

ECYC European Confederation
of Youth Clubs



Shrinking space for civil society

Study session in Strasbourg, France

2 - 6 March 2020

More and more civil society organisations face challenges and restrictions across Europe. Young people and their organisations are particularly vulnerable in the context of shrinking civil space. The study session, organised by the European Confederation of Youth Clubs in collaboration with Rural Youth Europe and the Council of Europe at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, “Shrinking space for civil society” brings together young activists to raise awareness on the topic.

Aim

The main aim of this study session is to empower young people and youth organisations to engage in expanding the space for civil society through youth work and youth-led actions.

Objectives

Taking part in the study session will help you:

- to understand what is shrinking space for civil society and how it affects youth organisations and young people;
- to share experiences and good practice in response to shrinking space for youth organisations and young people;
- to disseminate the knowledge within your organisation, and to connect it to the topic;
- to connect to like-minded young people that are currently engaging in countering effects of shrinking civil space;
- to share your personal story about how you've experienced phenomena of shrinking space for civil society on an online platform (if preferred anonymously).

Desired profile of participants

The study session is open for:

- Young people with a keen interest in the topic of shrinking space for civil society;
- Engaged in meaningful participation in civil society from the European Confederation of Youth Clubs and Rural Youth Europe member organisations, or members of NGOs, youth workers, youth leaders, volunteers, human rights defenders;
- Motivated to build solidarity and further civil society spaces and connections between youth organisation and informal youth groups;
- age 18-30, residents of European Cultural Convention signatory countries¹, with good use of English.

Practical information

This study session is organised by the European Confederation of Youth Clubs in collaboration with Rural Youth Europe and the Council of Europe at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, France.

¹ Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, as well as Belarus, Holy See, Kazakhstan (Non-Members of Council of Europe).

A total of **35 spaces** are available to participants. The preparatory team will select participants on the basis of the profile outlined above, ensuring a balanced group (gender, geographical regions, different types of experiences, cultural backgrounds and organisations).

- Applicants will be informed about the selection decision by 17th of January 2020 - ***Please do not book your travel tickets before your participation has been confirmed!***
- **Arrival** is on Sunday 1st of March 2020 (preferably no later than 19:00).
- **Departure** is on Saturday 7th of March 2020 (preferably after 9:00).
- **Accommodation and meals** will be provided and paid for by the Council of Europe at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg. The participants may need to share rooms.
- An **enrolment fee of 50 euros** should be paid by all participants to the Council of Europe. This amount will be deducted from the amount to be reimbursed for travel expenses or paid at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg during the study session.
- **Travel expenses and visa fees** are 100% reimbursed based on the presentation of the relevant receipts according to the rules of the Council of Europe. Only the participants who attend at least 80% of the whole study session can be reimbursed. The payment will be made either by bank transfer after the course or at the end of the course in cash (in euros). Participants are asked to use the cheapest transportation possible. More information about the travel conditions will be sent with the acceptance letter to participants.
- Participants requiring a **visa** should fill in the part of the application about details required for visa. The cost of the visa will be reimbursed upon presentation of a receipt. Agency fee or visa service fee will not be reimbursed. If the participant has to travel to get the visa the cost of the travel is not automatically reimbursed, so the participant should in this case contact ECYC at ioana@ecyc.org and check if the reimbursement of the travel for the visa is possible.
- Participants are responsible for arranging suitable **insurance coverage** (travel + medical, and in addition E111 for EU citizens) for themselves.

How to apply

Young people and youth organisations hold an important role in democratic society. However the phenomenon of shrinking civil space is affecting young people and youth organisations in Europe and globally at a disproportionate degree. Only 3% of global population live in countries with an open civic space.² Shrinking civil space is a human rights concern and is being underestimated.

Decision-making must consider all voices, not just the loudest, most privileged and resourced voices. Therefore pluralist civil society becomes a precondition for democratic decision making and is essential to democracy.

² <https://monitor.civicus.org/> Monitoring Civicus 2019 Report

There are deliberate attempts to restrict civil society (the restriction of civil liberties, violence against activists) that are easier to recognize. And, there are also more subtle, less express or structural constraints on civil space.

There are various processes and measures taken by governments to restrict the activity of civil society organisations, for example:

- Barriers to establishment of organisation: registering an NGO brings legal rights and benefits to the organisation and protections for its members. The state can make a registration process excessively burdensome or expensive.
- Regulation of activities: invasive reporting requirements and restrictions on activities
- Limited access to information and resources
- The normative effect of labelling civil society organisations: the state can affect discourse between organisations and the public by labelling and encouraging hostility against them. Civil society organisation being called foreign agents, spies, etc., and the individual associated with them may face hate speech or discrimination.

In the study session we want to explore the phenomena of shrinking civil space, and collect stories to make it evident, to inform and inspire people.

Tell us, in the format of a **personal story** about how you've experienced phenomena of shrinking space for civil society. You may think of situations that relate to:

- limited access to information and funding,
- self-censorship of your NGO because of negative labelling or rhetoric towards civil society organisations,
- changes in legislation that hinders NGO's registration or function,
- smearing campaigns (negative labelling),
- interfering from the state into internal affairs of the organisations,
- limited freedom of assembly and association.
- The story should be a maximum of 500 words.
- All candidates must apply using the online application form: <https://forms.gle/qgj28M4x8L7rJ5bU6>
- **Deadline for applications: 16th January 2020**

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