



## CONFERENCE OF INGOs OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

### THREE-YEAR STRATEGY (2024-2027)

Adopted by the General Assembly on 15 October 2024

#### Introduction

The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (CINGO), established in 1976, is the representative body of international NGOs with participatory status<sup>1</sup> within the Council of Europe (CoE)<sup>2</sup>. It is civil society's representative body ('pillar') in what is called the CoE "quadrilogue." The other three pillars are the Committee of Ministers (CoM), the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Congress).<sup>3</sup>

Exchange and collaborative working between all the bodies of the CoE is essential for the CoE to progress its mission to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law<sup>4</sup>, and to create an inclusive Europe where civil society has protected democratic freedoms and social rights.

In recent years, the CoE has further reinforced its commitment to integrating civil society perspectives across its work, notably in the 2019 Helsinki decisions of the Committee of Ministers<sup>5</sup>, in the 2023 Reykjavik Declaration<sup>6</sup> and the subsequent Secretary General's Roadmap on Civil Society Engagement 2024-2027<sup>7</sup>. These commitments are the basis for a strengthened engagement with civil society. CINGO continues to develop its role and ways of working to fulfil its mission within the quadrilogue, to support the CoE mission and to promote the voice and power of civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/participatory-status>

<sup>2</sup> Rules of Procedure of the Conference of INGOs adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 16 December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> [The Conference of INGOs in a nutshell \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/participatory-status)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/the-council-of-europe-at-a-glance>

<sup>5</sup> Decisions of the CoE Committee of Ministers adopted at the 129<sup>th</sup> Session in Helsinki (on 17 May 2019) "A shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe – The need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe", complemented by a set of CoE Secretary General's proposals in June 2020 (SG/Inf (2020)8).

<sup>6</sup> Reykjavik The [Reykjavik Declaration](https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/the-council-of-europe-at-a-glance) (CM(2023)57-final, 17 May 2023), reconfirmed the need to reinforce the Council of Europe's engagement with civil society: "We also call for a review and further reinforcement of the Organization's outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organizations and national human rights institutions." As the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy, appended to the Declaration, reaffirm: "civil society is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy" [United around our values - Reykjavik declaration \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/the-council-of-europe-at-a-glance)

<sup>7</sup> The Road Map <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/secretary-general-s-roadmap-on-civil-society-engagement-with-the-council-of-europe> (SG/Inf(2023)28)

CINGO brings the essential perspectives of diverse, organized civil society into the CoE to inform and support its priority agendas. This is a challenging task given the cultural, ethnic and other diversity of civil society across the Council of Europe area but makes the role of CINGO all the more crucial. Through engaging and giving voice to civil society, CINGO can channel the views and expertise of its members to strengthen the work of the CoE and its ability to deliver for the citizens of Europe. This includes advancing participatory democracy, the principles of good governance and active citizenship, and freedom of association.<sup>8</sup>

**The mission of CINGO** is to be

***The authentic voice of diverse civil society within the Council of Europe member states, representing national and international perspectives, and supporting the vision of a Europe of peace founded on the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.***

### **Three-year strategy 2024 -27**

CINGO is required under its Rules of Procedure to produce a three-year strategy. This Strategy is a framework which sets the direction and guides the development of CINGO. It lays out Strategic Priorities and focal points for actions to delivering tangible impact, recognising that specific priorities will evolve over the three years and urgent matters will arise.

The Strategy provides a framework for reporting and accountability within CINGO and within the CoE. The Standing Committee and President oversee implementation of this Strategy and report back and involve members in reviewing progress annually in the CINGO General Assembly.

This strategy for 2024-2027 builds on the 2021-2024 edition. It has been developed by the CINGO Standing Committee in the summer of 2024 in consultation with CINGO members. The text takes account of recent developments in the CoE and its expressed commitment to civil society, the overarching Mission and priorities.

The CINGO Strategy for 2024-2027 also reflects on a radically changed external context for the CoE region since the last Strategy: ongoing Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine, challenges of democratic backsliding and the rise of populist, anti-democratic forces in many countries, the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence and its human rights implications, and the deepening triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss<sup>9</sup>

The Strategy for 2024-2027 will be proposed for adoption by a vote at the CINGO General Assembly on 16 October 2024.

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<sup>8</sup> Rules of Procedure of the Conference of INGOs (2020). The Conference is governed in accordance with the Rules of Procedure. It operates under the rules and mission of the Council of Europe according to Resolution CM/Res (2016)3 ([Decision of the Ministers' Deputies \(coe.int\)](#)).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/un-environment-assembly-advances-collaborative-action-triple>

## Overarching Strategic Priorities for CINGO 2024-2027

### *External*

1. Ensuring freedom of expression, assembly, association, and defending liberal democratic values.
2. Strengthening the effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights' system and rule of law.
3. Fighting inequalities and actively promoting the European Social Charter.
4. Promoting equality, anti-discrimination and protection of marginalized and at-risk groups.
5. Promoting civil society action on the Triple Planetary (Environmental) Crisis<sup>10</sup> and the human rights consequences.

### *Internal*

6. Reinforcing the role of CINGO as the CoE civil society pillar through further developing CINGO members' systematic contribution to CoE bodies.
7. Strengthening CINGO's internal and external communications and participatory approaches.

## Focal points

To realize the Strategy, the seven Priorities are matched with focal points for action. These are tangible 'starting point' actions for each Priority, referencing the existing CINGO 'toolbox, sometimes deepening existing ways of working, sometimes' indicating new ways of working and adaptations to current pressures and events. The focal point actions will therefore evolve throughout the period of the Strategy.

**Priority 1:** Ensuring freedom of expression, assembly and association and defending liberal democratic values.

- **Focal Point:** CINGO will develop its ability to act, speak out, influence, and protect civil society from threats to Freedom of Association (CINGO core remit).<sup>11 12</sup>
  - *Activities:*

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<sup>10</sup> [https://unfccc.int/news/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis?gad\\_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCCQjw05i4BhDiARIsAB\\_2wFA1WmVnS3oYh8fuZUrdYbVw5JU3gnn7jJpAYxt1QIrmUFZGGxwIbpwaAoVtEALw\\_wcB](https://unfccc.int/news/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCCQjw05i4BhDiARIsAB_2wFA1WmVnS3oYh8fuZUrdYbVw5JU3gnn7jJpAYxt1QIrmUFZGGxwIbpwaAoVtEALw_wcB)

<sup>11</sup> See the 2018 Report "New restrictions on NGO activities in Council of Europe member States" (<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/24801/html>)

<sup>12</sup> For CINGO this priority naturally includes ensuring academic freedom and advocating for democratic education.

- Participate and bring voice of civil society in the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDDEM)<sup>13</sup> and other key bodies of the CoE focused on promotion of democracy.
- Form a coordinating group on freedom of association and promotion of liberal democracy to ensure progress on the following actions.
- Provide support and advocacy for NGOs under duress and experiencing oppressive measures within member states including visits to civil society (outside of formal country visits).
- Undertake formal country visits at the invitation of member states, engaging with civil society, providing timely feedback to CINGO members and the relevant CoE bodies, publicizing reports on the visits more widely.
- With the support of the CINGO Expert Council on NGO Law, provide policy advice to CINGO members, the CoE and its member states.
- Reach out to and act to protect civil society groups and organisations facing all forms<sup>14</sup> of targeted and specific discrimination, exploitation and threats including (but not limited to) LGBTQI communities, religious, national, and ethnic minorities, women and girls, disabled people and youth.
- Actively participate in and help shape the agenda of the World Forum for Democracy.
- Undertake educational and promotional activities to raise awareness and understanding of civil society rights e.g., webinars, publications, social media.

**Priority 2:** Strengthening the effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights’ system and rule of law.

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<sup>13</sup> [Steering committee on Democracy \(CDDDEM\) - Steering Committee on Democracy - CDDDEM \(coe.int\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> For a list of forms of discrimination addressed in Council of Europe texts, see in particular:

- Article 14 of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#): “The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.”
- section 2 of the appendix to Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2024\)4](#) on combating hate crime: “(...) race”(…), colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. (...)
- the box under paragraph 3 of the Council of Europe [Gender Equality Strategy](#): “(...)such as sex, gender, “race”(…), colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, sex characteristics, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or other status.

- **Focal Point:** Promoting the role of civil society in upholding the convention system and engaging in monitoring European Court of Human Rights' (ECtHR) judgments.
  - *Activities*
    - Empower civil society to engage with the convention system and its implementation through providing information, learning resources and engagement tools
    - Promote the role and capacity of NGOs and other civil society actors to monitor implementation of ECtHR judgements at national level, using all relevant CoE instruments that call for civil society engagement in human rights implementation and monitoring to substantiate our demands.<sup>15</sup>
    - Push for formal recognition of CINGO role within the CoE convention rights implementation and monitoring system.
    - Use CINGO country visits to promote and monitor implementation of ECtHR judgements, and capacity of civil society to engage in the Collective Complaints system of the Social Rights Charter.
    - Engage in monitoring of new convention rights and evolution of law in the ECtHR including the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence<sup>16i</sup> and the developing law on human rights and the environment<sup>17</sup>

**Priority 3:** Fighting inequalities and pursuing the revised European Social Charter.

- **Focal Point:** Promote and support use of the Social Charter by civil society actors.
  - *Activities:*
    - Advocate for the implementation of the revised European Social Charter, including participation in the Social Rights Committee of the CoE
    - Empower NGOs to participate in the Collective Complaints system and in the Social Rights tracker
    - Identify and raise awareness of current and pressing social rights priorities for nation states including (but not limited to) modern slavery and human trafficking, migration, youth and children's rights, older people's rights, disability rights, poverty and inequality, LGBTQI rights and equality and freedom from violence for women and girls.

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<sup>15</sup> CM/Rec(2007)14 on legal status of NGOs, CM/Rec(2018)11 on protection and promotion of civil society in Europe, CM/rec(2016)3 on participatory status.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/artificial-intelligence/the-framework-convention-on-artificial-intelligence>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-rule-of-law/humanrights-environment>

- Mark World Day for Eradication of Poverty with the CoE and other partners.

**Priority 4:** Promoting equality, anti-discrimination and protection of marginalized and at-risk groups.

- **Focal Point:** Promoting and taking action on both focused and intersectional equalities across the work of CINGO, including in its own committees, aligning closely with the work in CoE.<sup>1819</sup>
  - *Activities:*
    - Promote all the relevant equalities and anti-discrimination strategies, conventions and recommendations of the Council of Europe (and its key partners) within CINGO's ways of working and across its activities<sup>20</sup>.
    - Take an active 'minority rights' perspective across CINGO own work to ensure marginalized, stigmatized and disenfranchised groups are supported and visible.
    - Establish a task force to deliver strategy on equality to shape the position and priority engagement areas of CINGO.
    - Create a specific strategy on youth to improve its own work with young people and define major issues to be addressed by the Conference in close alignment with the upcoming youth strategy of the CoE. It shall give special importance to reaching out to young people that normally have no access to European institutions.

**Priority 5** Promoting civil society action on the Triple Planetary (Environmental) Crisis<sup>21</sup> and the human rights consequences.

- **Focal Point:** Promoting environmental sustainability and action on climate justice across the work of CINGO and promoting strong commitment to action in CoE.

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<sup>18</sup> Intercultural dialogue and education across CINGO activities are vital to ensure equality, anti-discrimination and protection of the vulnerable.

<sup>19</sup> CINGO acts as part of the accountability infrastructure of CoE, engaging and organising INGOs to hold countries and organizations to account for their adoption and operation of key commitments of the CoE.

<sup>20</sup> Key examples of this include The Istanbul Convention on violence against women and girls; the Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029; GREVIO; The European Committee of Social Rights; The EU Commission and its agencies including the Fundamental Rights Agency, [European Commission against Racism \(ECRI\) Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities \(FCNM\)](#) [European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages \(ECRML\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> [https://unfccc.int/news/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis?gad\\_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCCQjw05i4BhDiARIsAB\\_2wfA1WmVnS3oYh8fuZUrdYbVw5JU3gnn7jPjAYxt1QIrmUFZGGxwIbpwaAoVtEALw\\_wcB](https://unfccc.int/news/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCCQjw05i4BhDiARIsAB_2wfA1WmVnS3oYh8fuZUrdYbVw5JU3gnn7jPjAYxt1QIrmUFZGGxwIbpwaAoVtEALw_wcB)

- *Activities:*
  - Promote adoption of an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights on the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment within the CoE, and support all activities to react to the triple planetary crisis with all the instruments available to the CoE.
  - Ensure expert CINGO representation in the Environment and Human Rights Drafting Group (CDDH-ENV).
  - Ensure environmental protection and the climate crisis are represented in the work of CINGO committees, as a dedicated and cross-cutting theme. Help develop a coherent system of standards and draw attention to economically weak regions with little resistance to environmental looters.
  - Integrate support for the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>22</sup> across our work including in actions on the Triple Planetary Crisis.

**Priority 6:** Reinforcing the role of CINGO as the CoE civil society pillar through further developing the CINGO members’ systematic contribution to the CoE bodies.

- **Focal Point:** To develop systematic and expert representation of CINGO within all major bodies of the CoE, according to the themes of this Strategy, and encouraging wider consultation with civil society across the CoE.

- *Activities:*
  - Develop CINGO governance processes to ensure representation of CINGO in all key bodies including Steering Committees, Drafting Groups, ad-hoc groups, PACE and the Committee of Ministers and improve feedback from those activities to the Standing Committee and Conference.
  - Work with the CoE to increase systematic consultations with CINGO by all key CoE bodies (as above)
  - Review rules of procedure (annex) to require CINGO representatives to consult members, report back and enter into dialogue with the membership.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

- Increase resourcing, funding and organisational capacity to systematize representative and consultative activities by andwith CINGO across the CoE.

**Priority 7:** Developing CINGO's internal and external communications and participatory approaches

- **Focal Point:** Improve internal and external outreach and visibility of CINGO with the aim of informing and engaging wider civil society in CINGO's work and reaching more diverse groups/ audiences.
    - *Activities:*
      - Raise CINGO profile and visibility within the CoE through CINGO-branded events online and offline, promoting content created by CINGO (analyses, publications, statements, etc.).
      - Implement a structured communications approach that provides regular information to and engages with members through website, email updates, social media and traditional media outreach, special events and information products.
      - Develop CINGO's visibility across our sector through promotion and publication through the channels of the CoE and through social and traditional media and public facing events online and in person.
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