

Solidarity Network Civil Society Manifesto

Creating the conditions for civil society groups and organisations to progress transformative change for an equal, ecologically sustainable, and socially-just society

This paper is presented as a working document

Context

The **European Commission** has published the 'EU Strategy for Civil Society', noting that 'an open civic space, with a vibrant civil society is at the core of our democracies' [1]. The Strategy invites Member States to: strengthen engagement systems with civil society as a partner; create enabling legal and regulatory frameworks for civil society; provide adequate and sustainable support and funding mechanisms for civil society; and develop a strategy to support, promote and empower civil society. In holding the EU presidency during 2026, the Irish government is well-placed to give leadership for an ambitious implementation of the Strategy.

In Ireland, steps are being taken by Government to develop a whole-of-government strategy addressing the community and voluntary sector for the period 2026–2030, building on a previous strategy: Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019–2024. The Government has published 'Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector'.

The Solidarity Network identifies a significant narrowing of civic space and significant barriers that curtail civil society's contribution to progressing an equal, ecologically sustainable and socially-just society. These barriers include: a political environment that is resistant to such change, co-opting civil society voices that seek to pursue transformative change; policy arenas for civil society participation that lack capacity to deliver such change; funding regimes that are precarious, inadequate, and bureaucratic in their governance and reporting requirements and that underpin a service provision paradigm for civil society; and lack of space and support for advocacy and collective organising.

[1] [EU Strategy for Civil Society](#), European Commission, COM(2025) 790 final, Brussels, 12.11.2025.

Our Demands

An open and enabling civic space should be sustained and supported. This is civic space that is conducive to and supportive of the voice, advocacy and collective organising of civil society groups and organisations seeking to progress an equal, ecologically sustainable and socially-just society, with a capacity to be dynamic in responding to their evolving needs.

A Government strategy, encompassing all strands of civil society, should be co-created with civil society and implemented. This strategy would support, promote and empower civil society, with specific attention to civil society groups and organisations seeking to progress an equal, ecologically sustainable and socially-just society.

A model of engagement for the state with civil society, should be co-created with civil society. This model of engagement would allow civil society organisations and groups to exercise power and influence in meaningful decision-making through a process of collaborative governance, to enable progress for an equal, ecologically sustainable and socially-just society.

A public sector funding model for civil society organisations and groups encompassing multi-annual core funding, should be co-created with civil society. This funding model would be: rooted in principles of autonomy, independence, responsiveness to needs, and a right to dissent; ensure manageable reporting and governance requirements; and support and enable collective initiative and advocacy for an equal, ecologically sustainable and socially-just society.

The ILO Convention on Collective Bargaining Convention 154 should be ratified and the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive transposed, via a Just Transition lens to underpin the right to collective bargaining in a way that goes beyond wages to include mandatory negotiations on environmental impact, carbon reduction targets, and social-equality audits. Collective bargaining should be enabled by action to: support capacity for collective bargaining; create enabling contexts for collective bargaining; legislate that state contracts and grants are contingent on the employer having a collective agreement; and promote the benefits of collective bargaining.

Contact:

Solidarity Network

Secretariat:

Damien Peelo:

damienpeelo@gmail.com