



Interest  
Group on  
Civil Society

# MEPs Manifesto on Civil Society

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Across the European Union, civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in **promoting fundamental rights** and the **rule of law, amplifying** the voice of citizens, **strengthening** democracy, delivering **essential services**, and **ensuring that institutions remain accountable** to the people they serve.

However, in recent years, civic space across Europe **has come under mounting pressure** – from increasing legal and administrative restrictions, to growing mistrust and delegitimisation of the role of CSOs at EU level, including within the European Parliament itself. Such pressures threaten not only the organisations affected, but **also the EU’s foundational values** of participation, pluralism, and solidarity enshrined in the Treaties.

As Members of the European Parliament committed to safeguarding these foundations, **we endorse this Civil Society Manifesto as a pledge to support, protect, and meaningfully engage with civil society**, reaffirming its essential role in contributing to a democratic debate on policy issues.

## 1. Recognising civil society as a democratic pillar

Civil society is an invaluable guardian of the rule of law, human rights, and democratic governance. We recognise CSOs as integral democratic actors, not stakeholders to be consulted only occasionally or symbolically. We affirm our commitment to supporting their role in monitoring government actions, providing expertise, representing vulnerable groups, and contributing to policymaking.



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### **2. Defending fundamental rights**

We fully support the rights of civil society organisations to operate freely and independently throughout the European Union. This includes the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, participation in public life and policymaking, as well as the right to seek and receive funding. These rights are core democratic guarantees enshrined in EU treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and international human rights standards. We commit to countering any attempt to curtail these freedoms - whether through undue administrative burdens, intimidation, stigmatisation, or restrictive legislation.

### **3. Ensuring structural participation in policymaking**

We reaffirm the European Parliament's call for an interinstitutional agreement on civil dialogue and support the development of dialogue mechanisms to structurally involve civil society at all stages of policymaking - agenda-setting, drafting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation - as mandated by article 11 of the Treaty on European Union. Such mechanisms should be based on transparent procedures, timely access to information, and institutionalised dialogue formats that allow CSOs to contribute meaningfully and consistently.

Inclusive policymaking not only enhances democratic legitimacy and public trust, but also allows policymakers to gain deeper insight of the issues at stake and to design more effective solutions.

### **4. Supporting cross-border cooperation**

Civil society strengthens democracy not only within Member States, but across borders. From environmental protection to anti-corruption efforts, from social inclusion to human rights monitoring, many of today's key challenges require transnational collaboration.



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We therefore commit to promoting policies and legal frameworks that facilitate cross-border cooperation, like the European Cross-Border Association Directive (ECBA) endorsed by the European Parliament, enabling CSOs to operate and partner freely throughout the EU.

### **5. Ensuring sustainable and independent EU funding**

To carry out their public interest work effectively, CSOs require predictable, long-term, and politically independent funding. Sustainable financing is essential to ensure that civil society can continue to support and represent communities, and uphold democratic values without fear of reprisals or financial vulnerability. We endorse the development of EU funding programmes accessible to organisations in all Member States, with simplified procedures and safeguards against political interference. We commit to support the strengthening of funding dedicated to civil society within the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2028 - 2034, as well as the involvement of civil society actors in the shaping of funding programmes.

### **6. Monitoring the implementation of the EU Strategy for Civil Society**

Finally, we commit to monitoring and contributing to the implementation of the EU Strategy for Civil Society adopted by the European Commission in November 2025, to ensure that it translates into concrete improvements for civic space, participation, and fundamental freedoms across the Union and within the European Parliament.