

# **Legal environment and space of civil society organisations in supporting fundamental rights and the rule of law**

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# 1 Civic space developments in 2021

<b>1.1 Increased state funding for civil society initiatives</b>	
Area	Financing framework
Topic	Funding landscape
Impact	Minor

In Latvia, financial support to civil society projects from the state budget through different grant programmes increased in 2021. Under the framework of the “NGO fund” 87 civil society projects in the area of strengthening NGO capacity, protection of interests, and civil society activities were funded. The total amount of available funding was EUR 1.5 million. The funding was increased to EUR 1.8 million for projects to be funded in 2022.<sup>1</sup> The number of NGOs that have received funding from the NGO fund has increased from 31 in 2018, to 48 in 2019, to 70 in 2020 and to 87 in 2021. In 2022, funding for micro-projects has been increased to EUR 10.000, while for macro-projects to EUR 33.000.

Eleven NGO projects were funded in the framework of the civil society activities for public information about the Covid-19 vaccination. The total amount of available funding was EUR 396,000.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, 20 NGO projects received co-funding for the implementation of international projects. The total amount of available funding from the national co-funding programme was EUR 425,000.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Society Integration Foundation, [information about the grant programme “ NGO fund”](#)

<sup>2</sup> Society Integration Foundation, [information about grant for support of society information about vaccination against Covid-19 by NGOs](#)

<sup>3</sup> Society Integration Foundation, [information about co-funding grants](#)

<b>1.2 Participation of civil society in the decision making</b>	
Area	Participation and cooperation with authorities
Topic	Access to consultations / participation in decision-making
Impact	moderate

The Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*) adopted new regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on Cabinet Order Roll (*Ministru kabineta kārtības rullis*) in September.<sup>4</sup> The Latvian Civic Alliance (*Latvijas Pilsoniskā alianse*, (LCA)) – an umbrella organisation of Latvian NGOs- criticised the process of drafting the regulations without consulting civil society and for the exclusion of NGO representatives from the range persons who can take part in the sessions of State Secretaries, Committee of the Cabinet of Ministers and Cabinet of Ministers<sup>5</sup> in the status of an advisor. Initial draft regulations did not foresee any transition period for the introduction of a Common portal for the development and harmonisation of legislative projects (*Vienotais tiesību aktu projektu izstrādes un saskaņošanas portāls*) for civic participation in the elaboration of legal provisions. According to the LCA such amendments would negatively impact the participation of civil society in the decision-making process.<sup>6</sup> Following LCA criticism, the government kept the existing practice and adopted one month transition period for the submission of legislative proposals by civil society using not only the new common portal, but also regular mail or e-mail.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Latvia, Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*)(2021), [Noteikumu projekts "Ministru kabineta kārtības rullis"](#), 7 September 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Three stages of the adoption of legislative acts before the government.

<sup>6</sup>Latvian Civic Alliance (*Latvijas Pilsoniskā alianse* (2021), [NVO: aicinām Ministru kabinetu nepieļaut sabiedrības iesaistes iespēju samazināšanos](#), 20 August 2021, Press release

<sup>7</sup> Latvian Civic Alliance (*Latvijas Pilsoniskā alianse* (2021), [MK kārtības rullī saglabā līdzšinējo līdzdalības praksi](#), 3 September 2021, Press release

## 2 Examples of civil society contributions to the rule of law

<b>2.1 Harnessing digital tools to tackle corruption in the Nordic-Baltic Region</b>	
Topic	Keeping the national anti-corruption framework operational (incl. whistle-blowers and their protection etc.)

In 2021, Transparency International Latvia (*Sabiedrība par atklātību – Delna*), in cooperation with the Estonian partner Transparency International Estonia and Swedish partner Open Knowledge Sweden, started a new project called “Harnessing digital tools to tackle corruption in the Nordic-Baltic Region”<sup>8</sup>. The project aims to foster Nordic-Baltic cooperation in the disclosure of essential anti-corruption data and in the development of digital tools enabling citizens and journalists to prevent and detect corruption.

The project envisages updating the website *Deputāti uz Delnas*<sup>9</sup>, including the development of a new interactive map to explore the locations across Latvia of private interests disclosed by Latvia’s Members of the Parliament. The project also foresees the development of concept documents outlining steps for further development of the platforms aimed at increasing transparency in public procurement. The project will result in recommendations to governments in Latvia, Estonia and Sweden on the potential implementation of common data standards in the areas of political financing, public procurement, company ownership and public officials’ interest and asset declarations. The project also foresees the organisation of a regional roundtable to lay down the basis for a Nordic-Baltic community of civil society organisations and government agencies committed to ensuring the availability of relevant anti-corruption-related datasets and the development of innovative digital tools using those data to prevent corruption.

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<sup>8</sup> Transparency International Latvia (*Sabiedrība par atklātību – Delna*) (2021), [TI Latvia fosters the development of digital tools to fight corruption](#), 9 October 2021, Press release

<sup>9</sup> Website [Deputāti uz delnas](#)

## **2.2 Project "Together against disinformation and hate speech"**

Topic	Combating disinformation and fostering media and digital literacy
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Latvian Centre for Human Rights implemented the project "Together against disinformation and hate speech" (*Kopā pret dezinformāciju un naida runu*) aimed at increasing pupils' and teachers' awareness about identifying disinformation and combating hate speech. Five seminars for pupils, one two-day training seminar for teachers, and a competition for young people on how to identify disinformation were organized during the project.<sup>10</sup> The project was funded by the Department of Education, Culture and Sports of the Riga City Council in the framework of the "Society Integration Programme".<sup>11</sup>

## **2.3 Project "Support for women and children affected by violence in the Covid-19 crisis"**

Topic	Assisting victims in accessing judicial and non-judicial mechanisms of justice
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The resource centre for women "Marta" implemented a project "Support for women and children affected by violence in the Covid-19 crisis". The project was aimed at reducing domestic violence and violence against women caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and addressing its consequences by providing information, skills, methods and tools to the service providers to assist victims of violence. The project was also aimed at improving the digitalisation of services, as well as providing information to victims and wider public about recognizing domestic violence and accessibility of support services. The project results in the improved guidelines for specialists working with victims in pandemic-friendly conditions, publication of informative materials for victims, provision of support measures for specialist teams, elaboration of digital solution of services. The project was funded by the "NGO fund".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Latvian Centre for Human Rights (2021), [Ir īstenots projekts "Kopā pret dezinformāciju un naida runu"](#), 12 November 2021, Press release.

<sup>11</sup> Riga City Council (*Rīgas Dome*) (2019), [Rīga City Society Integration Programme 2019-2024 \(Rīgas pilsētas sabiedrības integrācijas pamatnostādnes 2019.-2024.gadam\)](#), 25 September 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Centre "Marta" (2021), [Projekts Atbalsts vardarbībā cietušām sievietēm un bērniem Covid-19 krīzes apstākļos](#), Press release