

Experiences of civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU – 2020

Consultation of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP)

FINAL

Context

Title	FRA consultation on experiences of civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU (3rd)	
Project and PM	FRP / civic space (Waltraud Heller)	
Type of consultation	Online survey	
Tool	LimeSurvey [with cookies] Name of the organisation will not be asked – instead request in the intro text that each organisation should only fill this once.	
Target group/Who in the organisation should reply at best (profile)	Organisations registered in the FRP database (all + observer States), plus their member organisations where applicable. Civil society organisations cooperating with FRA partners (CoE, ODIHR, OGP, EESC)	
Anonymous/targeted	Anonymised data collection	
Fieldwork period	1 December 2020 – 15 January 2021	Days:
Consultation number	FRP consult 2020/5	
Type of analysis	Qualitative	
Frequency	Annual	
Number of invitations	FRP all + partern networks	
Number of completed questionnaires		
Number of partial completed questionnaires		
Links to privacy notice and policy	For general information on data protection in the frame of FRP consultations, please refer to the following webpage: http://fra.europa.eu/en/data-protection – and in particular to the Privacy notice on FRA consultations with organisations registered in the Fundamental Rights Platform database , the Privacy notice on FRA consultations with civil society organisations under Art. 10 FRA Founding Regulation , and the Privacy notice on FRA Website and Web Services .	
Comms / link to publications	Report: Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU (January 2018) Conference paper: Experiences of organisations (November 2018) Civic space – Experiences of organisations in 2019	
Languages	EN only	

Email text:

Subject line: **Annual FRA consultation on civic space – please contribute**

Dear Fundamental Rights Platform organisations, / Dear civil society organisations,

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) would like to hear about **your experiences regarding the challenges that you faced in your day-to-day work during 2020 (“civic space”)**.

If you are a civil society organisation working in an EU Member State, Serbia or North Macedonia, or at EU level, please contribute. Your replies matter! The results of this consultation will be published and shared widely with policy makers, stakeholders and the media in order to promote actions that can **improve the conditions of work for civil society organisations** in the EU.

This is the **third annual FRA consultation on civic space**. You can find the online questionnaire here: [link](#).

The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. It will be **open from 9 December 2020 until 20 January 2020**.

Please complete the survey **only once** for your organisation. All **responses are fully anonymised and untraceable**.

The questions refer to your organisation’s experience in the following fields:

- regulatory (legal) environment
- threats and attacks
- access to finance and resources
- access to and participation in the decision-making process

The questionnaire also asks a few background questions about your organisation, such as your main working areas and the geographical scope of your work.

Feel free to contact us <frp@fra.europa.eu> in case you have any questions.

FRA complies fully with **data protection regulations**. For more information, please refer to the following webpage: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/data-protection>, and in particular to

- [the Privacy notice on FRA consultations with with organisations registered in the Fundamental Rights Platform database](#)
- [the Privacy notice on FRA consultations with civil society organisations under Art. 10 FRA Founding Regulation](#)
- [the Privacy notice on FRA Website and Web Services](#)

The online questionnaire makes use of so-called first-party ‘cookies’ to ensure, first, that the survey is completed only once by the same device and, second, to ensure that the questionnaire layout is appropriate for the device used. These cookies will be saved on the computer of each survey participant once they have submitted the completed questionnaire. No other information is

collected. You can delete the cookies or disable them by using the 'do not track' option in your browser. However, please note that if your browser settings block all cookies (including essential cookies), parts of the website may not work or we may be unable to optimise the way the questionnaire is displayed on your device.

First page of the survey

Thank you for taking the time to participate in FRA's 2020 consultation on the experiences of civil society organisations (CSOs). This online survey will be open from **9 December 2020 – 20 January 2021**. The results will feed into FRA's work to **improve the situation for human rights civil society organisations** in the EU.

You are invited to share your views and experiences, as regards:

- The overall general situation
- The impact of the regulatory environment in which you work
- Threats and attacks related to your work
- Access to finance and resources
- Access to and participation in decision-making processes

The consultation includes a few background questions about your organisation.

Each organisation should complete the questionnaire only once. It should take you approximately 15-20 minutes to complete it. Your answers are fully anonymous and cannot be traced back to you.

For more information, please contact us at [<frp@fra.europa.eu>](mailto:frp@fra.europa.eu).

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We thank you in advance for your time and input.

A) General situation of civil society organisations (CSOs)

All

1. The geographical scope of your organisation's activities is:

Please select all that apply

- a) Local
- b) National
- c) EU
- d) International

IF A1= "local or national"

2. How would you describe in general the conditions for civil society organisations working on human rights **in your country today?**

Infobox: In your reply please take into account multiple factors e.g. the legal environment, access to funding, political climate, safe and enabling environment.

1	2	3	4	5	8
Very good	Good	Neither good nor bad	Bad	Very bad	Do not know

IF A1= "local or national"

3. How have these conditions for civil society organisations working on human rights changed **in the past 12 months in your country?**

1	2	3	4	5	8
Greatly improved	Improved	Remained the same	Deteriorated	Greatly deteriorated	Do not know

IF A1= "local or national"

4. Is your organisation able to do its work free from government intimidation?

Never or rarely	Some of the time	Most of the time	Always	Do not know

IF A1= "EU or international"

5. How would you describe the general conditions for civil society organisations working on human rights **at EU level** (including advocacy and human rights work with EU institutions)?

Infobox: With *general conditions* we mean e.g. the legal environment, access to funding, political climate, safe and enabling environment.

1	2	3	4	5	8
Very good	Good	Neither good nor bad	Bad	Very bad	Do not know

IF A1= "EU or international"

6. In your view, how has the general situation for civil society organisations working on human rights **at EU level** changed **in the past 12 months**?

1	2	3	4	5	8
Greatly improved	Improved	Remained the same	Deteriorated	Greatly deteriorated	Do not know

All

7. And thinking about **your own organisation**, how has its situation changed **in the past 12 months**?

1	2	3	4	5	8
Greatly improved	Improved	Remained the same	Deteriorated	Greatly deteriorated	Do not know

B) Enabling regulatory environment and laws

States have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil rights such as freedom of expression, association, assembly, public participation, and non-discrimination. These obligations stem from the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. For States to fully deliver on such rights, a safe and enabling environment for civil society is essential.

The next questions will ask about your **organisation's experiences with the regulatory environment and laws**.

All

1. In the **past 12 months**, has your organisation faced difficulties in any of the following areas?

	1	2	8	0
Freedom of peaceful assembly	yes	no	Do not know	prefer not to say
Freedom of association	yes	no	Do not know	prefer not to say
Freedom of expression	yes	no	Do not know	prefer not to say

Infoboxes:

Freedom of peaceful assembly: e.g. difficulties in organising public gatherings, such as lack of or inadequate police protection, bans on certain assemblies or excessive restrictions on the content of an event, or regarding the time, place or manner of organising assemblies, such as bans on assemblies at certain times or locations.

Freedom of association: e.g. challenges to the capacity to register and/or operate as a legal person in national law

Freedom of expression: e.g. through political or criminal sanctions brought against the organisation, or through civil or administrative litigation or restrictions limiting access to funding or to the public space

All

2. In the **past 12 months**, has your organisation encountered difficulties in conducting its work due to legal challenges in the following areas? You can tick all boxes that are relevant.

	Yes	No	Do not know	Prefer not to say
Transparency or lobby laws				
Legal provisions on political campaigning				
Counter-terrorism legislation or policy				
Legislation on civil dialogue / consultations				
Data protection laws				
Anti-money laundering measures				
Changes in tax laws				
Changes in laws governing charitable status				
Travel restrictions / visa bans				
Emergency laws				

All

3. Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your organisation's experiences with regards to the legal environment? (open question, optional)

All

4. Promising examples of how you were able to address such a challenge?

C) Threats and attacks

Civil society organisations need to be able to conduct their work safe from any threats and attacks.

The following questions concern the conditions under which your civil society organisation is operating. The questions reflect the results of FRA's [civil society report](#).

All

1. In the **last 12 months**, have **any of your employees/volunteers** experienced any of the following due to their work?

		Yes	No	Do not know	Prefer not to say
a	Online verbal threats or harassment				
b	Offline verbal threats or harassment (Infobox: e.g. postal mail, telephone, in the street, calls to relatives...)				
c	Physical attack/s				
d	Harassment in the form of legal action/SLAPP – Strategic Lawsuit against Public Participation (individuals/companies/organisations/public authorities bringing or threatening to bring legal action against your organisation, such as claims for damages, criminal charges, injunctions, administrative action/fines, tax complaints)				
e	Other attack against employee/volunteer, please specify:				

If yes to any item in C1

Please could you give a concrete example of such an incident? (optional, open question)

All

2. In the **last 12 months**, has **your organisation** experienced any of the following?

		yes	no	do not know	prefer not to say
A	Coordinated and/or multiple online threats or harassment (Infobox: e.g. bombarded with messages on Twitter, comments on Facebook, disinformation campaigns online)				
B	Online attacks against your digital infrastructure				
C	Vandalism of your premises (office building) or other property (Infobox: eg. graffiti, broken windows, cars, bikes, outdoor advertising etc.)				
D	Negative media reports/campaigns				
E	Harassment in the form of excessive administrative controls or audits (Infobox: interrogations, detention, visits to work place, tax inspections, searches of workplace and equipments)				
F	Harassment in the form of legal action/SLAPP – Strategic Lawsuit against Public Participation (Infobox: individuals/companies/organisations/public authorities bringing or threatening to bring legal action against your organisation, such as claims for damages, criminal charges, injunctions, administrative action/fines, tax complaints)				
G	Criminalisation of our work				
H	Surveillance by law enforcement				
H	Other attack against organisation, please specify:				

IF C1+3 at least once **yes**

3. Please could you give a concrete example of such an incident? (optional, open question)

IF C1+3 at least once yes

4. In **the last 12 months**, has any of the employees/volunteers of your organisation suffered in their (psycho-social) wellbeing due to these experiences?

Infobox: such as: burnout, depression, anxiety, trauma or secondary trauma

1	2	8	9
Yes	no	Do not know	Prefer not to say

IF C1+3 at least once yes

5. Do you know or suspect who has been the perpetrator of these actions?
- State actor (public)
 - Non-State actor (private)
 - Do not know
 - Prefer not to say

IF C1+3 at least once yes

6. In the last 12 months, has any of these incidents resulted in the organisation discontinuing or reducing activities due to external pressure?

1	2	3	4
Yes	No	Do not know	Prefer not to say

If yes, please specify: (optional)

IF C1+3 at least once yes

7. Do you think or know whether the reasons for these threats or attacks were related to **specific activities of your organisation, or specific themes you are working on?**

1	2	3
Yes	No	Do not know

IF "yes" to C8

8. Please could you indicate the area of your work that you think or know to have been the reason for the attack: _____

IF C1+3 at least once yes

9. Has your organisation reported any of these incidents to the authorities (e.g. police or other competent body)?

1	2	3
Yes	No	Do not know

IF "yes" to C10

10. Did the police or relevant authorities investigate the incident, and act in protection of the victim (including public support statements)?

1	2	3
Yes	No	Do not know

IF "yes" to C10

11. Are you satisfied with the way these authorities acted upon your report?

1	2	3
Yes	No	Do not know

12. IF "no" to C8 Why did your organisation not report the incident?

(select all that apply)

- a) The incident was not serious enough
- b) Inconvenient/too much trouble to report-
- c) Nothing would come out of reporting it
- d) We do not trust the police
- e) It was reported to other services
- f) Fear of reprisals
- g) Other reasons
- h) Don't know

All

13. Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your organisation's experiences with regards to threats and attacks? (open question, optional)

All

14. Promising examples of how you were able to address such a challenge?

D) Access to finance and other resources

The right to freedom of association is guaranteed by several international human rights instruments, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 12), the European Convention on Human Rights (Art. 11) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art. 22). In order to fulfil these commitments, States need to provide equitable access to finance and resources. This can strengthen the effectiveness and facilitate the sustainability of associations. The concept of 'resources' includes material resources, access to international funds, solidarity, the ability to travel and communicate without undue interference, and the right to benefit from the protection of the state.

Next we would like to learn about **your organisation's experiences related to access to finance and resources**.

All

1. In the last 12 months, did you experience difficulties in finding adequate funding for your work?

Yes	no	Do not know	prefer not to say

If yes to D1

2. Please indicate which of the following reasons are applicable.
 - a) Overall public budget cuts
 - b) Decrease in donations (e.g. from companies, foundations, private individuals)
 - c) Change in government priorities for funding CSOs
 - d) Decrease in revenue from fundraising activities
 - e) Other (please explain – up to 150 words)

If yes to D1

3. For which aspects of your operation do you find it difficult to find adequate funding? Please select up to three.
 - a) Small-scale projects
 - b) Core funding for administrative and infrastructure costs
 - c) Providing own financial contribution (co-funding) when required by national, EU or international funding mechanisms
 - d) Advocacy
 - e) Litigation / strategic litigation
 - f) Not sufficient funding for our type of activities: please specify which activities: _____
 - g) Other (please explain – up to 150 words)

If yes to D1

4. **In the last 12 months**, did you experience any of the following difficulties when trying to access **national** funding? Please select up to three.
- a) Publicly available information is insufficient or difficult to find
 - b) Limited administrative capacity and/or expertise to find or apply for funding
 - c) Competition with other CSOs for limited funds
 - d) Restrictive eligibility criteria (**see infobox**)
 - e) Lack of transparency and fairness in funding allocation
 - f) New or changing national rules for accessing foreign funding
 - g) Discrimination because of the topics we are working on
 - h) Banking issues (**see infobox**)
 - i) No difficulties regarding the access to funding at national level
 - j) **Other** (please explain – up to 150 words)

Infobox for: eligibility criteria, such as: CSOs are not listed as “eligible” although the nature of work is suitable for such entities; calls require minimum duration of existence, number of full-time staff or turnover

Infobox for banking: when opening bank accounts, transferring funding or the suspension or temporary freezing of bank accounts

If yes to D1

5. **In the last 12 months**, did you experience **any** of the following difficulties when trying to access EU funding? Please select up to three
- a) Publicly available information is insufficient or difficult to find
 - b) Limited administrative capacity and/or expertise in our organisation to find or apply for funding (e.g. staff, skills, ...)
 - c) Competition with other CSOs for limited funds
 - d) Restrictive eligibility criteria (**see infobox**)
 - e) Lack of transparency and fairness in funding allocation
 - f) Discrimination because of the topics we are working on
 - g) No difficulties regarding the access to funding at EU level
 - h) Other** (please explain – up to 150 words)

All

6. Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your organisation’s experiences with regards to access to resources? (open question, optional)

All

7. Promising examples of how you were able to address such a challenge?

E) Access to the decision-making processes and participation

The next questions concern difficulties that your organisation might have had in relation to the access of civil society organisations to decision-making processes and participation. The questions are based on examples drawn from FRA’s [civil society report](#).

All

1. In the past 12 months, did your organisation participate in national public consultations for law and policy making – either through online consultations, meetings or other means?

1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Once	Never	Do not know	Not applicable

NOT IF “never, do not know, not applicable” to E1

2. In your view, were your inputs taken into account and sufficiently reflected in the final decisions taken, following consultations at national level?

1	2	3	4	8
Fully	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all	Do not know

NOT IF “never, do not know, not applicable” to E1

5. What were the main difficulties you encountered in national consultations/participation?

Please select up to three.

- a) Lack of timely and detailed information about upcoming participation processes / consultations (e.g. dates, places, processes, ...)
- b) Need to register with transparency or lobby register in order to participate
- c) No equal chances for all to participate, discrimination in the access because of the work of our organisation
- d) Consultation not accessible(online or physical), technical obstacles
- e) Lack of capacity in our organisation related to time, skills, knowledge of our staff
- f) Deadlines to provide meaningful input were too short
- g) Lack of feedback on the outcome (e.g. no information on the use of input, the impact and the reasons for it)
- h) Consultation was organised after core decisions on the issue had been taken

- i) Lack of trust between civil society and public authorities
- j) No difficulties encountered
- k) Other, (please explain – up to 150 words)

All

3. In the past 12 months, did your organisation participate in public consultations organised by **European Union institutions** – either through online consultations, meetings or other means?

1	2	3	4	5	8	9
Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Once	Never	Do not know	Not applicable

NOT IF “never, do not know, not applicable” to E3

4. In your view, were your inputs taken into account and sufficiently reflected in the final decisions taken following consultations at EU level?

1	2	3	4	8	9
Fully	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all	Do not know	Not applicable

NOT IF “never, do not know, not applicable” to E3

5. What were the **main** difficulties you encountered in **EU-level consultations/participation**?

Please select up to three.

- l) Lack of timely and detailed information about upcoming participation processes / consultations (e.g. dates, places, processes, ...)
- m) Need to register with transparency or lobby register in order to participate
- n) No equal chances for all to participate, discrimination in the access because of the work of our organisation
- o) Consultation not accessible(online or physical), technical obstacles
- p) Lack of capacity in our organisation related to time, skills, knowledge of our staff
- q) Deadlines to provide meaningful input were too short
- r) Lack of feedback on the outcome (e.g. no information on the use of input, the impact and the reasons for it)
- s) Consultation was organised after core decisions on the issue had been taken
- t) Lack of trust between civil society and public authorities
- u) No difficulties encountered
- v) Other, (please explain – up to 150 words)

All

6. Is there anything else you would like to share with us regarding your organisation's experiences with regards to participation? (open question, optional)

All

7. Promising examples of how you were able to address such a challenge?

F) About your organisation

You are almost done – just a few questions on background information about your organisation. After that, you will find the possibility to share any further thoughts or experiences in an open question.

All

1. Where does your organisation **mainly** work (or is based in):

[list: 27 EU Member States, EU level/umbrella organisation, North Macedonia and Serbia as FRA observers]

All

2. Which of the following terms **describes best** your organisation (categories as per FRA Founding Regulation, Art. 10)

(only one answer possible)

- a) Non-governmental organisation
- b) Trade union
- c) Employer's organisation
- d) Social and professional organisation
- e) Faith-based, religious, philosophical or non-confessional organisation
- f) University or other qualified experts of European/international body/organisation
- g) Other (please explain – up to 150 words)

All

3. Which is the **core activity** that your organisation is engaged in?

(Please select only ONE):

- a) Advocacy, campaigns / awareness raising
- b) Community engagement and development
- c) Litigation

- d) Victim support, counselling (legal, psycho-social)
- e) Research, data collection
- f) Service provision: projects in social integration / social services / health projects / refugee support etc.
- g) **Other**, please explain up to 150 words

All

- 4. To close, is there any other information you would like to share with us regarding the challenges your organisation is facing? (optional)

Thank you.

FRA thanks you for the time and effort you took to complete this questionnaire.

The outcomes will be summarised and published on FRA's website and distributed to policy makers, other stakeholders and the media. FRA will use the outcomes to further underpin its advice to policy makers in EU institutions and Member States on how to improve conditions for civil society work.

In case you are not yet registered in FRA's civil society database (Fundamental Rights Platform), you are kindly invited to register in order to enhance the cooperation. Please find more information here: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/cooperation/civil-society/how-to-register>

For any further questions regarding FRA's work on civic space, please consult the [dedicated page on FRA's website](#), or send an email to frp@fra.europa.eu