



European Center for Not-for-Profit Law Stichting

Strategy 2020-2023

// Introduction

The space for civic action across the globe is at a critical turning point. Unprecedented circumstances are reshaping our societies and impacting our activism, values and sustainability for years to come.

// Challenges, openings and opportunities

Securitisation, climate change, pandemic-related responses, the exacerbation of socioeconomic inequalities compounded by the increasing use of digital technologies to disrupt democratic processes, remain the major threats to civic space and are likely to stay in the long term as well. At the same time, the challenges also trigger openings and opportunities that civil society and activists can use to their advantage to strengthen their influence. Among the challenges, ECNL identifies the democratic decline, accelerated in fighting the pandemic including securitization promoted as a solution to protect lives; pressure on and deligitimisation of CSO role; restrictions on online/offline protests and assemblies and the use of new and emerging digital technologies to limit civic freedoms. There are important openings and opportunities that should be addressed such as the increased solidarity, resilience of the CSOs and supportive public response, opportunities provided by new technologies, increased CSO role as service providers and also defenders of rights, progressive examples that can be used as model and new openings in international institutions that can leverage change.

Lessons from ongoing successful initiatives and strategies to reverse restrictions to freedoms must become actionable knowledge, that is accessible for all actors, especially groups under threat. A democratic and sustainable space for civic action and ideas needs collective intelligence, open and innovative tools and insights enabled by empowered groups and progressive legal frameworks.

// Mission and Vision

ECNL's mission is to create legal and policy environments that enable individuals, movements and organisations to exercise and protect their civic freedoms and to put into action transformational ideas that address national and global challenges.

We envision a space in which everyone can exercise their rights freely, work in solidarity and shape their societies.

ECNL prides itself in its ability to identify and develop early responses to ever changing trends and challenges that shape the future of civic space. We push the boundaries of our knowledge, expertise and skills to be able to provide rapid and substantive assistance that will have meaningful results. Together with our partners, we have over 20 years of expertise and institutional know-how to share, which gives us the ability for fast response to emerging issues.

ECNL will therefore continue to unpack, analyse and build up on challenges, openings and opportunities to ensure that enabling civic space and freedoms remains central to the new modus operandi in the post-pandemic set up.

// Pathways for Change

ECNL's approach is to empower local advocates, organisations and movements, but also where possible, national authorities to understand the trends and their impact, to have the knowledge and tools to create and defend their own spaces. To do this we have identified and successfully implemented the following pathways for change:

- **Knowledge pathway:** Identifying, synthesizing and understanding of the trends and core issues is key to creating good policies, laws and practices, pre-empting and pushing back on restrictions.
- **Empowerment and mobilization pathway:** Aware, alert, connected and knowledgeable organisations, activists and movements can prevent threats and sustain gains in a longer term.
- **Reform and Standard Setting pathway:** Strong international, regional and national systems can safeguard rights, give guidance, change narratives and disrupt systems of power that limit civic action.

// Strategic goals and actions

Our strategy for the next 3 years is not only to scale up what we are doing and are good at, but also to partner with different groups to complement each other and to co-design new models and toolboxes needed to address the growing challenges and to capture opportunities. Our strategic goals and related actions for 2020-2023 are:

Defending civic freedoms through knowledge, strategies and tools

- Continue to monitor and research global, European but also national level practices in order to identify and understand new trends;
- Explore and analyse good practices and work with local partners in countries to adapt or develop new models;
- Scale up our work to collect evidence of the impact of different measures on activists and CSOs to help construe arguments for advocacy and push back against restrictions;
- Join work with pro-bono lawyers to support litigation;
- Facilitate development of new models and partnerships

Empowering activists and organisations to protect and expand civic freedoms through joint actions

- Broaden group of country-level partners;
- Support partners to develop their own reform and advocacy strategies;
- Nurture our successful coalitions;
- Enhance engagement with diverse groups to make them aware of how trends impact civic freedoms so to agree on joint goals and actions.

Strengthening global, regional and national policies, laws and standards to safeguard civic freedoms.

- Continue engagement with European states and with the European Union (EU) institutions in order to protect the rule of law, values and civic freedoms in democratic countries;
- Seek ways to leverage support and influence actions of multilateral actors;
- Continue work with traditional human rights mechanisms.

These strategic goals reflect our belief that aware and empowered civic action can lead to transformative changes.

Civic space freedoms are rapidly evolving and the environment in which ECNL Stichting operates is changing. Accordingly, ECNL views its strategy as a living document which needs to be periodically reviewed and adjusted in order to ensure that the objectives are realistic and correspond to the mission, and that ECNL activities and methodology of work can best support the partners and stakeholders we work with.