

FRA Press Release  
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## **Civil society under threat, Fundamental Rights Agency finds**

**In many parts of the EU, civil society is under threat, finds a new report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Given the vital role civil society plays in upholding democratic processes and in promoting human rights, decision makers need to ensure the important work of civil society is not undermined through policy and legal changes and funding cuts.**

*"A thriving democracy needs a healthy civil society. Unfortunately, the EU's own civil society is facing a pattern of threats and pressures in many parts of the EU. Addressing this unacceptable situation should be a high priority for policy makers at EU and national levels,"* says FRA Director [Michael O'Flaherty](#).

The '[Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU](#)' report explores how these challenges vary across the EU. It points to:

- Threats, physical and verbal attacks against activists, as well as smear campaigns;
- Legal changes that negatively affect civil society, such as freedom of assembly restrictions, often a by-product of counter-terrorism laws;
- Shrinking budgets and increased difficulties in getting funding;
- Lack of appropriate involvement of civil society in law- and policy-making.

Member States should abide by the laws, including international standards that recommend civil society participation in policy cycles. Due attention must also be paid to ensure that new or redrafted laws and policies do not undermine the work of civil society. Civil society funding also needs to be protected. In addition, channels of dialogue between civil society and the EU need to be strengthened to ensure their concerns are heard and addressed. This includes finding ways to collect comparable and reliable data on the challenges civil society face, such as threats, intimidation and attacks.

This report contains promising practices that are being used to address these challenges.

**For further information please consult the media Q&A or contact:**

[media@fra.europa.eu](mailto:media@fra.europa.eu)/ Tel.: +43 1 580 30 642. Also follow the discussions on #CivSoc.

### **Notes to editors:**

- FRA is the EU's independent body for delivering fundamental rights assistance and expertise to the EU and its Member States.
- As part of its [cooperation with non-governmental organisations and civil society](#), FRA initiated this research to look into how best to enable and protect civil society.
- The report will be launched at an event in Brussels at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 19 January which will also be [livestreamed](#).