

21 October 2025

Concept note

At the 2023 Reykjavík Summit, Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe adopted the landmark Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, setting out a common vision of the key elements of a functioning democracy. These Principles underscore the vital role of civil society in upholding democratic values and safeguarding fundamental freedoms across Europe.

By fostering trust, encouraging participation, and promoting accountability, civil society strengthens democratic resilience. It helps ensure that public institutions remain responsive and inclusive. Yet, civil society actors are facing growing constraints. Opportunities for meaningful participation in public decision-making are shrinking, while restrictions on organisations and individuals defending human rights – including those working on migration, women's rights and gender equality, LGBTI equality, and environmental justice – are becoming more pronounced. Legislative restrictions on civic space, harassment and surveillance of civil society actors and human rights defenders, the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), and increasingly limited funding all undermine civic engagement.

The 2025 Report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, [Towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe](#), highlights the urgency of protecting civic space as a cornerstone of democratic renewal. It calls for stronger cooperation among member states, international organisations, and civil society to reverse current trends and reinforce democratic institutions.

In response, the process leading to the [New Democratic Pact](#) aims to revitalise democracy through innovation, institutional renewal, and civic empowerment. This high-level event will contribute to that effort by exploring how civic space can be strengthened at both national and international levels. It will showcase practical initiatives for monitoring civic space and inspire new approaches for civil society and member states to jointly advance the Pact and build a more inclusive and resilient democratic future.

The [conference](#) will provide a strategic platform for reinforcing stakeholder commitment to developing and strengthening a coherent mechanism for monitoring and protecting civic space across Council of Europe member states. It will facilitate the exchange of best practices and the formulation of concrete proposals – including policy recommendations, collaborative frameworks, and pilot initiatives – aimed laying foundations for such a mechanism. In doing so, the event will also contribute to advancing the New Democratic Pact for Europe, by articulating actionable insights to strengthen civic space as a cornerstone of democratic renewal.



Objectives

- Foster sustained dialogue and strategic cooperation on civic space across Europe, identifying policy gaps and co-developing solutions to strengthen an enabling environment for civil society.
- Promote international collaboration and diplomatic engagement to protect and expand civic space through joint initiatives and protection mechanisms, policy innovation, and shared commitments under the New Democratic Pact for Europe.
- Ensure meaningful civil society participation in shaping the New Democratic Pact for Europe through inclusive consultation and representation in decision-making processes.

Practical information

- The [conference](#) will feature moderated panel discussions with diverse speakers from civil society, member states, and international organisations.
- Each panel will include structured opportunities for audience engagement, such as Q&A sessions, live polling, and facilitated dialogue segments to encourage active participation, foster dynamic exchange and generate concrete ideas.
- The event will take place in English and French, with interpretation provided, and will be live-streamed.
- An accompanying programme will include an exhibition space for materials and a civic space resource table showcasing reports, standards, case law, and tools.

