



# ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 22  
JUNE 23

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## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

OVERVIEW



KNOWLEDGE GENERATION



PUBLIC DISCOURSE



ADVOCACY



BUILDING COUNTERPOWER



STRONGER SUPPORT ECOSYSTEMS

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

FINANCIALS





## 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.”

## FOREWORD BY SECRETARY GENERAL AND BOARD CHAIR

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 (UN) 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 (FoPA), 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 (HRDs) were acquitted or freed.

Our Strengthening Central America Civil Society Initiative supported CSOs 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 (DDI), aimed at supporting their effective use of digital technologies to strengthen civic space and inclusive democracy, and Local Leadership Labs (LLL), 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.

## **FAIR SHARE** of Women Leaders

- 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 (CSOs) 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

CIVICUS WAS MENTIONED IN

1176

MEDIA OUTLETS



The New York Times



Argentina Star

CIVIC SPACE RATINGS FOR

197

COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES  
AND RECEIVING

316 

CITATIONS ACROSS ACADEMIA,  
CIVIL SOCIETY,  
INTERGOVERNMENTAL  
ORGANISATIONS AND MEDIA



## 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.



## 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.



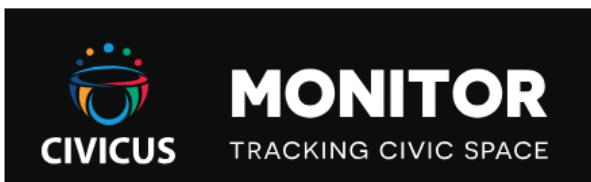


**WHAT WE DID:** We produced actionable research and analysis on civic and democratic space.

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

## PERMANENT RESEARCH INITIATIVES

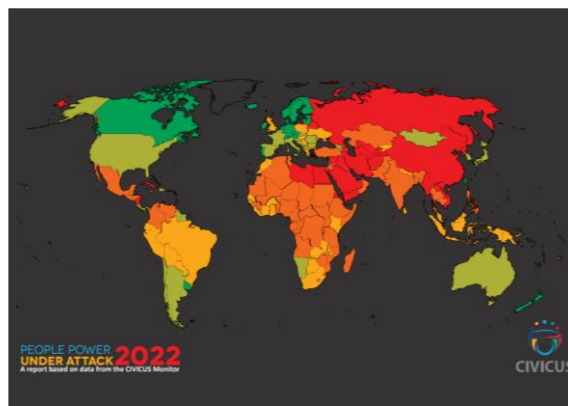
**CIVICUS LENS**  
PERSPECTIVES FOR A CHANGING WORLD



### IN NUMBERS

- 154 CIVICUS Lens articles
- 128 interviews with civil society stakeholders
- Civic space data for 197 countries and territories
- 316 citations of the CIVICUS Monitor

## GLOBAL ANNUAL PUBLICATIONS



We continued to draw inputs from diverse civil society voices with a view to advancing rights, particularly those of the excluded groups in the global south. CIVICUS Lens interviewed 128 civil society activists, leaders and experts whose perspectives were 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 about giving greater visibility to their struggles.

The 12th edition of the 2023 State of Civil Society Report monitored the trajectory of civil society mobilisations and actions around the world. The report identified trends in civil society action at every level and in every arena, from struggles for democracy, inclusion and climate justice to demands for global governance reform.

Our knowledge leadership was signalled by the growing demand for presentations tailored for specific audiences, requests for input into further reflections and discussions and invitations to multiple forums including global and regional organisations, academic and resourcing agencies.





## CIVICUS Monitor

For its seventh year, the 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 the methodology. In response to civil society requests, we created targeted country briefs, infographics and Watchlist reports. We captured 316 citations of these knowledge products across academia, civil society, intergovernmental organisations and media. These included citations by the British daily newspaper The Guardian, which extensively referenced CIVICUS Monitor data and its reasoning for downgrading the UK's civic space to 'obstructed' in March 2023. Monitor statistics were also cited by the UN, including in the UN Development Programme's 2023 publication on youth participation.

## CIVICUS Monitor country scores and ratings

### Methodology Paper

#### CIVICUS MONITOR RATING



#### CIVICUS Monitor score



#### Base score

#### Live score

#### Key scores

Quantitative indicators from reliable international sources that resume information on the three core civic space freedoms

#### Key analysis

Standardised quantitative assessment of narrative reports on civic space freedoms produced by reliable national, regional and international sources.

#### CIVICUS analysis

Standardised quantitative assessment of narrative reports on civic space freedoms produced internally by the CIVICUS Monitor

Standardised quantitative assessment of the civic space situation of the country done by our +20 network of research partners

## CIVICUS Watchlist

The CIVICUS Monitor 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. Monitor data also fed into a report on the state of civic space in Sri Lanka submitted to the 137th session of the UN Human Rights Committee ahead of the review of the state's implementation of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in March 2023. Along with 12 international organisations, we also released a public statement calling for the end of police repression of protests in Sri Lanka.

### SRI LANKA

### CIVICUS MONITOR WATCHLIST

### OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS



## Interviews

All our research is of, from and for civil society. Our analysis draws from in-depth interviews and other consultations with civil society activists, leaders, experts and others close to the major stories of the day.

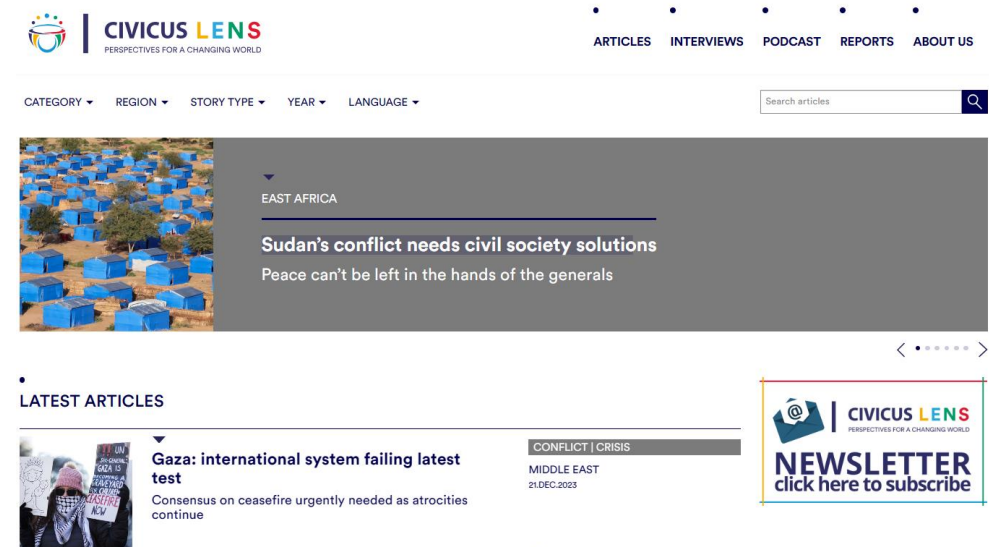
Our interviewees bring in valuable information, contribute to fact-checking and provide a civil society perspective on current issues. In 2022-23, a high and growing share of our interviewees were from the global south and belonged to one or more of our target groups, a materialisation of our goals to project a global south perspective and prioritise the narratives of historically marginalised groups.



## CIVICUS Lens

Building on 10 years of State of Civil Society Reports, CIVICUS Lens offers timely analysis of the major events of the day from a civil society perspective. Complementing our ongoing tracking of civic space on the CIVICUS Monitor, CIVICUS Lens highlights stories of civic action and civil society breakthroughs. It explores contemporary political, economic and social trends and their impact on civil society, and also and most importantly, the ways in which people's movements are responding, innovating and scoring victories.

CIVICUS Lens is intended to demystify complex issues, encourage reflection and promote solidarity, allyship and progressive action. It showcases a plurality and diversity of experiences and voices, including through interviews and consultations. In 2022-23, CIVICUS Lens analysis was systematised into a shorter State of Civil Society report focused on the year's civil society trends. Through new media partnerships established in 2023, its contents are also being repackaged in more accessible formats to reach wider audiences.



## CIVICUS'S GROWING IMPACT

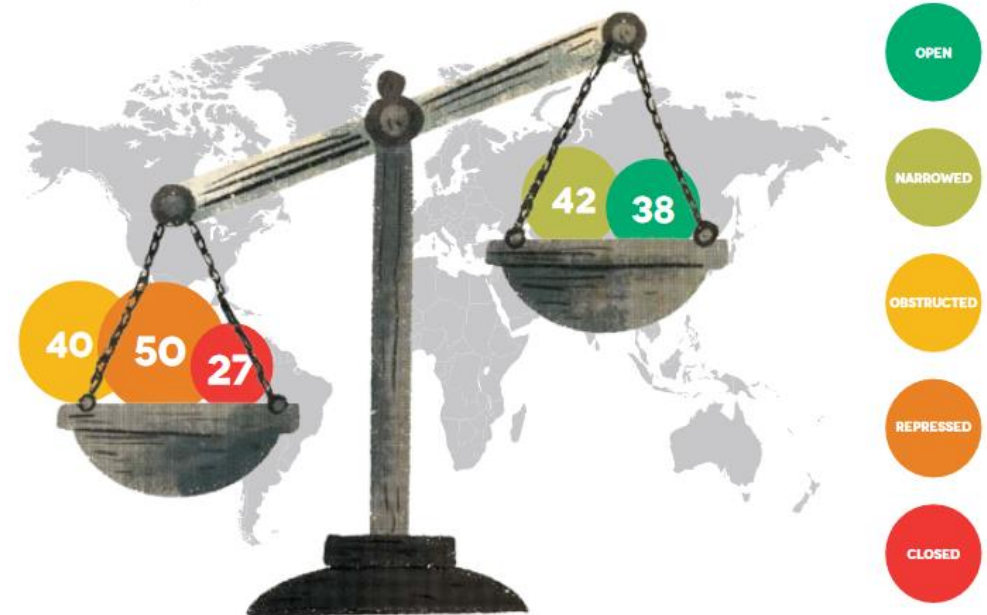
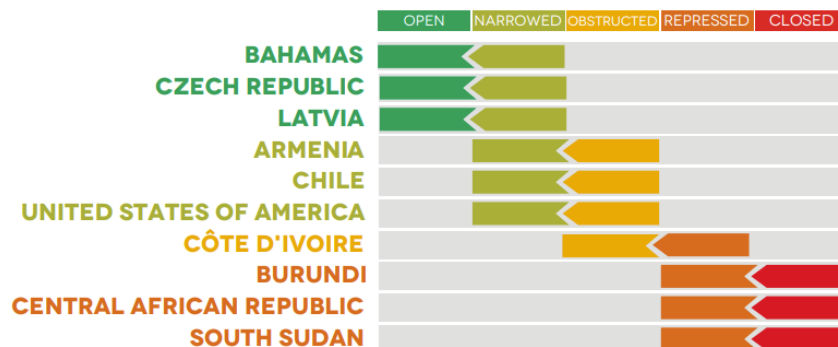
CIVICUS is a trusted source of information, and the use of its publications is increasing in number, scope and impact. For instance, the CIVICUS Monitor team attended expert meetings organised by financial institutions in the Netherlands to explore how financial institutions can strengthen human rights risk assessments of business activities in areas where civic space is restricted. The meetings led to the publication of a report, 'No news is bad news', that references CIVICUS's definition of civic space and 2021 Monitor findings included in its People Power Under Attack publication. Among the 11 expert contributors to the discussion were 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 assessments.

“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 need 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 citations of our work.

CIVICUS produces high-quality grounded research products supported by regional research partners and interviews with civil society stakeholders. We have long held a strong reputation for our products with international bodies, but have recently obtained 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 while they are still ongoing. For instance, an interview by David Kode, CIVICUS's advocacy and campaign lead, with International Press Service about civic space conditions in Nigeria, which called for allowing protests and rallies, was released just before the Nigerian elections. It highlighted that if people were not allowed to protest peacefully, they might resort to violence to have their voices heard. The interview emphasised participating in the elections as a way to make change happen.

Our credibility has helped amplify our partnerships to reach a wider and more diverse audience. Some of the proven outreach tactics used this year have included the continuous and consistent use of key international days and events 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. We have partnered with the Mail and Guardian in South Africa, and established 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 have highlighted the importance of sharing successful tactics as a way of encouraging other CSOs to use them.



Global Assessment on Protest Rights 2022



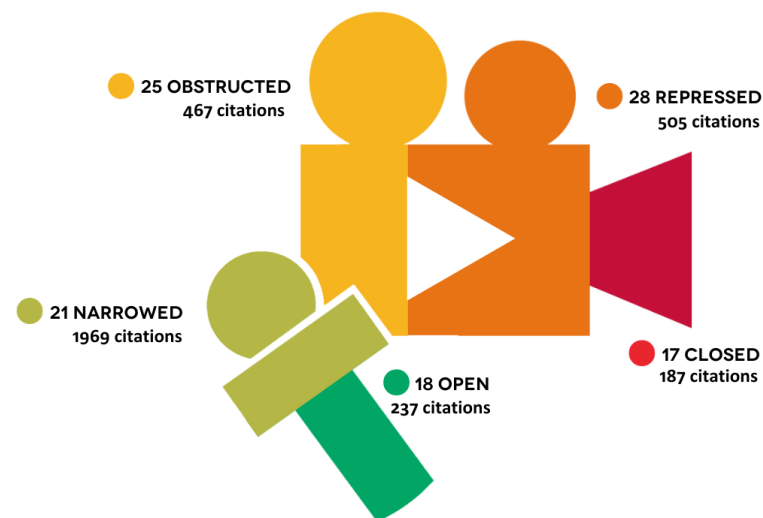
**WHAT WE DID:** We amplified grassroots narratives with media pieces and coverage. We contributed to increased public trust in civil society through advancing peer accountability practices within civil society.

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

- 1,176 media mentions of CIVICUS in more than 118 countries and in 58 languages
- 26 analytical op-eds and 14 blogs responding 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 included presentations to CSOs, 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, JULY 2022-JUNE 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.



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 second season of the CIVICUS Voice podcast 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. The podcast provided analysis of protest restrictions and included interviews with protest leaders from a range of social justice movements. It had over 1,700 downloads.



The videos produced by the Strengthening Civil Society in Latin America initiative present short stories of civil society resilience in the face of challenges told in the activists' own words and voices. More information about this initiative can be found under the strategic objective 'Contributing to stronger emergency and sustained support ecosystems for activists and organisations at risk'.



The Grassroots Solidary Revolution (GSR) videos were viewed 121,500 times in the first month. Followers of the grassroots collective partner Bogotart provided 90 per cent 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 narratives, in which contexts and why?

Bogotart produced a video on five Colombian activists that received 121,000 views in the first month.



During the GSR campaign, it became clear that improving the resourcing realities of grassroots activists required spaces for them 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 when they do, they have limited reach and don't achieve enough visibility. To address this gap, in 2023 the GSR campaign made a public call for proposals to provide funding for activists with storytelling experience. Five activists – from Chile, Colombia, Haiti, India and Nigeria – were each granted USD 5,000 to produce a video story aligned with key topics of the campaign. They had 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 made sense to them were highly valued. Support included small grants and accompaniment to produce quality content; support to amplify and disseminate their messages with global audiences; connections with other storytellers and opportunities for learning from each other's ideas and creative approaches.

The resulting stories amplified grassroots voices about the realities, funding struggles, stigma, dangers and daily challenges facing grassroots activists. They also demonstrated the positive impact their work is having on their communities.

## PEER LEARNING

### Accountability practices

CIVICUS also strengthens public discourse by promoting accountability practices that build trust in civil society. CIVICUS 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 in 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 there would be neither Global Accountability Week in 2023, nor accompanying activities and resources.

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.

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.





“Our journey in dynamic constituent accountability was transformative for our organisation. 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  
PJL Director of Evaluation and Strategic Development

## DYNAMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

### Shifting public discourse in Madagascar

In 2018 Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) joined the CIVICUS Resilient Roots initiative and began its dynamic constituent accountability journey. It developed and tested a paper-based Constituent Voice magazine about its comprehensive sexuality education programme. The magazines were meant to improve PJL's transparency and build trust by collecting and responding to feedback from 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 when they took part in the Resilient Roots 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 young people, parents, school officials and other community members across three regions of Madagascar, including blank pages for their feedback. PJL used stories, articles and questions to inspire readers to share their reactions and lived experiences on key topics of 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 in the Madagascar context. PJL then developed four issues for decision-makers focused on what constituents – including young people from marginalised rural communities – wanted national decision-makers and technical advisors to do differently in their work on that topic. The PJL team used 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 its 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.







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

### IN NUMBERS

- 8 agreement changes towards defending or expanding civic space at the UN.
- 22 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) submissions to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) reporting comprehensively on civic space conditions in individual countries.
- 64 statements, letters and resolutions negotiated in Geneva with UN bodies.
- 121 direct advocacy actions, including financial, technical and research support.
- 94 indirect advocacy actions, including relationship/coalition building and in-kind support.
- 17 open letters providing targeted responses to developments related to civic and democratic space upon requests from members and partners.

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



**ACHPR**  
African Commission on  
Human and Peoples' Rights

**IACHR**  
Inter-American Commission  
on Human Rights



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 for the 2024-2027 period.

In Geneva, CIVICUS organised multi-stakeholder and bilateral meetings with delegations and UN human rights experts, supporting them to deliver statements at the UNHRC and in the context of other UN human rights mechanisms. On the margins of UNHRC sessions, CIVICUS organised side events with the participation of activists from Afghanistan, Cambodia, the Philippines, South Africa, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. We also supported our members so they could raise civic space concerns directly at the Council through formal statements (Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Venezuela) and through briefings (Myanmar).

CIVICUS value added in the UN system in Geneva can be found in its connection and everyday work with a broad network of activists, HRDs and fellow CSOs, many of which are part of Human Rights Commission Network. For example, through our FoPA workstream, we enabled actions of a diverse group of activists. Six groups contributed to the analysis of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association of accountability for violations to FoPA.

Groups from the ecosystem of Innovation for Change-South Asia Hub and Global Study on the Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Civil Society and Civic Space contributed to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights while countering terrorism, and specifically to the 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 UPR submissions to the UNHRC. 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 countries undergoing review to build coalitions to submit comments to be included and then monitor their states' progress against commitments. Members express gratitude at having access to elite spaces and decision-makers and gaining better understanding of how to leverage international bodies for their work in their communities.



**HIGHLIGHT:** Arbitrary detention of HRDs, peaceful protesters and media workers included for the first time in a UN resolution.

For the first time, the UNHRC resolution on arbitrary detention included a paragraph on HRDs, peaceful protesters and media workers. During informal negotiations of the resolution, CIVICUS sought the inclusion of ‘peaceful protesters’ on the list of actors that states must protect from arbitrary detention.



Illustration by RobinOlimb/Getty Images

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To give full effect to the UN 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.

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## NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ADVOCACY

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



### Algeria: Increased solidarity among CSOs

Due to increased restrictions on civil society, there were divisions and high levels of mistrust amongst CSOs in Algeria, to the extent that many could not coexist in the same space. Over several months we helped bridge these divides by coordinating a series of online events in which more than 100 CSOs participated. 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 human rights organisation in Algeria



## Eswatini: Supporting democracy activists

The government of Eswatini continued using brutal retaliatory tactics against democracy activists, including the assassination of HRD Thulani Maseko. CIVICUS mobilised over 390 organisations working at the national and regional levels 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.

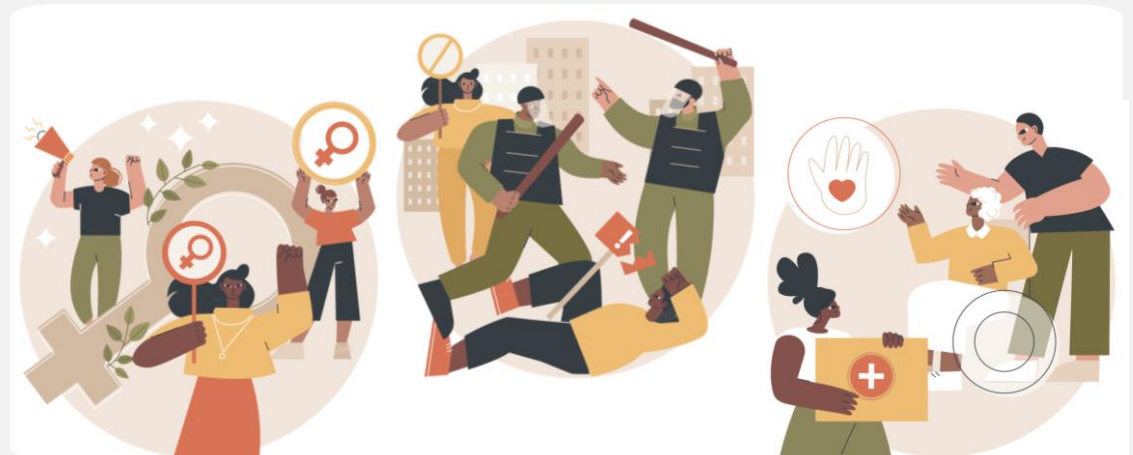


## Guatemala: Congress reverses restrictive bill

In 2022, the Guatemalan Congress passed Bill 5272, the Law for the Protection of Life and the Family. The new legislation increased penalties for abortion and banned same-sex marriage and the teaching of sexual diversity in schools. Protests erupted and mobilisation by CIVICUS local partners raised the cost the government would pay if it validated the congressional decision. Congress reacted by stepping back and shelving the bill.

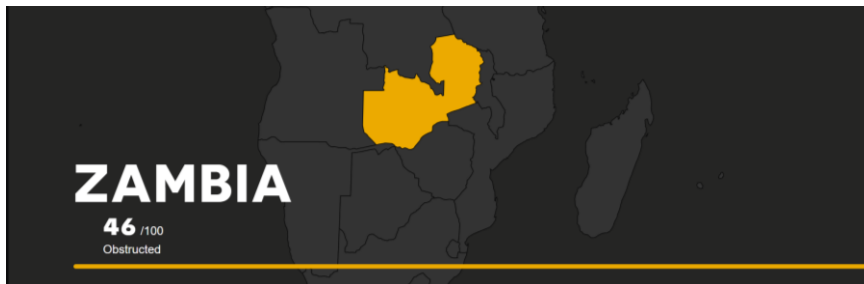
## ADVOCACY LINKS TO OTHER OBJECTIVES

Our advocacy connects with the #StandAsMyWitness campaign, the Vuka! Coalition for Civic Action, the Consortium for Human Rights and Media Development in Sub-Saharan Africa (CHARM), the Defender and Diplomats Dialogues and the Crisis Response Fund, all of which pursue the same objectives of building counterpower alongside the most affected groups and their movements and contributing to stronger emergency and sustained support ecosystems for activists and organisations at risk.





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



### Zambia: Sustained advocacy on civic space restrictions achieved through the creation of district caucuses of CSOs

The Governance, Elections, and Advocacy Research Services (GEARS), a Zambian 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.

Thanks to concerted advocacy, the amendment bills – which would have created difficult circumstances for CSO operations – did not pass. Sustained advocacy also resulted in amendments to the NGO Act and Public Order Act. The new bills are already in place for final debate in the National Assembly.

Prior to the establishment of the district forums, the political climate in Zambia did not encourage the effective engagement of all stakeholders in governance processes. 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. The purpose of the project was to encourage effective citizen participation, the mobilisation and training of local communities, the formation of advocacy district networks and media engagement to strengthen democratic institutions.





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

## IN NUMBERS

- 15 HRDs featured in the #StandAsMyWitness campaign acquitted and/or released
- Four thematic research reports on most affected groups published



CIVICUS has made traditionally excluded groups a focus of its new strategic plan for 2022-2027. In doing so, we are applying learnings from co-design initiatives developed in the previous strategic period to work with such groups, and specifically with young people. CIVICUS's thematic research pieces, op-eds and blogs have also repeatedly documented the work of and challenges faced by LGBTQI+ people, youth and Indigenous peoples, providing an additional 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 Vuka! Coalition for Civic Action. In addition, our advocacy team has hosted a series of events with Indigenous people to strengthen solidarity, create awareness of protest rights and organise effectively around the COP28 climate summit.

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





## THE RIGHT TO PROTEST:

### An intersectional and transfeminist approach

One example of our thematic research addressing most affected groups includes, 'The right to protest: the need for an intersectional and transfeminist approach', jointly published by CIVICUS's Innovation for Change and the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) in Argentina. Approaching FoPA from an intersectional and transfeminist perspective, the report found women and transgender people are more likely than cisgender males to experience violations of the right to FoPA. It also showed that Latin America's Black and Indigenous women are more exposed to violence while protesting than their white counterparts.

Concerningly, the case studies included in the report documented the negative impacts across Latin America of the absence of an intersectional approach when dealing with abuses and protection of protesters.

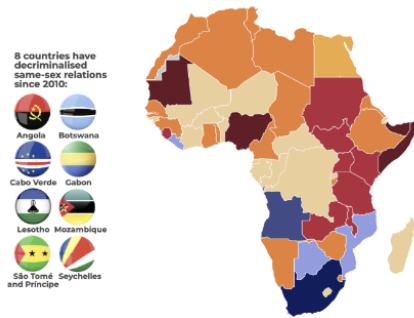
On the basis of this research, CIVICUS is using its programme quality and innovation framework to address the depth of impact of race, gender, sexual orientation, indigeneity, class and other intersectionalities to better support most affected groups in exercising their right to FoPA. This is part of 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





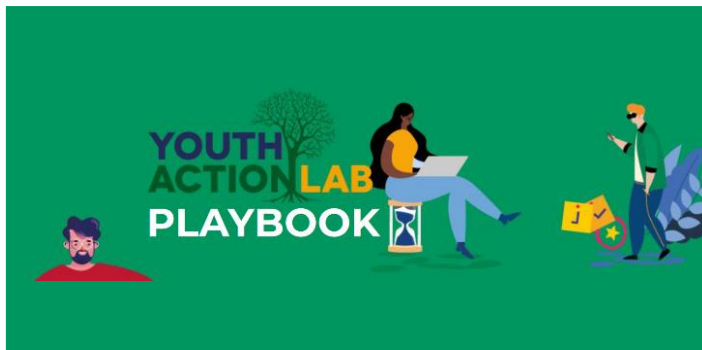
## Challenging Barriers

This paper reviews civic space restrictions targeting LGBTQI+ groups in Africa. It 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 Africa's sub-Saharan region that year.



## Youth Trends in Activism

For years, CIVICUS's research has found young people 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 the brief 'Youth Trends in Activism', CIVICUS's YAT contributed to conversations on resourcing youth-led consultations. 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 focused on how to include youth groups and other non-formal movements. It harnesses the experience and lessons learned during the Youth Action Lab pilot project 2019-2022. To further share learnings and discuss practices to foster meaningful inclusion of youth and non-traditional CSOs, 'learning circles' were created with 11 members of peer organisations such as Fenomenal Funds, LGBTQI+ Youth Fund, Porticus, Restless Development, Save the Children, The Movement Trust and WINGS.

## GROWING IMPACT: #StandAsMyWitness campaign

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

CIVICUS continued its targeted advocacy for the release of arbitrarily imprisoned HRDs through the #StandAsMyWitness campaign, first launched on Nelson Mandela Day in 2020. #StandAsMyWitness builds partnerships and amplifies voices calling for the release of unjustly imprisoned civil society activists. This approach has resulted in the acquittal and/or release of 15 HRDs this past year. We have received personal letters thanking us for our work.

However, these campaigns are far from over when a HRD is released, as seen in the case of the eight Guapinol River defenders in Honduras, which we reported on last year. In January 2023, two of them, Aly Domínguez and Jairo Bonilla, were shot dead in broad daylight. In response, more than 100 human rights organisations, including CIVICUS, called for the state of Honduras to comply with its international obligations to guarantee access to justice and measures of non-repetition.

This year we also created an interactive chronology for the detained Bahraini HRD Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, a prominent member of Bahraini civil society and a well-known human rights activist in the Gulf region. Since 1980, he and his family have

faced systematic harassment and intimidation from the government of Bahrain for his human rights work. Abdulhadi is currently serving a life sentence.

Prepared in collaboration with his family, the timeline includes personal, advocacy and persecution events. FrontLineDefenders also featured it on their webpage to call for solidarity on his behalf.

The key to #StandAsMyWitness' success is sustained collaborative action. The campaign works closely with family members, colleagues and lawyers of profiled HRDs, who keep the campaign team updated with relevant dates, events and advocacy opportunities. Every month we identify entry points at the 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 bring visibility to all the HRDs profiled in the campaign.

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



**Medardo Mairena and Pedro Mena**  
Nicaragua



**María Esperanza Sánchez García**  
Nicaragua



**Professor Muhammad Ismail**  
Pakistan

## GROWING IMPACT: #StandAsMyWitness campaign

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

In Burundi, CIVICUS advocated for the release of detained HRD Germain Nkina, sentenced to five years in prison in 2021 under accusations of collaborating with armed groups. We shared details of his arrest and detention with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, and together with regional groups continued to advocate for his release. The Supreme Court later quashed the sentence and ordered his release.

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

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

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

DEMAND EQUITY

### UAE — Release Human Rights Defender Ahmed Mansoor

34,139 / 50,000 Actions Taken

TAKE ACTION

DEMAND EQUITY

### Hong Kong — Release Lawyer And Pro-Democracy Activist Chow Hang-tung

29,102 / 50,000 Actions Taken

TAKE ACTION



## SUPPORTING NETWORKS TO BUILD COUNTERPOWER

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

### Vuka! Coalition for Civil Society

Another CIVICUS-supported space to foster mobilisation for change is the Vuka! coalition, which includes over 250 civil society groups working together to reclaim civic space. Between July and November 2022, Vuka! released a final report and next steps, 'Dialogue on corporate accountability and cooperation to protect and promote civic space', held a dialogue to nurture civil society well-being, and released an analysis of civil society needs from the Vuka! Right to Protest survey, which identified needs such as water and safe spaces to create banners to exercise FoPA rights. Vuka! consultations with the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders 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 Central Asia, Europe, MENA and sub-Saharan Africa. 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, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Russia and Tanzania.



### Global Resource Hubs

Six regional Global Resource Hub partners exchanged tools and strategies and built solutions and solidarity with others around FoPA. Extensive consultation with partners and networks revealed a gap regarding the prevention of FoPA violations against vulnerable groups.

The consultations also yielded 65 solutions to FoPA's most pressing prevention challenges, such as encouraging the use of art and creative expression to raise awareness and developing resources for holistic safety. In addition, they found that alliances and coalitions specific for FoPA are quite weak and usually focused on specific causes such as women's rights or climate change.

Global Resource Hub partners will provide links between the local and regional levels – 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.

#### Global Resource Hub partners

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



## 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 space is obstructed – that is, where there are heavy restrictions but there is still some space that makes it possible 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 the coordinating member of CHARM. We continue to be an implementing partner, but in June 2023 the coordination function was undertaken by DefendDefenders.



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 with support and sustained training conducted under the CHARM project. ACOYDE's work is a shining example of how targeted interventions can empower people and communities to create a more sustainable and equitable world.

The devastating effects of climate change were becoming increasingly evident in Uganda, disproportionately impacting on women who, despite being the breadwinners of 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 ACOYDE, a local organisation dedicated to supporting grassroots communities 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 its 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 embed best practices to catalyse joint action for mutual solidarity and collective impact?

CIVICUS envisioned the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a galvanising moment for the CIVICUS alliance. We committed to co-designing our campaigns and activating our networks.

To catalyse joint action for mutual solidarity and collective impact, we dedicated time to integrating the learnings from the Global Resource Hubs, selecting partners and co-designing the campaign. The result was the WeRise! Campaign, aimed at strengthening civil society vigilance to act locally and globally to uphold, protect and improve the framework of internationally protected FoPA rights.

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

Global Resource Hub partners will be supported financially to coordinate and scale up 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. We intend to establish a robust network capable of operating proactively rather than in reaction to FoPA violations. This alignment, along with the link to Global Resource Hub partners, provides the campaign with a sustainable component that is critical for success.



Illustration by Laura Díez Estrada



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

## IN NUMBERS

- More than 17 consultations and dialogues engaging more than 350 grassroots activists calling for greater access to resources, partnerships and equitable relationships with donors and allies.
- 121 subgrants
- USD 3.6 million in subgrants
- More than 300 HRDs 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 December 2019 until November 2022, the Strengthening Central America Civil Society initiative worked with 22 CSOs from four Central American countries – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua – that have heavily 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 delivered to 400 CSO participants, and USD 147,000 in subgrants that were used for purchasing equipment and implementing projects. Additionally, an online platform, EXPLORADOR, was created to provide organisations and activists information about financial and non-financial resources.



Restrictions on civic space are not uniform: they target specific groups that mobilise around causes that are often considered politically sensitive 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 organisations and activists, farmers, workers, students and journalists.

### Digital Democracy Initiative

The new DDI continues the work of enabling civil society in restrictive contexts. The initiative focuses on the digital expression of civic activism and seeks to strengthen resourcing ecosystems and foster an improved use of digital technology among local civil society in restrictive contexts.

The initiative builds upon past work undertaken to better understand the digital realities of the CIVICUS membership, such as their struggle to access reliable internet services, and is supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.





## CIVIL SOCIETY RESOURCING

### Grassroots Solidarity Revolution Campaign

The Grassroots Solidarity Revolution 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, international NGOs 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 humanises grassroots groups and activists and promotes more trust-based relationships and approaches through awareness-raising content on social media but also through the creation of unusual dialogue spaces and the convening of conversations amongst activists and with donors and allies.

This year, the campaign held jam sessions and supported the Grassroots Solidarity Revolution campaign videos mentioned under the strengthening public discourse objective. In addition, the campaign also hosted a session on 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.

Additionally, following 2019 research we further deepened our analysis and understanding of the resourcing landscape for civil society in Latin America. This time we looked at the barriers and costs experienced by civil society groups in the region when seeking grants, and especially by smaller, less formal and recently established local groups, as well as the ecosystem-level inequities and inefficiencies that result from donors' grant-making processes.



Illustration by Laura Díez Estrada





**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, scale our work and improve the support ecosystem for activists and organisations at risk?

## KNOWLEDGE GENERATION SHIFTING POLICIES AND RESOURCING APPROACHES

Funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), between 2018 and 2023 Strengthening 21st Century Citizen Action has encompassed several initiatives including the Youth Action Lab and Grassroots Solidarity Revolution. It has also supported the 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 is a common thread across our work. Outputs included products offering compelling evidence, stories and know-how to attract attention, encourage dialogue and debate, inform agenda setting approaches and substantiate demands and priorities by the programme 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 activism. In particular, CIVICUS work helped shift the compensation policies and resourcing approaches of other organisations such as the Global Fund for Children and the 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.



Illustration by Laura Díez Estrada







## SOLIDARITY MECHANISMS

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

### 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 groups facing urgent threats to the freedoms of assembly and of association (FoAA) to conduct advocacy activities to counter them.

This year 34 organisations in 33 countries were awarded advocacy and resilience grants totalling USD 466,579. They used the funds to build counternarratives to respond to smear campaigns, hold workshops and lobby policy-makers and key actors to amend restrictive laws governing freedom of assembly and association (FoAA).

Our support was not only financial: we also supported partners by coordinating meetings with embassies, donor governments and UN special mandate-holders. We were intentional about adopting a feminist intersectional approach by fostering connections with the groups that are most impacted in moments of crisis, such as Indigenous and historically marginalised groups.

We supported several feminist and women's collectives organising on the multilayered restrictions that women and women HRDs (WHRDs) face as a result of institutionalised patriarchy. In Lesotho, we supported an initiative centred around women's experiences in the textile industry, governed by a section of the Labour Code Order No.24 of

1992 that effectively limits workers' freedom of association. In South Africa, we supported work to counter legislation restricting FoAA and access to funding for CSOs and to the resistance of WHRDs in the face of mounting cyber-attacks. In line with this year's theme, our partner also hosted a side event on physical and digital protection on the margins of Commission on the Status of Women's 67th session and produced a shadow report on the situation of WHRDs in South Africa.



Illustration by erhui1979/Getty Images





## Target groups of the Rapid Response Donor Finder



Activists or groups focused on sexual and reproductive rights



Artists and activists



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

See complete target group list [here](#).

## Building Responses Together

A co-design process led by CIVICUS in 2019 produced the Building Responses Together collective, focused on providing referrals and coordination of rapid response mechanisms across 10 organisations and coalitions 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, matching funding for impactful work that requires additional resources and avoiding duplication and double funding.

Although it is now coordinated by Global Focus, our 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 Building Responses Together enabled us to facilitate safe and trust-based information sharing to enhance both short-term responses and grantees' resilience and sustainability in the medium and longer-terms.



Curated list of progressive donors supporting activists, civil society organisations and small, informal civil society groups

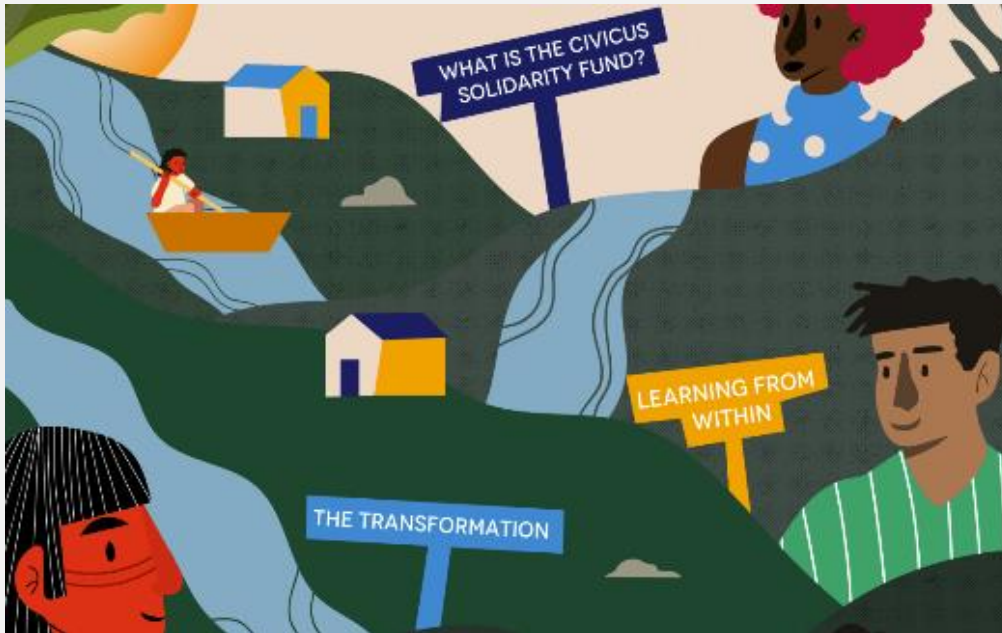
## Donor Finder and Rapid Response Donor Finder

An updated and expanded edition of the Donor Finder was published to enhance access to resources for smaller, less formal groups. The directory 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 a lot of attention and is highly praised by its users. An online event about it attracted 721 registrations and 234 unique attendees and scored 86 points in the Net Promoter Score, widely interpreted as excellent on the -100 to 100 scale. The recent Donor Finder edition has been downloaded 1,643 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, CSOs and informal civil society groups to respond to attacks, sudden emergencies, crises or advocacy opportunities and to avoid and mitigate threats. It was downloaded 770 times in its first two months.





## CIVICUS Solidarity Fund

Each year the Solidarity Fund, along with the Membership Advisory 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' recognised the fund as an innovative practice and invited us to conduct a training for Danish international NGOs on how to make their funding practices more inclusive and participatory. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development also listed the fund as an example of an initiative to lessen administrative and financial burdens in its toolkit 'Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance'.

## Defender and Diplomats Dialogues

These 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 and brought more than 300 HRDs and members of the diplomatic community together. In Mozambique, HRDs enhanced their understanding of how to approach diplomatic missions for support and partnerships when civic space restrictions occur. In Benin, diplomats and diplomatic missions identified advocacy strategies to address restrictions on the freedoms of expression and assembly. In South Africa, HRDs working with grassroots communities were introduced to diplomats and relationships were built so that they are now able to engage bilaterally, providing small grants, protection and diplomatic support. In both Mozambique and Benin, dialogues have continued, in a further demonstration of the relevance of 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 came 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

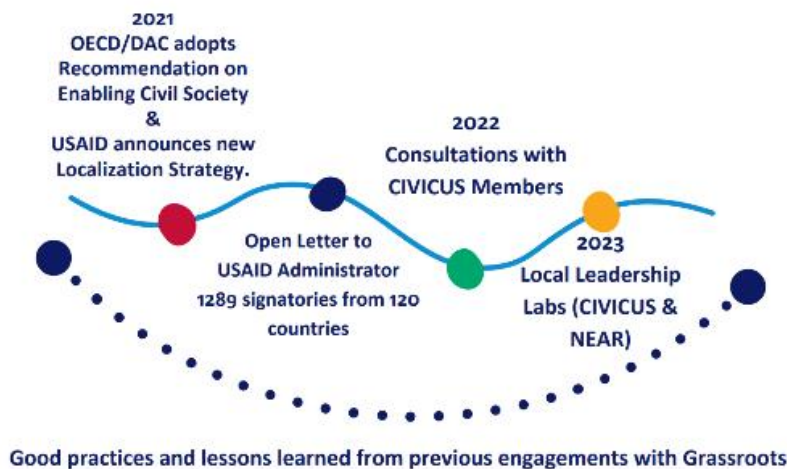
In March 2023, a representation of CIVICUS grassroots members had the opportunity to engage directly with senior staff of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of USAID's consultation to revise a new local leadership indicator it planned to introduce in its metrics framework.

This effort was part of the follow-up to the open letter that CIVICUS, the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) and other allies had sent to USAID Administrator Power alongside 1,289 southern civil society signatories calling for a meaningful operationalisation of the new USAID

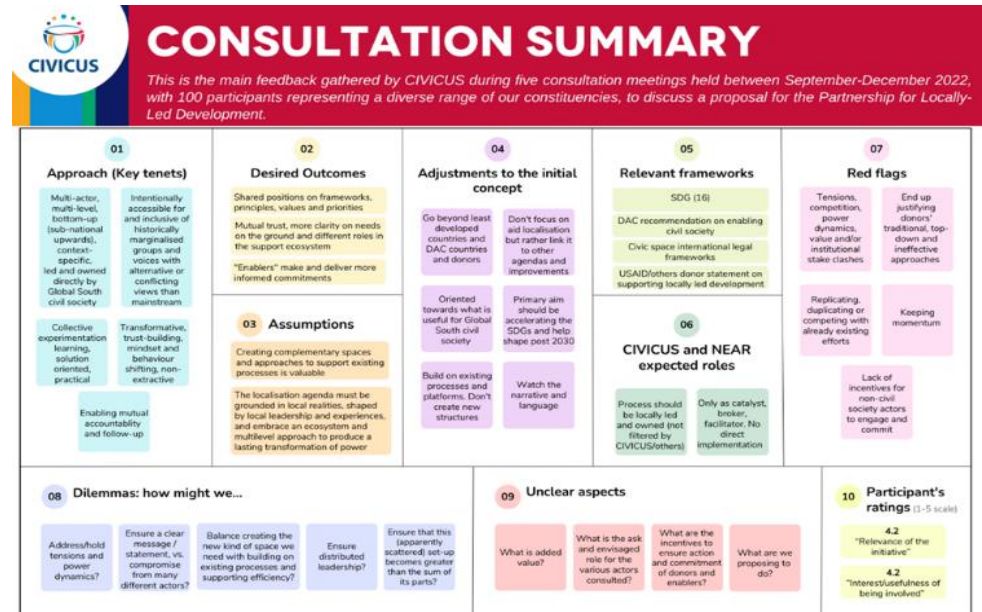
localisation commitments.

Another element directly following up from that advocacy letter was the organisation of five meetings engaging over 100 participants representing diverse CIVICUS members and key stakeholders including USAID and 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 LLL, which started in April 2023 thanks to the financial support from the Hilton Foundation.

### Project Background



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's hubs in New York and Geneva connect CIVICUS and its alliance to key UN bodies. CIVICUS has more than 70 staff members, half based in South Africa and the other half based in more than 20 countries.

A key organisational priority this year has been the transition to our new strategic plan for 2022-2027. Our strategy implementation workplan included elements on aligning ways of working, tracking our contribution to change and engaging our alliance in the delivery of our strategy.

Based on a ways of working analysis, we are deepening our programmatic focus through three new cross-cutting workstreams: Evidence and Engagement, Advocacy and Solidarity Action, and Innovation and Sustainability – each one to be led by a chief officer, growing 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 gathered in South Africa for all-staff retreat in 2023.

## NEW PROJECTS

CIVICUS has initiated two new projects: the Digital Democracy Initiative (DDI) and Local Leadership Labs (LLL).

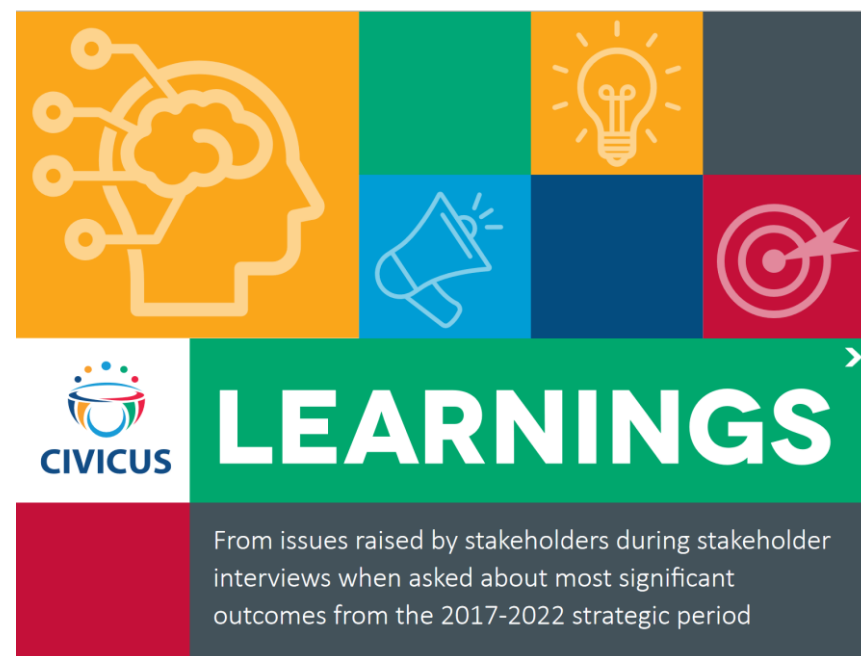
DDI will be driven by partners to strengthen the financial and non-financial support infrastructure for civil society in the global south to safely harness digital technologies in pursuit of greater civic and democratic freedoms.

LLL builds 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 conducted a review of CIVICUS's work over the 2017-2022 strategic period to assess its most significant outcomes. The review was undertaken through a two-stage process that included an in-depth, external review of key strategic documents and 50 interviews with selected CIVICUS staff, alliance members and external partners to corroborate the information collected and curate the most impactful stories.

In addition to a range of examples of impact, the review offered suggestions to integrate the emerging findings in the implementation of our current strategic plan.



## PEOPLE AND ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES

Since 2021, CIVICUS has been implementing a racial justice action plan that now includes a new learning and development (L&D) framework. We have also furthered 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 rollout 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 entailed 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. As a result of these changes, in this reporting period 73 per cent of the interns hired were from the global South, 59 per cent were Black Africans and 40 per cent were South Africans.

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

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 searching for joint solutions. 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 reports every year 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.





## SYSTEMS, LEARNING AND IMPACT

We continue to invest in resilient systems and processes encompassing financial, security and knowledge management as well as their alignment with 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, our 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 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 DDI 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 more than 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 CHARM and the Innovation for Change global hubs. This year, with in-person events resumed, we were able to further strengthen these relationships through board engagements with AGNA and YAT representatives during the November 2022 and May 2023 board meetings.

The CIVICUS membership database grew by 17 per cent, 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 Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania. Only Europe had a lower growth rate, at 8 per cent. However, CIVICUS does not have a membership growth strategy, and the approach for this strategic period is about moving members from transactional relationships to a more solidarity-based engagement model. This means stronger decentralised connections among members making the alliance less about development opportunities and more about collective action. This is currently reflected in the role played by members in co-designing the WeRise! and LLL 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 aligned with CIVICUS's strategy. Through this 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 towards 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.

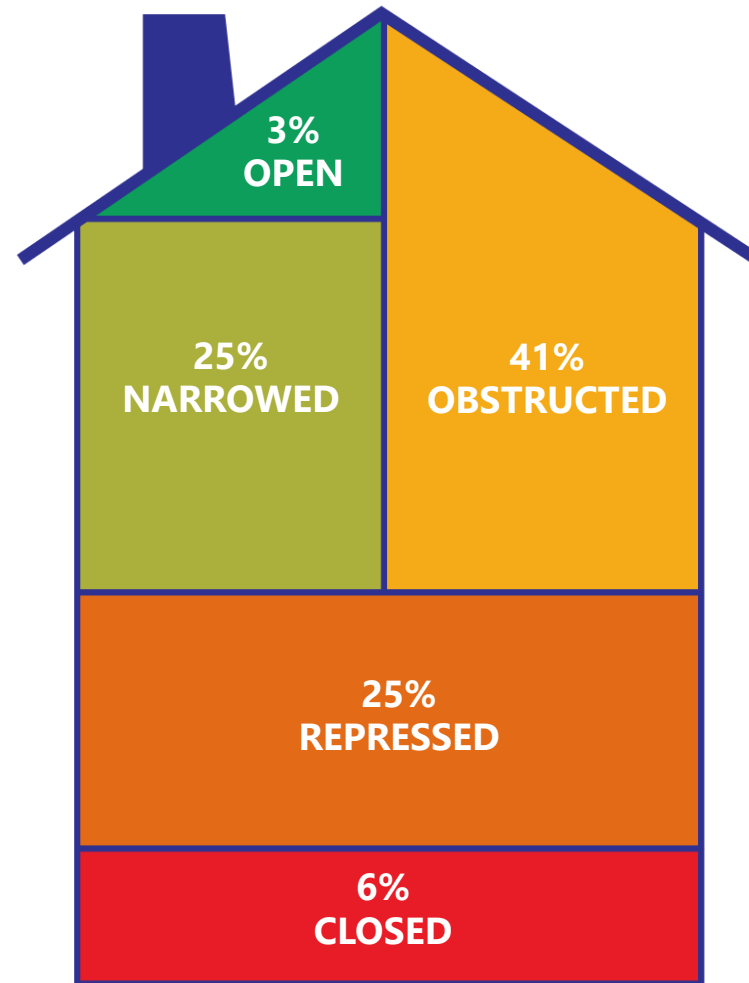
The hybrid CIVICUS Annual General Meeting (AGM) took place on 30 November 2022. Two hundred members attended the hybrid meeting, a similar number to 2020 but a decrease from last year's 260. The AGM provides a platform for members to engage directly with the Board and Secretariat on progress made against 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 Connect Humanity, End Water Poverty, FAIR SHARE for Women Leaders, Innovation for Change, KujaLink and Peace Direct. The most popular activity during the fair was the regional roundtables, in which members took part in staff-facilitated networking sessions 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 –, selected based on needs assessments from previous CIVICUS Solidarity Fund applications and relevant available content to meet those needs.

## ALLIANCE ENGAGEMENT

2022 - 2023



WHAT IS THE  
QUALITY OF CIVIC  
SPACE WHERE OUR  
MEMBERS LIVE?

## MEMBERSHIP

“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**  
*International 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*  
Brazil



**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*  
UK



**Sarah Rose**  
*Social purpose consultant*  
UK/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 accountability to make fair, justified decisions.

The board is representative of CIVICUS's regional diversity and is composed of individual activists, grassroots groups and national and international CSOs. Eight new CIVICUS board members were elected and began three-year terms on 1 July 2023. Ten of the 13 board members are women. Dylan Mathews serves as chair and Sonia Kwami as vice chair.



## 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 expenditures 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 amounted to USD 10,670,243. The top three funders were the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, with USD 4,364,328, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, with USD 1,898,017, and the Ford Foundation with USD 1,174,684.

Overall, we had 12 donors: four bilateral governmental bodies and eight private foundations. Reserves remained steady.

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

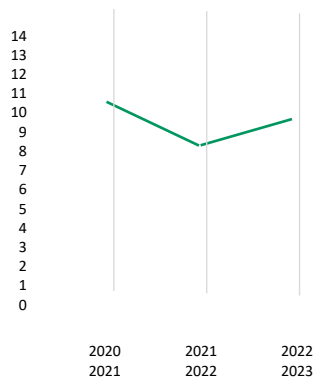
There was progress on the diversification, growth and optimisation of resources. Six new proposals were submitted and there were seven new and renewed partnerships arrangements. In-person and online exchanges were also held with the leadership groups and/or wider partner networks of our key supporters.

CIVICUS has diversified its donor base, which includes three new donors: the David Lucile Packard Foundation, Auxilium and The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. In addition, multiple new projects were secured in the current year, including additional funding from the 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 move forward our resourcing strategy and achieve our commitment to diversify CIVICUS's resourcing partnerships significantly.

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

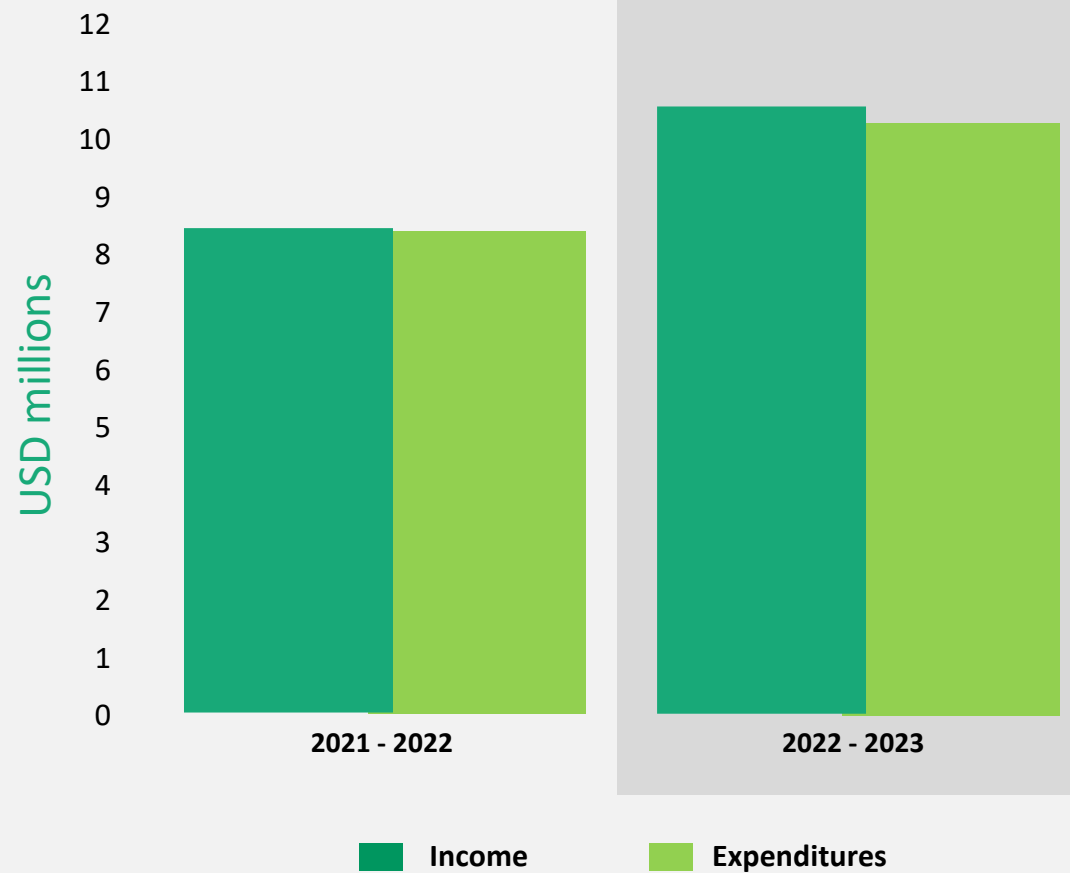
Revenue trend



Annual revenue in USD millions

## ANNUAL FINANCIAL FIGURES

CIVICUS's financial year is from **1 JULY 2022 to 30 JUNE 2023**



Fiscal Year  
2022-2023

**Total revenue**  
10,670,133 USD

**Donor revenue**  
10,438,310 USD

**Membership revenue**  
31,719 USD

**Expenditures**  
10,460,115 USD

**Reserve**  
1,421,644 USD

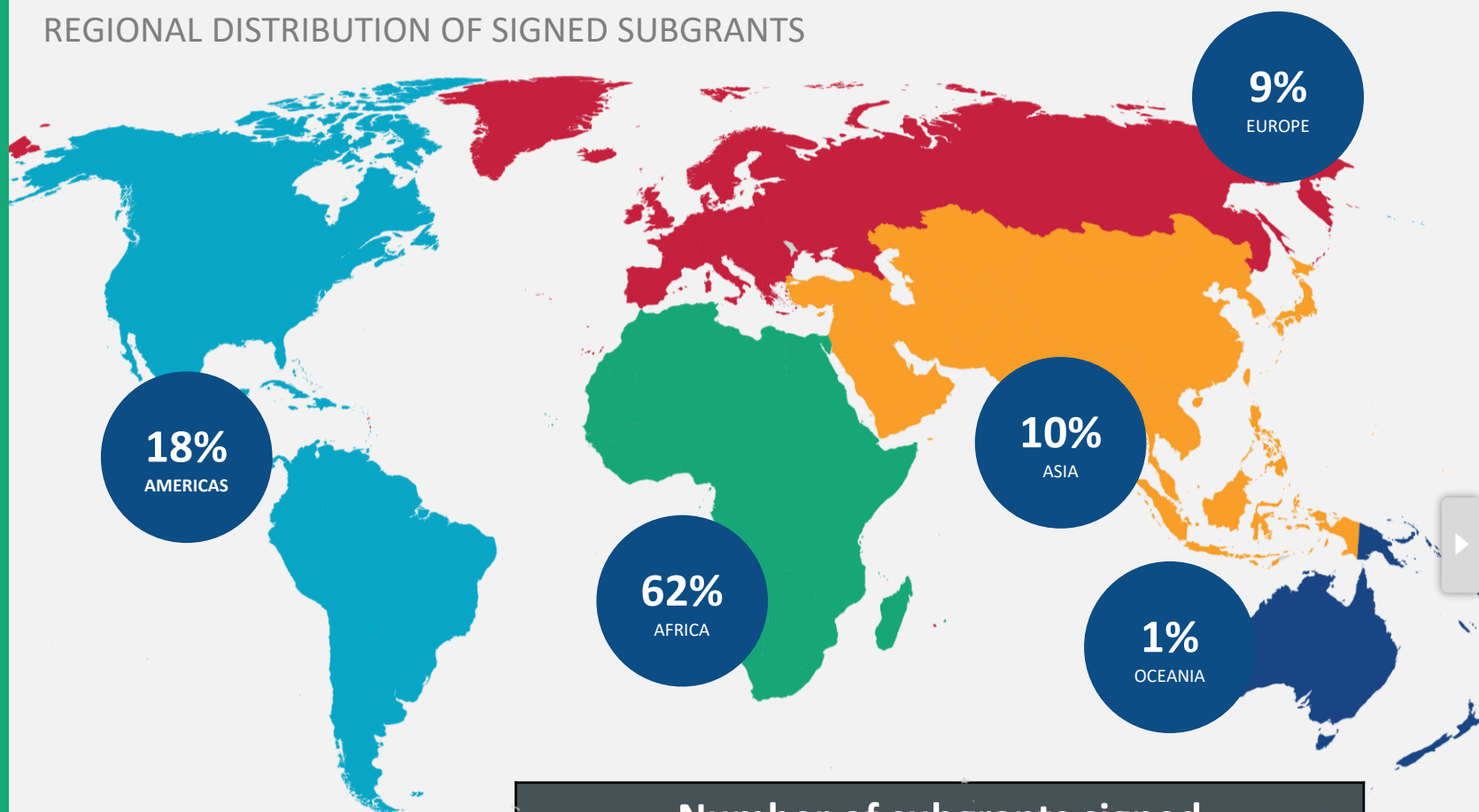
**USD 3.6 million** were passed on to CIVICUS members and partners and there were 121 subgrants signed.

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

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

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

## REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SIGNED SUBGRANTS

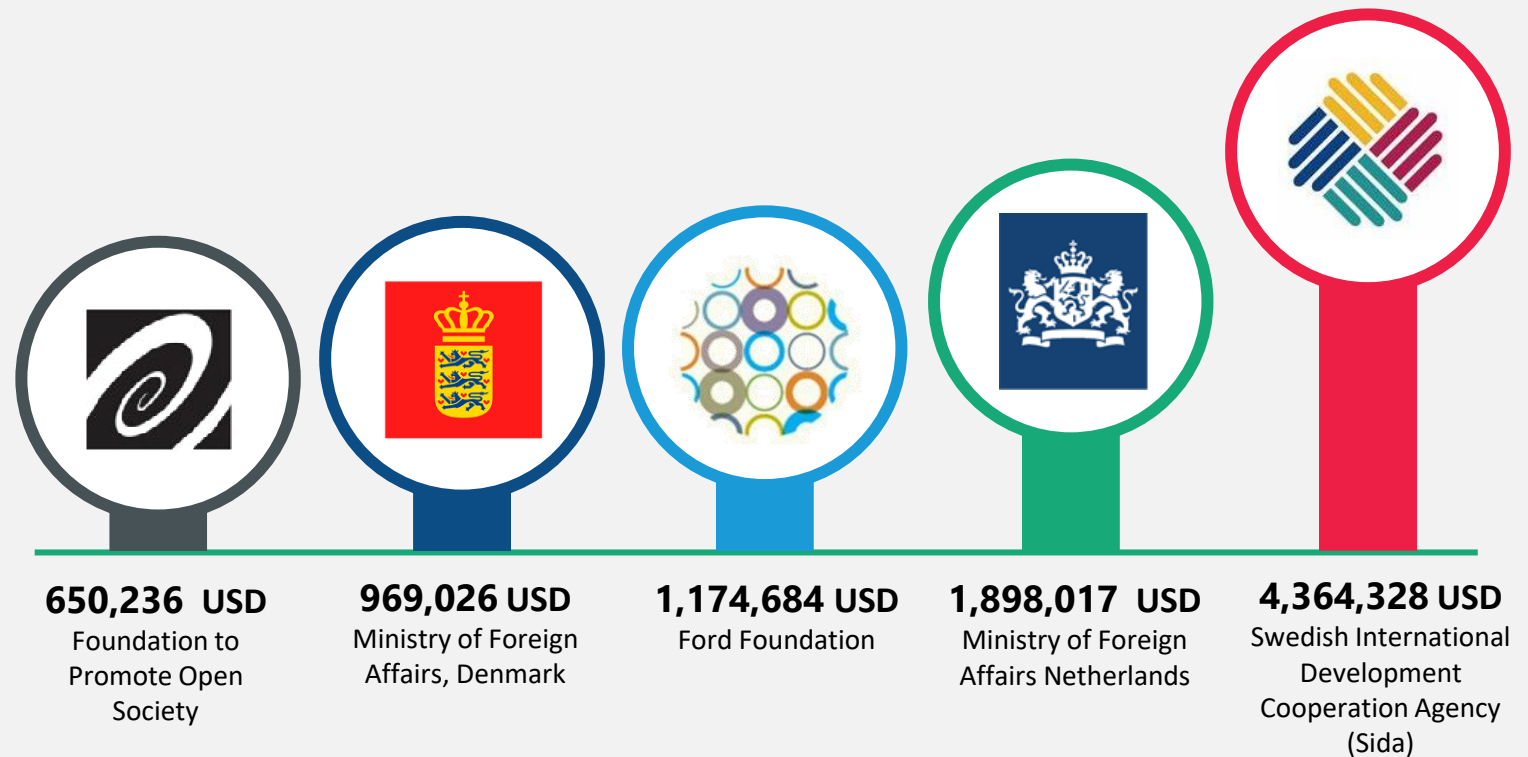


## Number of subgrants signed

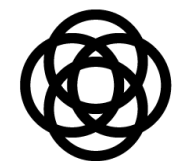
Region	2021-2022	2022-2023	Change
Africa	50	75	+25
Americas	11	22	+11
Asia	19	12	-7
Europe	13	11	-2
Oceania	17	1	-16
<b>Subgrants Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>+11</b>

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



AUXILIUM







## Annual reports

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

## Regular updates

- [CIVICUS Lens](#)
- [CIVICUS Monitor](#)

## 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

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

## Thematic reports

- [Global assessment of protest rights](#)



## Op-eds and blogs

- 26 analytical [op-eds](#)
- 14 [blogs](#)

## Media

- FoPA Podcast: [CIVICUS Voices: Season 2](#)
- [Grassroots Solidarity Revolution videos](#) (
- [JAM sessions toolkit](#)
- Videos: [Strengthening Civil Society in Latin America](#)



Coordinate  
targeted  
advocacy

## Advocacy

- 17 [open letters](#) providing targeted response
- 22 UPR [submissions](#)
- 64 [statements, letters and resolutions](#) negotiated with UN bodies in Geneva
- [COP27](#): focus on environmental and land rights 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](#)



Building  
counterpower  
with most  
affected  
groups

## #StandAsMyWitness

- [Interview](#) on the Philippines: 'This victory belongs to everyone who supported and fought with us'
- [Chronology](#) of Pakistani HRD Muhammad Ismail
- [Chronology](#) of Bahraini HRD 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+ fights in Africa
- [Youth trends in activism](#)
- [Youth Action Lab playbook](#)



Contribute to  
stronger emergency  
and sustained support  
ecosystems

## Grassroots research

- [Access to resources for civil Society in Latin America](#)
- [Five things grassroots activists want donors and allies to know](#)

## Media

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

## Resource finders

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



## CONNECT WITH US

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