addition to a range of specific examples of impact, the review also offered specific suggestions for how the findings that emerged can be integrated into the implementation of our current strategic plan.





## PEOPLE AND ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES

Since 2021, CIVICUS has been implementing its racial justice action plan, which includes a new learning and development (L&D) framework as well as furthering our diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and accountability practices. The newly launched L&D framework incorporates concepts and leadership practices that foster a culture of a commonly shared identity and advances the practice of distributed leadership. The first phase of its roll out focused on familiarising staff with the framework's learning-oriented and employee-directed performance management approach, which informed an initial round of growth-focused goal setting.

The racial justice action plan also included revising our internship guidelines to improve DEI. Changes we have implemented included standardising compensation and working more closely internally across teams to recruit university graduates from the Global South. For this reporting period, these changes resulted in hiring 73% of interns from the Global South, 59% Black Africans and 40% South Africans.

CIVICUS joined Fair Share in 2019, which calls on civil society to increase parity in leadership. This year, CIVICUS earned the top spot in the index by showing 77% of positions of leadership are held by women, which is proportionate to the 77% of its female workforce.

Another notable milestone in this reporting period was our global staff retreat, connecting us in person for the first time since 2019. The retreat focused on team building and strengthening a collective understanding of our new strategy by creating inclusive, safe spaces for dialogue and joint solution ideas. We also took this opportunity to

hold a collective exercise to strengthen communication and collaboration across the three management and leadership forums. Several staff conversations and feedback loops helped us collectively prioritise processes that will enable greater convergence across levels.

CIVICUS remains an active Accountable Now member, and every year CIVICUS reports on its internal and external accountability practices. For more information about our ongoing journey to enhance our organisational accountability please refer to our latest reports on the Accountable Now website.



**Accountable Now**

CIVICUS's Accountable Now Report

## SYSTEMS, LEARNING AND IMPACT

We continue to invest in resilient systems and processes encompassing financial, security and knowledge management as well as their alignment to our new strategic plan. We made progress towards real-time, collaborative planning and implementation through a new reporting platform dashboard, PowerBI . Through PowerBI reports, budget holders have access to more timely data on spend for better planning. In addition, budget holders provided activity-based budgets rather than spend-category budgets, providing a foundation for further collaboration. We strengthened our data security by drafting a new data retention policy and maintaining full multi-factor authorisation compliance on our platforms, reducing vulnerabilities and providing external stakeholders with confidence about their safety on our platforms. One complete year on Contract Works - the new contract management system - reduced delays in signing agreements and increased efficiency during audits. New Smartsheet dashboards such as event-specific travel dashboards for large meetings have meant increased visibility in our planning processes.

We developed and began implementing our new programme, quality and innovation (PQI) framework and aligned our monitoring and evaluation with our new strategy. The process-based PQI framework is bespoke to CIVICUS, building on organisational learnings and providing for improved conceptualisation, co-creation and planning to deliver large cross-organisational projects such as the new Digital Democracy Initiative and WeRise! Campaign. The board approved our integrated results framework in December 2022 along with new monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning processes. These changes are strengthening our outcomes reporting, specifically improving articulation of our contribution to change and its relevance to our stakeholders. In addition, we automated our quantitative indicators allowing more time to focus on qualitative content to understand our collective story and validate outcomes with our stakeholders. Outcomes are now being shared internally during our monthly outcome calls with staff as we prepare them to share externally. These outcome calls, amongst specific programmatic brown bags, support our ongoing learning as well as being more formally incorporated into planning cycles.



Integrated Results Framework



Annual Report 2021 - 2022



Annual Plan Narrative  
2023 - 2024

## ALLIANCE ENGAGEMENT

*CIVICUS is a growing global alliance of +15,000 members in 189 countries dedicated to protecting and defending civic and democratic space. We have an explicit focus on working with and for groups affected by the combined impact of civic space restrictions and structural forms of discrimination.*

The alliance is composed of members, the board, the secretariat, donors, and its key network groups: The Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA) and Youth Action Team (YAT). It also includes coalitions led by CIVICUS such as Vuka! Coalition for Civic Action and networks incubated within CIVICUS to become independent such as the Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Freedoms and Media Development (CHARM) in Africa and Innovation for Change Global Hubs. This year, with in-person events resumed, we were able to further strengthen these relationships through the board engagements with AGNA and YAT representatives during the November and May board meetings.

The CIVICUS membership database grew by 17% from 13,419 last year to 15,656 this year. Membership numbers tend to grow around board elections and development opportunities such as training and funding offerings. Regionally, growth was equally distributed across the Africa, Americas, Asia and Oceania regions. Only Europe had a lower growth rate at 8%. However, CIVICUS does not have a membership growth strategy, and the approach for this strategic period is about moving members from transactional development orientated relationships to a more solidarity-based engagement model. This means that connections within the membership are decentralised and stronger within the alliance, making the alliance work less about development opportunities and more about collective action. For example, members are co-designing the WeRise! and Local Leadership Labs initiatives.



**10,028**  
INDIVIDUALS



**218**  
VOTING  
MEMBERS



**15,385**  
ASSOCIATE  
MEMBERS



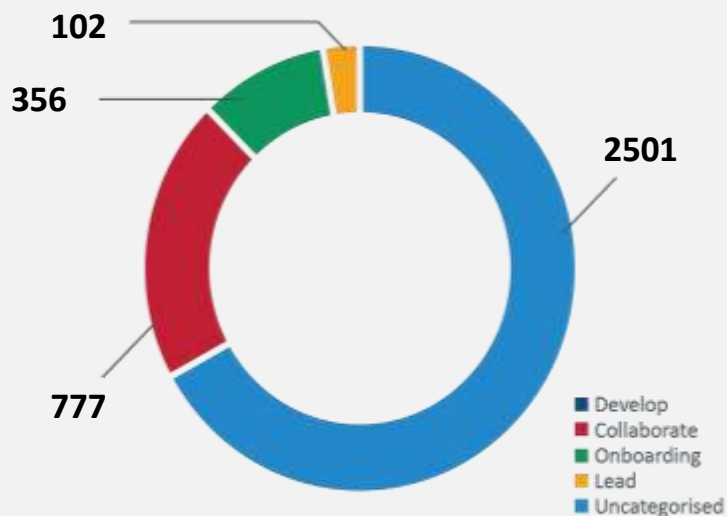
**5,627**  
ORGANISATIONS



**189**  
COUNTRIES



To assess impact and understand how the alliance behaves, we have adopted an engagement framework, fully aligned with CIVICUS’s strategy. Through the framework we measure engagement across various channels and initiatives, including the CIVICUS Online Community, in person events, online workshops and other engagements. Each engagement is categorised into one of the four stages of the framework: onboarding, develop, collaborate or lead. Below is the baseline for 2022 – 2023. We expect to see an increase in the collaboration and leading categories by the end of the strategic period in 2026 - 2027.



## MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT MONTH

In November-December 2022 we held the first edition of the membership engagement month leveraging annual governance, programme and network activities for a consolidated window of strategic engagement. Events and exchanges were coordinated through CIVICUS’s Online Community, which was launched in 2021 and enables secure, real-time, peer-to-peer interactions across a verified group of members.

The hybrid CIVICUS Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place on 30 November 2022. 200 members attended the hybrid meeting, which was similar to 2020 but a decrease from last year’s 260. The AGM provides a platform for members to engage directly with the Board and Secretariat on progress made against CIVICUS’s strategic plan. Representatives of the Board and Senior Leadership Team presented key aspects of CIVICUS’s annual report and financial statements for 2021 - 2022, and voting members were invited to confirm the adoption of the annual report.

The ‘Digital Fair for Collective Action’ was the highlight of the online activities during membership engagement month. Eleven virtual booths were hosted by a range of networks, including Invention for Change, Connect Humanity, End Water Poverty, FAIR SHARE for Women Leaders, KujaLink and Peace Direct. The most popular activity during the fair was the Regional Roundtables, where members were invited to a staff-facilitated networking session with peers in their regions.

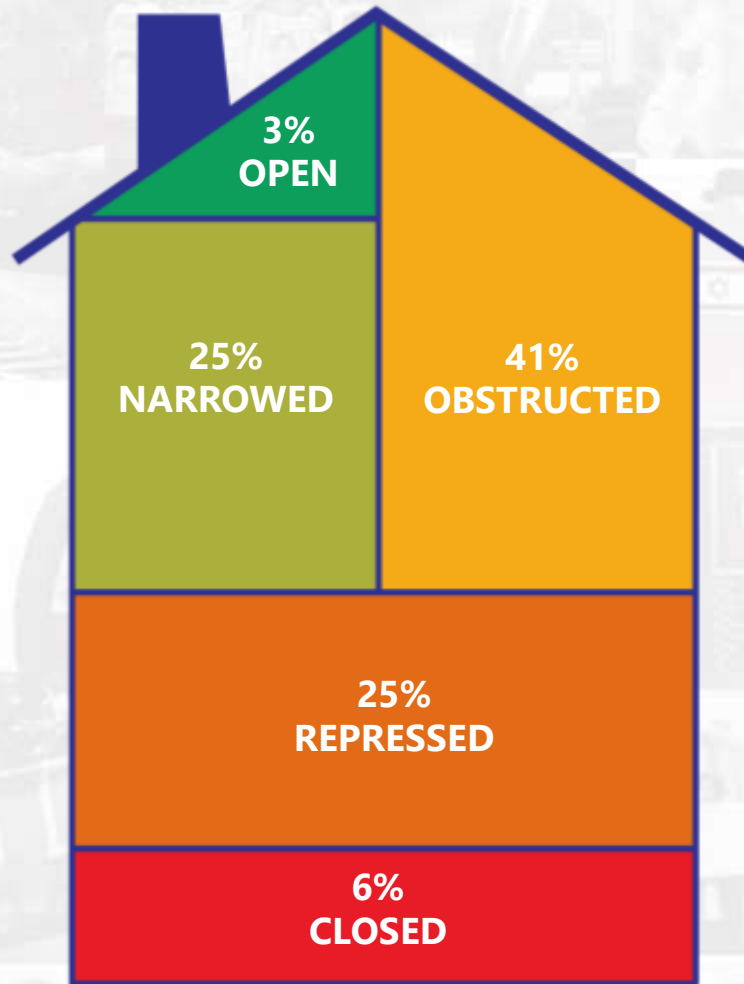
Also, for the first time, CIVICUS launched standard trainings available online to all members. Over 1,765 members registered for the new programmes: building blocks for organisers, community accountability and digital security. The programmes were selected based on needs assessments from previous CIVICUS Solidarity Fund applications and relevant available content to meet those needs.

ALLIANCE ENGAGEMENT

MEMBERSHIP

2022 - 2023

WHAT IS THE  
MONITOR  
CIVIC SPACE  
WHERE OUR  
MEMBERS  
LIVE?



*“THE ORGANIC GROWTH OF THE ALLIANCE IN CONTEXTS WITH RESTRICTED CIVIC SPACES SHOWS THE RELEVANCE OF OUR PROGRAMMATIC WORK, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF FACILITATING COLLABORATIVE SPACES WHERE CIVIL SOCIETY CONVERGES AND BUILDS COUNTERPOWER.”*

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## AFRICA



**Ekenia Chifamba**  
*Shamwari Yemwanasikana*  
Zimbabwe



**Irene Petras**  
*Intl Center for Not-for-Profit Law*  
Zimbabwe



**Sonia Kwami (Vice Chair)**  
*The One Campaign*  
Ghana



**Stellah Bosir**  
*Member, Membership Committee*  
Kenya

## AMERICAS



**Ana Addobbati**  
*Women Friendly, Social Good Brasil*  
Brasil



**Mario Roset**  
*Civic House*  
Argentina



**Patricia Lerner**  
*Greenpeace International*  
USA



**Patricia Tatis**  
*TECHO*  
USA

## ASIA



**Cristina Palabay**  
*Karapatan Alliance Philippines*  
Philippines



**Omaid Sharifi**  
*ArtLords and Wartists*  
Afghanistan/Turkey/USA



**Vandita Morarka**  
*One Future Collective*  
India

## EUROPE



**Dylan Mathews (Chair)**  
*Peace Direct*  
Britain



**Sarah Rose**  
*Social purpose consultant*  
Britain/South Africa

CIVICUS's board provides strategic direction and is elected by members. New this year, board meeting briefs were posted on CIVICUS's website furthering our commitment to greater transparency and hold us to account to make fair, justified decisions.

The board is representative of CIVICUS's regional diversity and is composed of individual activists, grassroots groups, national and international civil society organisations. Eight new CIVICUS board members were elected and began three-year terms on 1 July 2023. Ten of the thirteen board members are women. Dylan Mathews serves as chair and Sonia Kwami as vice chair for the thirteen-member board.

## RESOURCING AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

*CIVICUS's financial resilience has continued to improve through diversification of donors, strengthening of resource mobilisation and improved financial management practices.*

This is the first year of our new strategic plan. We had an increase in expenditure as we closed out several long-term programmes and prepared for the onboarding of new projects for the new strategic period. CIVICUS's revenue from July 2022 to June 2023 was 10,670,243 USD. The top three funders were the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency with 4,364,328 USD, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands with 1,898,017 USD, and Ford Foundation with 1,174,684 USD. Overall, we had 12 donors: four bilateral governmental bodies and eight private foundations. Board reserves remained steady.

Fiscal Year	Income	Expend
2022-2023	10,670,243	10,460,115
2021-2022	8,591,824	8,546,288
2020-2021	11,279,552	10,967,404

Progress on the diversification, growth and optimisation of resources occurred resulting in the submission of six new proposals and seven new and renewed partnership arrangements. In-person and online exchanges were also held with the leadership groups and/or wider partner networks of our key supporters.

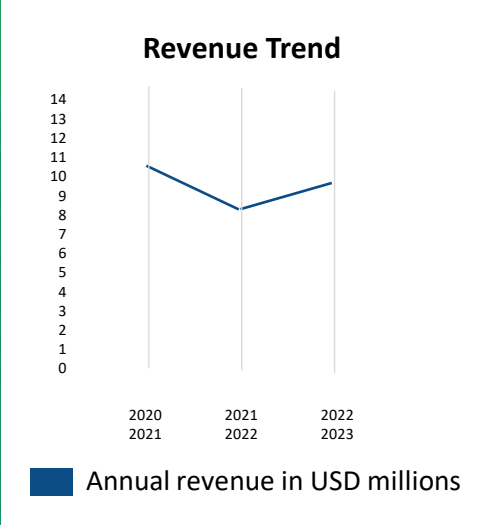
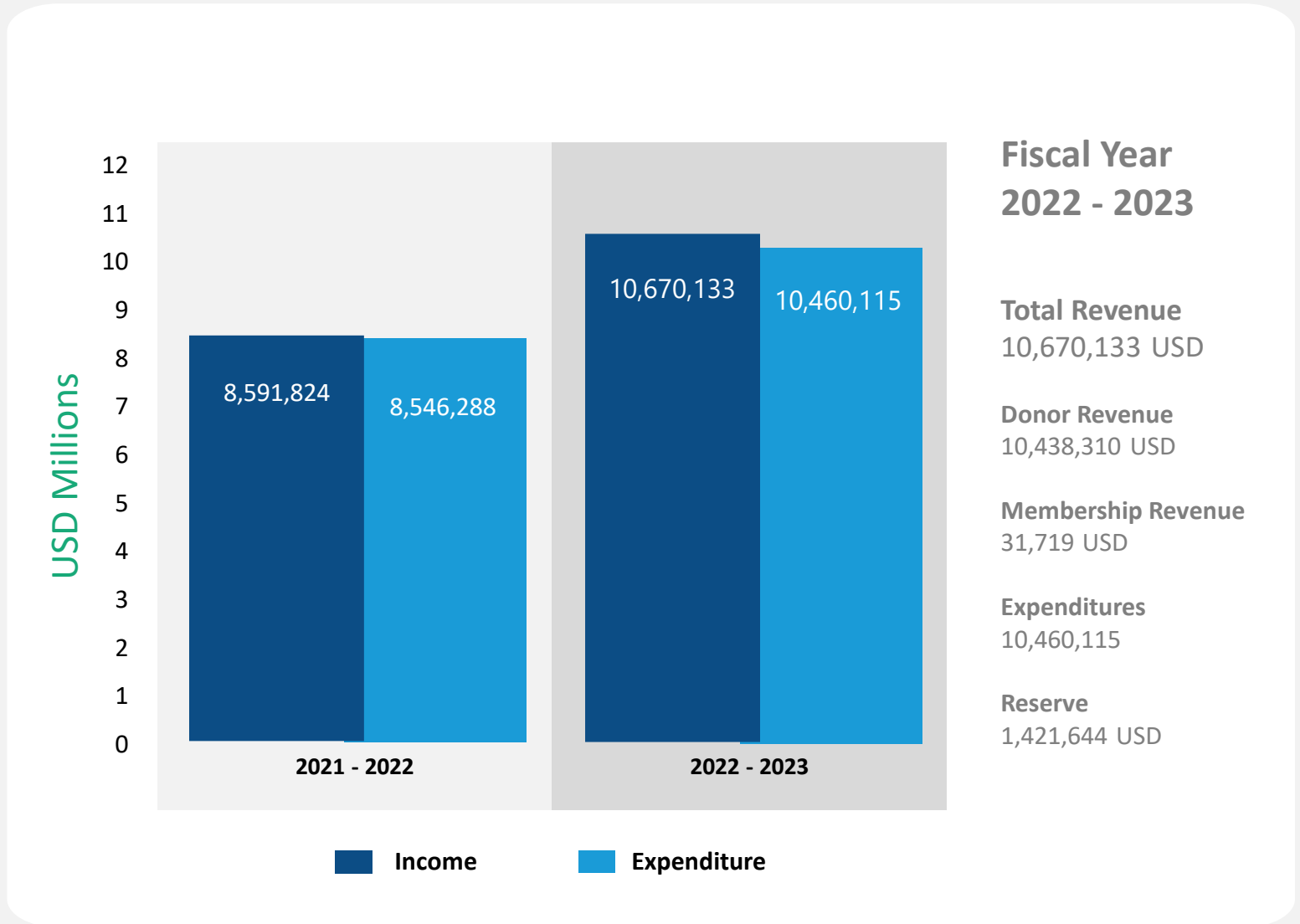
CIVICUS has seen growth in the diversification of its donor base, which includes three new donors: David Lucile Packard Foundation, Auxilium and The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. In addition, multiple new projects were secured in the current year, which included additional funding from Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA).

We also completed recruitment of a resource mobilisation and partnerships team in June. The two-member team will work closely with the senior leadership team to progress our resourcing strategy and achieve our commitment to diversify CIVICUS's resourcing partnerships significantly.

*“CIVICUS’S FINICAL RESILIENCE HAS CONTINUED TO IMPROVE THROUGH ITS DIVERSIFICATION OF DONORS, STRENGTHENING OF RESOURCE MOBILISATION AND IMPROVED FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.”*

## ANNUAL FINANCIAL FIGURES

CIVICUS Financial Year is from JULY 1<sup>ST</sup> 2022 – JUNE 30<sup>TH</sup> 2023





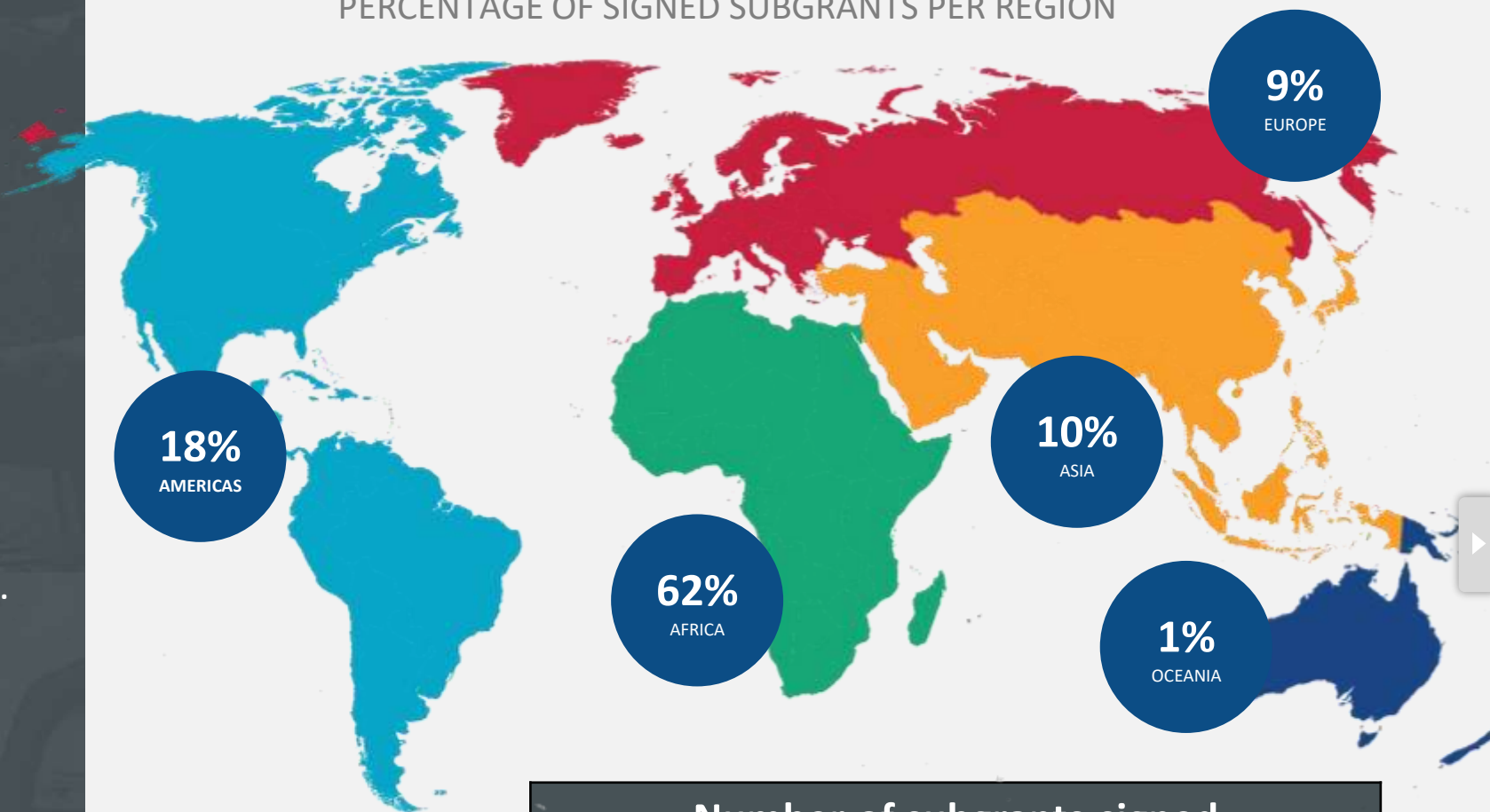
**3.6 million USD** was passed on to CIVICUS members and partners and there were **121** subgrants signed.

**34%\*** of CIVICUS's annual revenue was used towards subgrants.

The subgrants were distributed to **108** unique partners in **56** countries.

\* CIVICUS subgranted 3,618,785 USD of its 10,670,133 USD revenue from July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

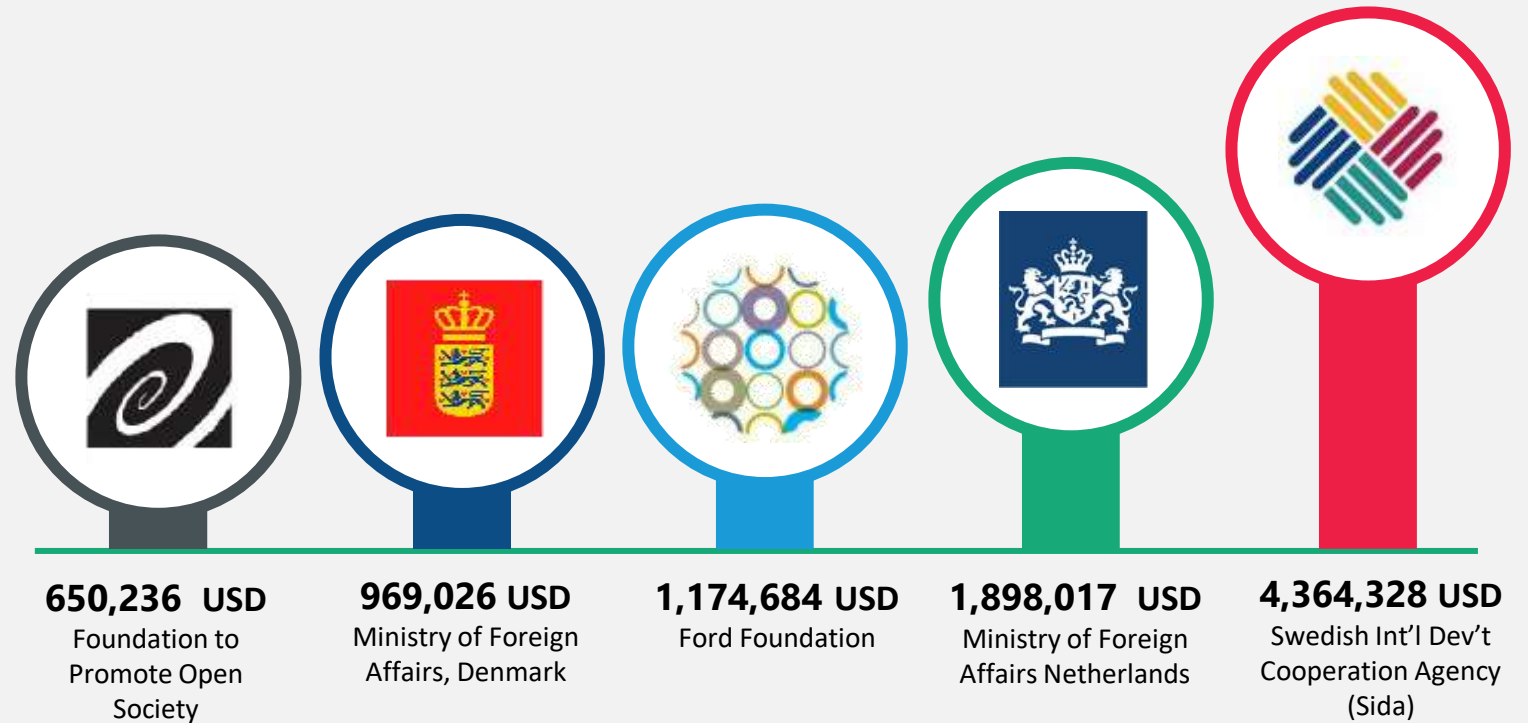
## PERCENTAGE OF SIGNED SUBGRANTS PER REGION



Number of subgrants signed			
Region	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	Change
Africa	50	75	+25
Americas	11	22	+11
Asia	19	12	-7
Europe	13	11	-2
Oceania	17	1	-16
<b>Subgrants Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>+11</b>

*We work closely with our supporters through our donor coordination group to share progress on CIVICUS's strategic plan and to identify opportunities for aligning agendas towards our shared common interest of expanding and defending civic space and democratic freedoms.*

## OUR TOP FIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS



## ADDITIONAL FUNDERS





## Annual Global Civic Space Reports

- [State of Civil Society Report](#)
- [People Power Under Attack](#)

## Regular Updates on Civic Space

- [CIVICUS Lens](#)
- [CIVICUS Monitor \(Ratings Methodology\)](#)

## National Policy Briefs

- [Hong Kong](#), [Kenya](#), [Afghanistan](#), [South Sudan](#), [Belarus](#), [Cambodia](#), [Palestine](#), [Philippines](#), [Sudan](#), [Uzbekistan](#), [Morocco](#), [Latvia](#), [United States](#), [Chile](#), [Myanmar](#), [Ghana](#), [Sri Lanka](#)



## Regional Reports

- [Regional aspects of civic and democratic space Myanmar-ASEAN](#)
- [Challenging Barriers: Investigating Civic Space Limitations on LGBTQI+ Rights in Africa](#)

## Civic Space Watchlist

- [Sept 2022](#) (Sri Lanka, Guatemala, Zimbabwe, Serbia, Guinea)
- [Feb 2023](#) (Peru, Cambodia, Zimbabwe, Iran, Sudan)

## Thematic Reports

- [Global Assessment of Protest Rights](#)



## Op-Eds and Blogs

- 26 Analytical [op-eds](#) and 14 [blogs](#) respond to key civic and democratic space developments

## Media

- [CIVICUS Voices Season II Podcast on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly](#)
- [Grassroots Solidarity Revolution Videos \(English, French and Spanish\)](#)
- [JAM Sessions Toolkit \(Eng, Fra, Esp\)](#)
- [Strengthening Civil Society in Latin America videos](#)



## Advocacy

- 17 [open letters](#) providing targeted response
- 22 Universal Periodic Review [submissions](#)
- 64 [Statements, letter, and resolutions](#) negotiated in Geneva with UN bodies
- [COP27](#): Environmental and Land Defenders

## INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

### Impact and Accountability

- [Annual Plan: 2023 - 2024](#)
- [Integrated Results Framework](#)

### Strategic Period 2017 – 2022

- [Selected Outcomes](#)
- [Selected Learnings](#)

### Reporting

- [Accountable Now](#)
- [Annual Report: 2021 - 2022](#)



## #StandAsMyWitness

- [PHILIPPINES](#): This victory belongs to everyone who supported and fought with us
- [Chronology](#) Pakistani human rights defender Muhammad Ismail
- [Chronology](#) of Bahraini human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja

## Thematic Research

- [The right to protest](#): the need for an intersectional and transfeminist approach
- [Challenging Barriers](#): Investigating Civic Space Limitations on LGBTQI+ Rights in Africa
- [Youth Trends](#) in Activism and Civic Space Expansion
- [Youth Action Lab Playbook](#)



## Grassroots Research

- [Access to Resources](#) for Civil Society in Latin America Research Brief
- [Five Things](#) Grassroots Activists want Donors and Allies to know.

## Media

- Strengthening Central America Civil Society Initiative [Advocacy Course](#) (Spanish)
- Civil Society in Central America [Short Videos](#)

**Resource finders** enhancing access to resources for smaller, less formal groups.

- [Donor Finder 2023](#)
- [EXPLORADOR](#) (Spanish)
- [Rapid Response Donor Finder](#)



## Connect with us:

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 [civicus.org](https://civicus.org)

 [info@civicus.org](mailto:info@civicus.org)

 [/CIVICUS](https://www.facebook.com/CIVICUS)

 [@CIVICUSalliance](https://twitter.com/CIVICUSalliance)

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HEADQUARTERS  
25 Owl Street, 6th Floor  
Johannesburg, 2092  
South Africa  
Tel: +27 (0)11 833 5959  
Fax: +27 (0)11 833 7997

UN HUB: NEW YORK  
We Work Premises  
450 Lexington Avenue  
New York, NY, 10017  
United States

UN HUB: GENEVA  
11 Avenue de la Paix  
Geneva, CH-1202  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41 (0)22 733 3435