COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

CSO Grant to promote democracy and CSO engagement with Council of Europe
DICS/Grant/2026/1

Project	Empowering civil society: contribution to democratic renewal
Awarding entity	**COUNCIL OF EUROPE** Civil Society Unit
Funding	Voluntary Contribution 2026 Democratic Institutions and Civil Society Division and Ordinary Budget 2027 Democratic Institutions and Civil Society Division
Duration	Projects shall be implemented by 31 October 2027. Reporting requirements shall be completed by 30 November 2027.
Estimated starting date	01 February 2027
Issuance date	09 November 2026
Deadline for applications	02 December 2026

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APPENDICES:
- Appendix I - Application Form
- Appendix II - Provisional budget (Template)
- Appendix III - Template Grant Agreement

HOW TO APPLY?

- Complete and sign the **Application Form** (See **Appendix I**)
- Attach a provisional budget (using the template reproduced in **Appendix II**)
- Attach the other supporting documents:
  - A register extract or other document showing the legal status of the Applicant(s)
  - Latest available annual report of the (Lead) Applicant
  - Latest available audited annual financial statement of the (Lead) Applicant together with the audit report
  - A list of member organisations of the Applicant(s)
- Send these documents in electronic form (Word or PDF) to the following e-mail address: NGO-Unit@coe.int. Emails should contain the following reference in subject: "Application for CSO Grant".
- Applications must be received before 2.12.2026 at 23.59 Central European Time (CET)

I. INTRODUCTION

This call for proposals is launched in the framework of the Council of Europe Project "4670 - Empowering civil society: contribution to democratic renewal". The project aims to strengthen the capacity of selected civil society organisations to understand and apply Council of Europe standards on democracy and civic space and to make more effective use of the Organisation's mechanisms and opportunities for engagement. The project will provide targeted information and capacity-building activities on relevant Council of Europe standards, working methods and participation opportunities.

Project proposals shall aim to produce an added value to the Council of Europe efforts in this domain.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE PROJECT

CSOs play an essential role in protecting democratic standards, monitoring public policies and enabling citizens to participate in public affairs. However, restrictions on civic freedoms, polarisation and limited access to decision-making increasingly constrain their ability to do so effectively. The Reykjavik Principles for Democracy recognise a safe and enabling environment for civil society as a prerequisite for functioning democracy. The project supports this commitment by helping CSOs understand and use Council of Europe standards, monitoring mechanisms and opportunities for engagement.

The Secretary General's latest annual report, the Commissioner for Human Rights' statements and the Council of Europe's wider policy work all underline the need to strengthen democratic resilience and security and ensure that civil society can participate safely and meaningfully in public life. The Commissioner has drawn attention to challenges including restrictive legislation and administrative practices, stigmatisation, intimidation, judicial harassment, surveillance, threats to human rights defenders and barriers to funding and international co-operation. These pressures can be particularly acute for organisations working on women's rights, minority rights, migration, LGBTQI rights and accountability.

The project addresses a clear implementation gap: although many civil society actors wish to contribute to policymaking beyond electoral processes, they lack sufficient knowledge of Council of Europe standards or working methods and participation channels are not always sufficiently known or accessible. The purpose of the Project is to strengthen democratic governance in Council of Europe member states through meaningful civil society participation.

In particular, it aims to ensure that targeted civil society organisations contribute more actively and meaningfully to policymaking and reviewing the implementation of laws, decisions and policies at national and Council of Europe levels. Targeted civil society organisations will strengthen their capacity to apply Council of Europe standards and tools in their advocacy and monitoring work and to engage effectively with relevant Council of Europe mechanisms and processes.

Through the project targeted civil society organisations will have access to information, dialogue and peer-exchange opportunities concerning engagement with the Council of Europe in the field of democratic governance, and they are provided with capacity-building activities and practical resources on applying Council of Europe standards and tools for reinforcing democracy and civil society and for monitoring and protecting civic space.

Through improved knowledge, practical skills and access to engagement opportunities, participating CSOs will be better equipped to contribute to policymaking, monitor and follow-up developments affecting civic space and cooperate with the Council of Europe. The project will thereby contribute to more inclusive democratic processes and to the implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, the Roadmap on Civil Society Engagement 2024–2027 and the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Project partners include national and international civil society organisations working on democratic governance, civic participation, civic space and human rights, academic actors contributing to relevant Council of Europe processes, and members and alumni of the Schools of Political Studies.

III. BUDGET AVAILABLE

The indicative available budget under this call for proposals is 60.000 € (sixty thousand Euros). The Council of Europe intends to award a maximum of three grants of a maximum amount of 20.000 € (twenty thousand Euros) each.

Applicants should note that the budget for this call for proposals has not yet been formally adopted. The Council of Europe will complete the grant-award procedure only if and when the budget is formally adopted. In addition, subject to the availability of funds and extension of the Project initial duration, the Council of Europe reserves the right not to award all available funds, and/or to redistribute the available funds in a different manner depending on the project proposals received and on the outcome of the call for proposals.

The Council of Europe shall not be held liable for any consequences arising from the circumstances described above.

REQUIREMENTS

1. General objective

The grants will fund a maximum of four projects designed to inform civil society and the wider public about Council of Europe standards on democracy and civic space; build CSOs' practical capacity to apply those standards in advocacy, monitoring and dialogue with public authorities; and raise awareness of relevant mechanisms and opportunities to engage with the Organisation.

The projects will help CSOs make Council of Europe standards, mechanisms and engagement opportunities better known and more practically useful in their advocacy, monitoring and dialogue with public authorities, thus supporting the Council of Europe's commitments to meaningful civil society participation and an enabling environment for democratic governance.

The projects will in particular:

- inform about existing standards and work done by the Council of Europe to make member states more resilient to pressures undermining democratic values, promote democratic governance, strengthen civic space and enhance civil participation in political decision-making, including the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy;
- build the capacity of civil society organisations to apply relevant Council of Europe standards on democracy, civic space and civil society in advocacy, monitoring and dialogue, to advance their causes;
- raise awareness about existing mechanisms and opportunities to engage with the Organisation and help to identify new opportunities of cooperation and interaction between the Council of Europe and civil society.

Each project shall involve participants from at least four Council of Europe member states and design and deliver activities through their own networks using a participatory approach. The countries to be covered by the proposal shall be specified in the application form.

Specific attention should be paid to a human rights approach and a balanced geographical and gender representation of the stakeholders. The projects should consider how gender may shape access to resources, networks, leadership and influence in the areas they address, and consider whether women and men, and organisations representing different groups, can access and benefit from the activities on an equitable basis. The projects should identify relevant gender-related barriers and explain how their proposed activities will promote equitable access and participation.

The projects should pay attention to the sustainability of results. This can be done by developing reusable materials, sharing learning through the stakeholders' networks and integrating the knowledge gained into ongoing advocacy, monitoring and capacity-building work. Sustainability considerations help extend the project's reach and support continued engagement with relevant Council of Europe mechanisms after funded activities end.

Communication and visibility will support the project's objectives by raising awareness of Council of Europe standards on democracy and civic space, sharing information about opportunities for civil society engagement with the Organisation, and disseminating the project's activities and results.

Each project should include a short results plan, including its activities, expected outputs, indicators and targets. Such a results plan could monitor the number of people and organisations reached, distinguishing direct participants from wider or indirect reach; participation by country, gender and relevant target group, where safe and feasible; change in participants' self-assessed knowledge of relevant Council of Europe standards, mechanisms and engagement opportunities, measured before and after activities; and participant feedback on relevance and usefulness.

2. Means of action

Each project should include a proportionate communication plan, identifying target audiences, intended messages and suitable channels for sharing activities and results.

At least two of the following activities should be included in each project:

- Raise awareness about Reykjavik Principles for Democracy and the Reykjavik Parameters
- Raise awareness about existing Council of Europe standards on civil society and civic space, such as the Recommendations CM/Rec(2026)15 on the legal status of civil society organisations in Europe and CM/Rec(2018)11 on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe.
- Raise awareness about existing Council of Europe tools related to opportunities for participating in Council of Europe standard setting, monitoring and cooperation activities, such as the Practical Guide for Civil Society and the Civil Society Portal.

Activities could include training, accessible information materials, peer learning, awareness-raising initiatives, conferences, seminars, dialogues, advocacy meetings, webinars and workshops. Applicants are invited to propose the most appropriate format(s) for achieving the project objectives.

3. Implementation period

The implementation period of the projects should start on 1 February 2027 (see indicative timetable under VIII. below) and shall not extend beyond 31 October 2027**.**

Reporting requirements shall be completed on 30 November 2027 at the latest.

Projects completed prior to the date of submission of the applications will be automatically excluded. As regard projects started prior to the date of submission of the applications, or prior to the date of signature of the grant agreement, only those costs incurred after the date of submission of the grant application could be eligible (provided the agreement concerned so provides).

4. Target stakeholders

Projects should target in particular the following key stakeholders:

- civil society representatives from international and national civil society organisations involved in advocacy, policymaking, and the representation of interests, and concerned with the subjects of democratic governance, civic participation, civic space and human rights;

- representatives of academia concerned with the subjects of democratic governance, civic participation, civic space and human rights (including members of the Council of Europe network of Schools of Political Studies and OCEAN – Open Council of Europe Academic Networks)

The above list is not exhaustive, and projects may propose targeting other relevant stakeholders, while keeping in mind the general objective of the Project.

5. Budgetary requirements

Project proposals shall be accompanied by a draft budget (See **Template Budget, in Appendix II**). The maximum contribution to be financed by the Council of Europe shall not exceed 20.000€ (twenty thousand Euros). The estimated budget must be consistent, accurate, clear, complete, and cost-effective, in light of the activities proposed.

Each Grantee shall also be required to contribute to the project either by way of its own resources or by contribution from third parties with an amount equivalent to at least 5% of the requested grant. Co-financing may take the form of financial or human resources, in-kind contributions or income generated by the action or project.

6. Further to the general objective, preference will be given to:

- Projects proposed by an INGO or consortium of CSOs with strong expertise and experience in advocacy, policymaking and representation of interests in the areas of democracy, civic space and human rights;
- Projects proposed by an INGO or consortium of CSOs with expertise of the Council of Europe standards or with experience of cooperating with the Council of Europe;

7. The following types of action will not be considered:

- Projects/actions providing financial support to third parties (re-granting schemes);
- Projects/actions concerning only or mainly individual scholarships for studies or training courses;
- Projects/actions supporting political parties.

8. Funding conditions:

The funds for each grant should in principle be distributed as follows:

- 70% will be paid to the Grantee or the Lead Grantee in case of a consortium when the Grant Agreement between the Parties is signed;
- the balance will be paid to the Grantee or the Lead Grantee in case of a consortium based on actual expenditures incurred, and after the presentation and acceptance by the Council of Europe of the final narrative and financial reports for the Grant implementation.

9. Reporting requirements:

- **narrative reporting** requires a full narrative report in English on the use made of the grant, the fulfilment of the objectives of the project, results achieved, and challenges encountered. The narrative report must supported by proportionate evidence such as activity materials, copy of the register of the participants during each of the events, including names, organisations and signatures of participants, anonymised participant feedback, examples of follow-up, photos of the events and links to blogs or articles written. The narrative report could summarise approaches that worked, barriers encountered and adaptations made during delivery, and provide examples of participants applying learning in advocacy, monitoring or dialogue. The narrative report shall include recommendations, in the light of the experience gathered during the initiative, for future action for strengthening Council of Europe engagement with civil society;

- **financial reporting** requires in particular a statement in the currency in which the Grant Agreement will be concluded (Euros), in English, stating the payments made for the implementation of the activities, certified by the responsible financial officer of the Grantees, accompanied by "appropriate original supporting documents" (see below). The Council of Europe reserves the right to ask for summary translations of invoices into English. If for legal reasons the original documents must be retained by the Grantees, certified copies must be submitted with the financial statement.

"Appropriate original supporting documents" refers to signed contracts, invoices and acceptances of work (for all transactions), payment authorisation for all transactions should also be provided in case the Grantees use such practice, and reliable evidence of payment (authorised payment order and bank statement).

As regards round tables / conferences, presenting "appropriate original supporting documents" requires presentation of a programme indicating the title, dates, venue, and agenda of the event; the names of persons facilitating the event, a signed list of participants, the contracts with the owner of venue of the event (e.g. hotel) for the rent of premises, food and beverages of participants, invoices from the owner of the venue of the event for the above services, and a report on the results of the event (see narrative reporting above).

As regards consultancy services, presenting "appropriate original supporting documents" requires presentation of evidence of the outputs produced, contracts with experts and consultants containing a specific description of services to be carried out, invoices produced after the works have been performed and delivered (the specialities of the consultants shall correspond to the nature of activities for which they are contracted).

As regards travel fees / lodging of experts and participants, presenting "appropriate original supporting documents" requires presentation, where relevant, of contracts with a travel agency for travel fees and lodging, invoices of the travel agency indicating destinations, dates, ticket costs, and names of the travelling persons, a programme of the event indicating the names of the experts and signed lists of participants.

The above description is not comprehensive. Any doubt regarding the interpretation of the notion of "appropriate original supporting documents" should lead the Grantee or the Lead Grantee in case of a consortium to consult the Council of Europe.

The reporting requirements, including the number of reports to be submitted, shall be specified in the Grant Agreement

IV. HOW TO APPLY?

1. Documents to be submitted:

Each application shall contain:

- the completed and signed **Application Form** (See **Appendix I**);
- a provisional budget (using the template reproduced in **Appendix II**);
- a list of all owners and executive officers, for legal persons only;
- the other supporting documents:
    - A register extract or other document showing the legal status of the Applicant(s)
    - Latest available annual report of the (Lead) Applicant
    - Latest available audited annual financial statement of the (Lead) Applicant together with the audit report
    - A list of member organisations of the Applicant(s)

Applications that are incomplete will not be considered.

2. Questions

General information can be found on the website of the Council of Europe: https://www.coe.int/en/web/civil-society/home.

Other questions regarding this specific call for proposals must be sent at the latest on 22 November 2026, in English, and shall be exclusively sent to the following address: NGO-Unit@coe.int, with the following reference in subject: "Question regarding CSO Grant".

The replies to the questions received will be posted on the website of the Council of Europe on 26 November 2026: https://www.coe.int/en/web/civil-society/home

3. Deadline for submission

The application form, **completed and signed by all Grantees**, together with the supporting documents, must be submitted in electronic form (Word or PDF) to the following e-mail address: NGO-Unit@coe.int. Emails should contain the following reference in subject: "Application for CSO Grant".

Applications must be received **before 2.12.2026 (at 23.59 Central European Time (CET))**. Applications received after the above-mentioned date will not be considered.

4. Change, alteration and modification of the application file

Any change in the format, or any alteration or modification of the original application file, will cause the immediate rejection of the application concerned.

V. EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURE

The projects presented will be assessed by an Evaluation Committee composed of three staff members of the Council of Europe with expertise in the area of democracy and the organisation of projects and awareness-raising campaigns.

The procedure shall be based on the underlying principles of grant award procedures, which are transparency, non-retroactivity, non-cumulative awards, not-for-profit, co-financing and non-discrimination, in accordance with Rule 1/2015 on grants.

The applicants, and their projects, shall fulfil all of the following criteria:

1. Exclusion criteria:

Applicants shall be excluded from the grant award procedure where they or, in the case of legal persons, their owner(s) or executive officer(s):

a) have been sentenced by final judgment on one or more of the following charges: participation in a criminal organisation, corruption, fraud, money laundering, terrorist financing, terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities, child labour or trafficking in human beings;

b) are in a situation of bankruptcy, liquidation, termination of activity, insolvency or arrangement with creditors or any like situation arising from a procedure of the same kind, or are subject to a procedure of the same kind;

c) have received a judgement with res judicata force, finding an offence that affects their professional integrity or constitutes a serious professional misconduct;

d) do not comply with their obligations as regards payment of social security contributions, taxes and dues, according to the statutory provisions of the country where they are established;

e) are an entity created to circumvent tax, social or other legal obligations (empty shell company), have ever created or are in the process of creation of such an entity;

f) have been involved in mismanagement of the Council of Europe funds or public funds;

g) are included in the lists of persons or entities subject to restrictive measures applied by the United Nations Security Council or the European Union.

By signing the Application Form, applicants shall declare on their honour that they are not in any of the above-mentioned situations (See **Appendix I, Item 14**).

The Council of Europe reserves the right to ask applicants at a later stage to supply the following supporting documents:

- for the items set out in paragraphs a), b), c) and f), an extract from the record of convictions or failing that an equivalent document issued by the competent judicial or administrative authority of the country where the applicant is established, indicating that these requirements are met;

- for the items set out in paragraph d), a certificate issued by the competent authority of the country of establishment;

1. for the items set out in paragraph e);

    1. for natural persons, a scanned copy of a valid photographic proof of identity (e.g. passport)
    2. for legal persons, an extract from the companies register or other official document proving ownership and control of the applicant.

2. Eligibility criteria:

In order to be eligible for a grant, an applicant must:

- be legally constituted as a non-governmental organisation in a member state of the Council of Europe;
- be able to carry out activities described in its project proposal;
- have been active for at least five years in the field of advocacy, policy-making or representation of interests related to democracy, civic space, rule of law or human rights;
- have expertise of the Council of Europe standards
- have sufficient financial capacity (stable and sufficient sources of funding) to maintain its activity throughout the period for which the grant is awarded and to participate by way of its own resources (including human resources or in-kind contributions) [1];
- have sufficient operational and professional capacity, including staff, to carry out activities described in its project proposal[2];
- have a bank account;

Multiple applications are not allowed and shall lead to the exclusion of all applications concerned.

[1] The Council of Europe shall have full discretion in determining whether applicants are considered to have sufficient financial capacity in light of the complexity of the project/action proposed.

[2] The Council of Europe shall have full discretion in determining whether applicants are considered to have sufficient operational and professional capacity in light of the complexity of the project/action proposed.

3. Award criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- the relevance and added value of the project regarding the objective of the call (30%)
- the extent to which the project meets the requirements of the call (30%);
- the quality, accuracy, clarity, completeness and cost-effectiveness of the application and the estimated budget (20%);
- the relevance of the experience of the applying organisation(s) and staff (20%).

VI. NOTIFICATION OF THE DECISION AND SIGNATURE OF GRANT AGREEMENTS

On completion of the selection process, all applicants will be notified in writing of the final decision concerning their respective applications as well as on the next steps to be undertaken.

The selected Grantees will be invited to sign a Grant Agreement (See Appendix III), formalising their legal commitments**. Potential applicants are strongly advised to read the draft contract, in particular its requirements in terms of payment and reporting.**

VII. INDICATIVE TIMETABLE

Phases	**Indicative timing**
Publication of the call	9 November 2026
Deadline for submitting applications	2 December 2026
Information to applicants on the results of the award procedure	22 January 2027
Signature of the grant agreements	29 January 2027
Implementation period	1.2.2027-31.10.2027

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