



Skills and Capacity Labs

Overview of workshops

The workshops will take place as parallel sessions Friday morning 10.30-12.00



with partners



Co-funded by
the European Union



Introduction

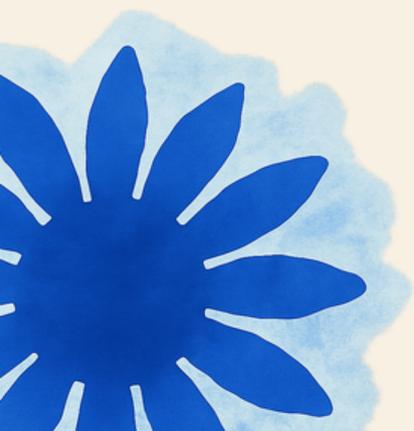


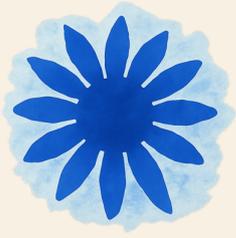
In the face of deepening democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and mounting threats to the rule of law across Europe, it is not enough that we simply diagnose problems – we must build capabilities. It is in this spirit that the Skills and Capacity Building Labs feature as a central pillar of the Standing up for Democracy & Rights Conference, **as a space where theory meets practice, and potential is turned into agency.**

The Labs are designed as interactive, problem-driven working sessions for practitioners, donors, activists, policymakers, researchers, and civil society actors. Rather than merely exchanging critiques or analyses, participants will engage in co-learning, peer exchange, experimentation, and mutual support. The format emphasises hands-on techniques, co-creation of tools, and cross-sectoral fertilisation.

What are Skills and Capacity Building Labs?

- **Laboratories for practice:** The Labs provide a safe, structured environment to test, refine, and adapt strategies, methodologies, and innovations for defending democracy, guarding rights, and restoring civic agency.
- **Bridges across silos:** By convening participants from different sectors (grassroots organisers, legal advocates, technologists, campaigners, local governments, academia etc.), the Labs aim to break down isolation and foster integrative thinking.



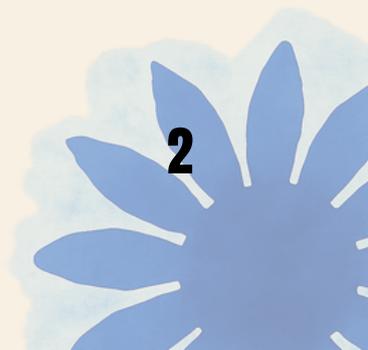


- **Tailored competence development:** Rather than one-size-fits-all sessions, each Lab is targeted toward a specific domain (e.g. digital resilience, narrative framing, coalition-building, legal strategies, monitoring and accountability) and calibrated to the local or thematic contexts participants bring.
- **Collective capacity building:** The Labs are not about transferring abstract knowledge from “experts to novices”. Rather, they rest on the principle that everyone has insights to contribute; participants learn through doing and build their capacities together.

Through these Labs, the conference aspires to deliver:

1. **Concrete toolkits and playbooks:** Each Lab will conclude with tangible and adaptable outputs for implementation and use across Europe.
2. **Strengthened networks and alliances:** the Labs serve as incubators for trust, solidarity, and collaboration, enabling transnational partnerships beyond this conference.
3. **Resilience and alliances:** We will increase capacities for civil society actors to become more able to act amid shifting political headwinds.

With this compendium readers can orientate themselves in the various Skills and Capacity Building Labs, which are cornerstones in turning hope into action, and strengthening democracy across Europe.





1. Media, disinformation and democracy

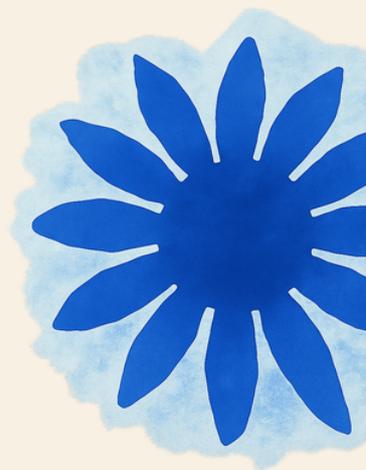
The workshop is organised by Civil Liberties Union For Europe and will be hosted by Valentin Toth, Head of Communications.

Description

The aim of the workshop is to map how civil society perceives the state of democracy within the broader information space, from the perspective of mainstream media and the growing influence of disinformation.

Through interactive, group-based activities, this playful workshop will explore the main challenges, generate possible solutions, and define a shared vision.

The key conclusions and priorities of the workshop will be channelled to the Danish EU Presidency's relevant platforms.



2. Timeout Dialogue Method supporting civic engagement and democracy

The workshop is organised by [Timeout Foundation](#)

Description

In this workshop you will learn about the Finnish Timeout Dialogue Method and how to use it to support civic engagement and participatory democracy.

Over the last six years more than 140.000 people have participated in different Timeout Dialogues. The method has proven successful in generating constructive discussion formats and is now being implemented and used as a working tool across countries and sectors, by NGO's, ministries, cities, communities and active citizens.

In this workshop you will learn to prepare and to facilitate Timeout Dialogues.



TIMEOUT
FOUNDATION

3. Civic space monitoring: from data to action

The workshop is organised by European Center for Non-for-Profit Law (ECNL), European Civic Forum (ECF) and Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR).

Description

In recent years, there has been a growing demand for concrete methodologies that track data and identify trends in civic space and the enabling environment. Advocacy efforts are often reactive, which limits the chances of achieving meaningful change. The aim of the session is for the different organisations to present in detail how different methodologies work and their synergies.

Specifically, we will present the new tool: Monitoring Action for Civic Space (MACS) and the Early Warning System and the Right to Defend Rights monitoring tool from DIHR.

Participants will be get to interact with the tools and assess their needs and potential areas for improvement. In addition, the session aims to connect data with action and identify tools for advocacy, so participants can identify concrete resources and tools for advocacy.



European Center for
Not-for-Profit Law



DANISH
INSTITUTE FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS

4. Use of citizen-generated data for more inclusive decision-making

The workshop is organised by Danish Institute for Human Rights, International Civil Society Centre (ICSC) and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) are contributing partners.

Description

ICSC (and representing the Collaborative on Citizen Data) will present the Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data, which was recently endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission. The Framework guides and sets standards for citizen data as a practice to close data gaps for population groups often less visible in data to ensure that their experiences and needs are reflected in analyses and policies.

IWGIA and DIHR will showcase best practice examples of how to collect citizen data from population groups often overlooked in data and policy making:

- The Indigenous Navigator
- The Handicap Barometer
- The LGBT+ Barometer

The workshop is a facilitated exercise where participants will learn about citizen data as concept and practice and get to engage with thematic and concrete tools to collect, disseminate, and turn citizen data into policy change.

5. Youthopia: Youth engagement across segments and borders

The workshop is organised by Our Rule of Law Foundation.

Description

Across Europe, youth engagement is often designed from the top down: Topics are pre-set, participation is institutionalised through formal councils, and initiatives rarely focus on academic quality or policy relevance. The combination of these factors often serves to discourage rather than encourage young people to learn how to use their democratic agency. The Our Rule of Law Foundation takes a different approach. Founded by law students as a grassroots initiative, it has grown into a pan-European foundation, recognised as the national winner of the 2024 European Charlemagne Youth Prize (Netherlands) for empowering young Europeans to engage meaningfully in democracy. Through its mentorship programmes, the Our Rule of Law Academy, the Vote4OurRuleofLaw Fellowship, and the Our Democracy Report (ORoL) has developed a model that combines research rigour, youth-led participation, and real policy impact.

The Youthopia workshop will present this model and invite participants to reflect on its strengths and limitations. Together, we will discuss how it might be improved, scaled, or adapted to other contexts. The session will conclude with a co-created blueprint of actionable principles for meaningful, long-term youth participation in democratic life.



6. From civic space struggles to EU Impact: advocacy pathways and alliances for civil society in Europe

The workshop is organised by Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN). Civic Initiatives (Serbia) is a contributing partner.

Description

This interactive lab will explore how civil society can effectively engage EU institutions and policies to defend civic space and strengthen democracy — both in EU Member States and in enlargement countries. Drawing on BCSDN's Monitoring Matrix and lived experiences from the Western Balkans, the session highlights how challenges in candidate countries often foreshadow or mirror civic space struggles within the Union.

Serbia will act as a case study. Participants will examine how BCSDN and partners raised awareness of restrictive civic space developments in Serbia, leveraging connections and collaborations with European and international organisations and networks. This case will illustrate how regional advocacy networks and EU-level engagement can amplify national struggles, generate international solidarity, and pressure institutions to act.

Participants will:

- **Map shared threats and trends** across Europe, from “foreign agents” laws to SLAPP’s, disinformation, and decreased funding.
- Identify **advocacy entry points** at EU level (European Commission, Parliament, Council, FRA, Danish Presidency) relevant to civic space and democracy.
- Work with **real case studies** from enlargement countries to extract tactics that can also be applied in the EU.



Participants will, continued:

- Practice **crafting advocacy messages and strategies** that connect national struggles to EU priorities (enlargement, rule of law, the upcoming EU Civil Society Strategy).
- Co-create a **mini advocacy roadmap** that links Member States and candidate countries, ensuring solidarity is backed by actual policy leverage.
- Exchange tools (e.g. Monitoring Matrix, coalition models), identify allies, and map opportunities that can travel across borders and help reinforce solidarity.

By the end, participants will leave with:

- A **toolkit of advocacy tactics** adaptable to EU and national contexts.
- Insights into **how enlargement experiences can inspire action inside the EU**, and vice versa.
- A draft **joint advocacy roadmap** feeding into the EU Civil Society Strategy and other EU-level processes.

Other relevant information

Format: a mix of short inputs presentations, interactive group exercises, and plenary sharing.

Cross-learning is central: EU and enlargement participants will work together to identify overlaps, divergences, and opportunities for joint action. The Serbia case study will guide the workshop methodology, showing how advocacy grounded in networks and coalitions can be a replicable model elsewhere.

Outcomes will feed into the conference's shared action points, ensuring that defending civic space is addressed as a pan-European challenge, not confined to candidate countries.

7. Strengthening solidarity and coalition-building mechanisms

The workshop is organised by the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and will be hosted by Nourhene Mahmoudi, Policy and Advocacy Advisor.

Description

This session focuses on reinforcing the infrastructures that enable solidarity and collective action across movements and borders. Drawing on ENAR's experience in shaping and monitoring the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025 as well as the upcoming EU Anti-Racism Strategy, it explores how similar frameworks can inspire and strengthen collaboration among movements for racial, climate, migrant and social justice. Through shared reflections and practical examples of cross-country coalition-building, participants will identify concrete ways to connect grassroots realities with EU-level advocacy, fostering resilient networks capable of responding collectively to shrinking civic space and rights restrictions.

Skills and capacities participants will gain:

- Deeper understanding of mechanisms for transnational solidarity and coalition-building.
- Knowledge of how to connect grassroots struggles with EU-level advocacy and policy-making
- Practical tools for strengthening alliances across movements and communities
- Strategies for coordinated responses to repression and the criminalisation of solidarity
- Enhanced capacity to design and sustain collective action frameworks at multiple levels



8. Democratising the MFF:

Unlocking the potential of CSO's while answering their needs and identifying strategic partners

The workshop is organised by the National Federation of Polish NGO's (OFOP) and the Stefan Batory Foundation.

Description



In mid-July, the European Commission presented its proposal for a new Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028-32. It includes an ambitious plan to double current funding for the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme, which is to become part of a new initiative called Agora EU. However, immediately after the announcement, voices of opposition to a general increase in the EU budget arose. We now face months of struggle to maintain support for CSO's.

But money is not everything. CSO's also have procedural solutions at their disposal to implement their agenda and improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable members of our societies – horizontal principles and mechanisms to control their implementation (e.g. monitoring committees). However, the current draft EU documents setting out the rules for implementing the EU budget do not guarantee sufficient use of these mechanisms. Joint action is needed to remedy this.

The aim of this workshop will be to familiarise participants with various issues that increase the participation of CSO's in the implementation of the EU budget, including cohesion policy. Together, we will explore what advocacy activities are worth undertaking and what arguments to use to achieve this. We will also identify allies at European and national levels who are worth engaging in this activity. The main recommendations developed will then be presented in a policy paper and translated into action.



9. A strategic approach to legal defence: Developing anti-SLAPP law in Europe and beyond

The workshop is organised by the Global Climate Legal Defense (CliDef).

Description

Around the world Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP's) are increasingly being used as a means of blocking accountability and silencing advocacy.

In response to this growing threat to democracy, last year two new legal instruments were introduced to tackle SLAPP's in Europe: an EU Directive and a Council of Europe recommendation on SLAPP's. Both instruments are replete with gaps and ambiguities, and much will therefore come down to the transposition process (due to end in May 2026).

This session will explore how we can take advantage of the opportunities this period brings – with courts in Europe increasingly receptive to anti-SLAPP arguments – while reducing the risk of bad case law accumulating that reduces the scope of anti-SLAPP protections. It will look more broadly at how defensive legal actions can be made strategic, and how funders and CSO's can help build far-reaching and durable protections for activists and other public watchdogs. Participants will gain the capacity to identify strategic cases; mitigate risks associated with litigation; develop the law to build anti-SLAPP protections; and respond sustainably to legal strategies built around financial attrition.



10. The role of cities and regions implementing human rights: why and how?

The workshop is held by the Human Rights Office of the City of Vienna and Region Västra Götaland. It will be hosted by Shams Asadi, Human Rights Commissioner, Emma Broberg, Regionsudvikler/regional developer and Morten Kjaerum, Adjunct Professor, Aalborg University.

Description

In 1958 Eleanor Roosevelt famously expressed that if human rights are not implemented where people live their daily life they have worth nowhere (paraphrased). The human rights city movement has developed across all continents the past 20 years. This summer it took an important step forward when the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights and the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) co-signed the Guidance Framework for Creating a Human Rights City building within the EU framework. Why are cities relevant in this regard and how is it done and implemented in the everyday life in a city or region? These are the questions we will discuss, and participants will be presented with tools to address human rights at a local level.

