

# CSO Strategy 2023–2027

Background note to the Government  
resolution on the development of civic  
space

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## The Government resolution on the development of civic space

The Government resolution outlines the development of civic space in the Government Programme period 2023–2027. An active and vibrant civil society with its CSOs is a key part of a functioning democratic society. The resolution was approved in a plenary session on 6.6.2024.

CSOs promote people's wellbeing, democracy and participation, increase trust and strengthen society's comprehensive security and resilience. As the operating environment of CSOs is changing, they have the need and responsibility to develop activities such as fundraising, increase cooperation and restructure themselves. The resolution promotes CSOs' own fundraising, develops government grant activities concerning CSOs and dismantles burdensome bureaucracy.

The resolution was prepared by a cross-administrative working group that utilized previous studies and recommendations, consulted CSOs and other experts, and compiled a literature review. The working group collected feedback from public administration and CSOs on the development of civic space. The resolution was also discussed in the ministerial working group on internal security and administration of justice.

CSO Strategy 2023–2027: Government resolution on the development of civic space is available in English: <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/165691>

## Background note to the Government resolution

This background note was published as an appendix to the Finnish-language Government Resolution (Publications of the Ministry of Justice, Reports and Statements 2024:20). The background note is now also available in English so it can be utilised in stakeholder cooperation.

This background note covers the themes of the strategy more extensively than the Government resolution. The background note also describes the preparation of the strategy and contains a feedback summary.

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# 1 Introduction

The Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government of 20 June 2023 outlines that the Government will lighten the additional regulation on organisational and volunteer activities, explore possibilities for developing the independent fundraising of CSOs and improve interaction between administration and civil society. EU funding opportunities will be expanded in particular for civil society organisations engaged in work to prevent violence and crime.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the statement to Parliament on promoting equality, gender equality and non-discrimination 31 August 2023 outlines that dialogue with civil society organisations will be strengthened with measures such as the implementation of a CSO Strategy.<sup>2</sup>

An active and vibrant civil society is a key part of a functioning democratic society. CSOs promote people's wellbeing, democracy and participation, increase trust and strengthen society's comprehensive security and crisis resilience. For this to continue to be the case in the future, public administration must develop and monitor civic space in both the short and long term. As the activities and operating environment of CSOs change rapidly, CSOs have a need and obligation to develop fundraising-related activities, increase cooperation and reform structures.<sup>3 4</sup>

The CSO strategy, which is based on the Government Programme and will be implemented during the Government Programme period 2023–2027, outlines how the Government will develop civic space. The strategy will promote independent fund-raising activities by CSOs, develop government grant activities concerning CSOs so they are more consistent than at present and dismantle bureaucracy that burdens CSOs. A broader picture of the relationship between public administration and civil society, which also takes into account municipalities and wellbeing services counties, will be formed. By developing the cooperation between public administration and CSOs, it is possible to promote genuine dialogue and strengthen democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Vahva ja välittävä Suomi. 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Valtioneuvoston tiedonanto yhdenvertaisuuden, tasa-arvon ja syrjimättömyyden edistämistä suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa.2023.

<sup>3</sup> Lind, Kimmo. 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Aalto-Kallio, Mervi, Mäkipää, Erica, Kittilä, Riitta, Inkinen, Ari. 2023.

## 2 Situational picture and development of the operating conditions of CSOs

### 2.1 Diverse CSOs

An active and vibrant civil society is a key part of a functioning democratic society. CSOs promote and protect democracy as part of civil society.<sup>5</sup> They promote people's well-being and inclusion in a multitude of ways with their existing structures. CSOs also play an important role in increasing trust and strengthening the overall security and resilience of society.<sup>6</sup> CSOs also promote sustainable development, integration and the formation of culture.<sup>7 8 9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ipsos European Public Affairs. 2023.

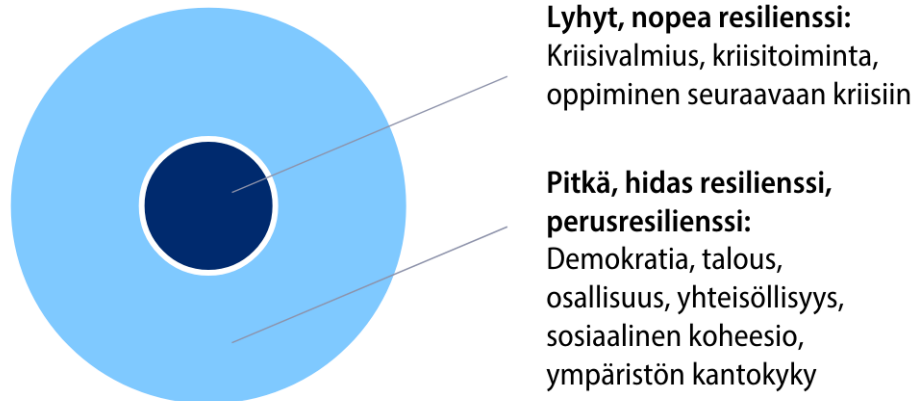
<sup>6</sup> Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös. 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Strategic foresight report. 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Faehnle, Maija, Mäenpää, Pasi. 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Mäenpää, Pasi, Grönlund, Henrietta, Kemppainen, Teemu. 2023.

**Kuvio 1.** Two perspectives on resilience<sup>10</sup>



**[Inner circle] Short, fast resilience:** Crisis preparedness, crisis response, learning for the next crisis

**[Outer circle] Long-term, slow resilience, basic resilience:** Democracy, economy, inclusion, communality, social cohesion, environmental capacity

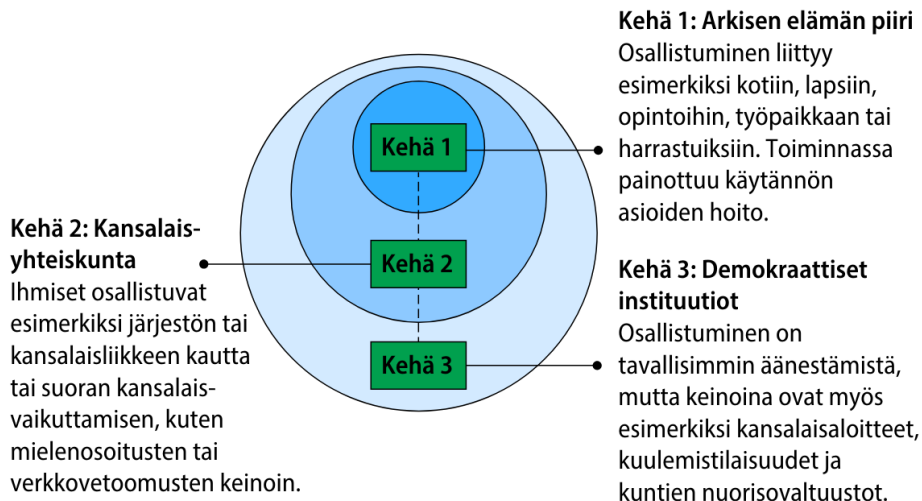
Activities in the form of associations continue to hold a strong position in Finnish society, as people want to, for example, participate and make a difference, learn and help others, and engage in leisure activities through associations. However, there is a desire to participate in association activities more diversely than before. There are more than 108,000 registered associations in Finland, and more than half the population participate in their activities.<sup>11 12</sup> Free-form, decentralised and network-like civic activities are becoming more common alongside organised civic activities organised in associations, which is also reflected in people's participation in society. This is illustrated in Figure 2 as an example.

<sup>10</sup> Faehnle, Maija, Mäenpää, Pasi, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Tilastokeskus.2018.

<sup>12</sup> Jauhiainen, Jyrki, Tervola, Markus. 2021.

**Kuvio 2.** Circles of societal participation<sup>13</sup>



### **[Inner circle] Circle 1: Circle of participation in everyday life**

Participation is related to such things as the home, children, studies, workplace or hobbies. The focus of the activities is on practical matters.

### **[Middle circle] Circle 2: Participation in civil society**

People participate, for example, through an organisation or a citizens' movement or through direct civic participation, such as demonstrations or online petitions.

### **[Outer circle] Circle 3: Participation in democratic institutions**

Participation usually involves voting, but also includes means such as citizens' initiatives, hearings and municipal youth councils.

<sup>13</sup> Hantula, Kirsti, Lauha, Heikki, Mäkelä, Rosa-Maria, Vahti, Jukka.2024.

Some CSOs have become more professional, which is reflected in such things as an increase in the amount of paid work carried out in the CSO and the social economy.<sup>14</sup>  
<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> Organisations play a growing role as employers. A large number of associations still operate on a voluntary basis.

The state provides significant funding for CSO activities and projects. According to an estimate, a total of EUR 800 million of discretionary government grants are granted to CSOs each year.<sup>18</sup> Established discretionary government transfers remain highly necessary public funding for NGOs, as fundraising provides few NGOs with the foreseeable and continuous funding required for professional activities.<sup>19</sup>

Although many hundreds of CSOs apply for and receive government grants, a large proportion of associations operate solely with funding from membership fees, other grants and subsidies or collect funds for their activities through other fundraising, such as one-off and monthly donations or corporate cooperation. Fundraising and the responsible use of government grants require CSOs to have effective and efficient governance and compliance systems. At the same time, many CSOs feel that the requirements for administrative competence and legal obligations, as well as regulation and steering by public administration, have increased. If the operating logic of the private and public sector begins to replace the operating logic of voluntariness and member democracy in CSOs, this may weaken the specific nature of the activities of CSOs. The general rise in prices and costs is also posing a challenge to organisational and volunteer activities.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ruuskanen, Petri, Selander, Kirsikka, Anttila, Timo. 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Ruuskanen, Petri, Jousilahti, Julia, Faehnle, Maija, Kuusikko, Kirsi, Kuittinen, Outi, Virtanen, Johanna, Strömberg, Lisbeth. 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Komission tiedonanto Euroopan parlamentille, neuvostolle, Euroopan talous- ja sosiaalikomitealle ja alueiden komitealle ihmisten hyväksi toimivan talouden rakentaminen: yhteisötalouden toimintasuunnitelma. 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Yhteisötalous: Komissio ehdottaa keinoja hyödyntää yhteisötalouden potentiaalia työllisyyden, innovoinnin ja sosiaalisen osallisuuden edistämiseksi.

<sup>18</sup> Järjestöjen valtionavustuskäytänteiden kehittämisjaosto, valtionavustustoiminnan kehittämis- ja digitalisointihanke. 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Valtionavustuslaki 688/2001.

<sup>20</sup> Rahoitusmarkkinaosasto. Ministry of Finance. 2024.



## CSOS ARE NOT ONE, BUT MANY

Civil society organisation (also non-governmental organisation, international non-governmental organisation) is defined as an actor whose activities are independent of national governments and who implement a certain common goal, value or matter.<sup>21</sup> In Finland, the public administration has traditionally supported CSOs. Civil society organisation (CSO) is used as a general term in this background note.

CSOs do not form a coherent whole but are diverse and in many respects very different from each other, albeit united by the basic principles of being voluntary, non-profit and for the common good.<sup>22</sup> This diversity does not only apply to CSOs, but also to their operating environment both in Finland and internationally. As an example, people in cities experience different situations to those who live in sparsely populated areas.<sup>23</sup>

CSOs are generally placed in the third social sector as a distinction between the market and the state and the emerging fourth sector which is part of civil society.<sup>24</sup> In addition to their actual activities, some CSOs engage in economic activities, offering products and services on the market.<sup>25</sup> The European Commission has also proposed new legislation to promote European cross-border association activities.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 Operating conditions of civil society organisations must be developed in Finland and Europe

Public administration support is part of the Finnish civil society model, and it is valued internationally. It has been recommended that Finland's public administration develop the operating conditions of CSOs and safeguard their operating environment in the future. The recommendations issued by international organisations and the institutions and agencies of the European Union are related to things such as:

- access to public funding and resources;
- an enabling regulatory environment and legislation; and

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<sup>21</sup> Civil society organisation. 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Arajärvi, Pentti. 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Lind, Kimmo, Kaunismaa, Pekka (toim.) 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Ruuskanen, Petri, Jousilahti, Julia, Faehnle, Maija, Kuusikko, Kirsi, Kuittinen, Outi, Virtanen, Johanna, Strömberg, Lisbeth. 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Peltosalmi, Juha. 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Oikeusministeriön tiedote. 2023.

- the right of citizens and civil society actors to participate in public decision-making.<sup>27 28 29</sup>

The recommendations issued to Finland are also related to the protection of CSOs, to strengthening their capacities and safeguarding their independence in a situation where it has been reported that the state of civil society has narrowed in Europe.<sup>30 31</sup> Democracy and free civil society must also be defended in Finland.<sup>32 33 34</sup>

Civil society has intrinsic value in a functioning democratic rule of law. Public administration must avoid steering civil society and respect freedom of association and assembly.<sup>35</sup> The agency, operating principles and decision-making power of CSOs must be respected, for example when awarding government grants. Government grant activities are accompanied by guidance, a requirement for accountability and common societal goals, which should be pursued with as uniform methods and with as little administrative burden as possible.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Civic Space Scan of Finland. 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Komission suositus (EU) 2023/2829.

<sup>29</sup> Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy. Preparing the Ground for Government Action. 2022.

<sup>30</sup> A thriving civic space for upholding fundamental rights in the EU. 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Strategic foresight report. 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Komission suositus (EU) 2023/2829.

<sup>33</sup> Komission suositus (EU) C/2023/8627.

<sup>34</sup> International Idea. 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Komission suositus (EU) C/2023/8627.

<sup>36</sup> Komission suositus (EU) C/2023/8627.

## 3 Government objectives and measures

The strategy defines five packages that describe what kind of change the development of civic space is intended to achieve quickly and in the longer term. Indicative goals and shorter-term objectives are accompanied by rapid government measures to create opportunities for CSOs to develop activities such as fundraising, increase cooperation and restructure themselves. Cooperation between public administration and CSOs is developed in a goal-oriented manner.

The measures will be carried out as official work, during which their impacts will be assessed. If the measures are expected to involve costs other than those arising from official duties, the measures will only be implemented if separate funding is provided.

### 3.1 Improving the preconditions for CSOs to raise their own funds

It is not easy for CSOs to obtain private funding, as their ability to raise funds vary significantly. While the amount of private funding seems to have increased in recent years,<sup>37</sup> According to the accounts for 2022, small-scale money collections produced approximately EUR 2.4 million. The average revenue from small-scale money collections was approximately EUR 3,320. On the other hand, money collection campaigns produced approximately EUR 283.1 million, whereas indefinitely valid money collection permits were examined until the end of the financial year ended on 31 December 2022. The average revenue from money collection campaigns was approximately EUR 216,000 and the median slightly over EUR 4,100. The figures do not include fundraising similar to membership fees.

On the basis of a report, one in five Finns regularly support one or more organisations.<sup>38</sup> According to the Citizens' Pulse survey, more than half of respondents had supported the activities of an association during the past year, for example by donating money.<sup>39</sup> Private foundations supported science, art and civic activities with more

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<sup>37</sup> Tutkimus:Järjestöillä on vahva usko varainhankinnan tuottojen kasvuun.2024.

<sup>38</sup> Mikkonen, Katja. 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Kansalaispulssi: Luottamus terveydenhuoltoon ja koulutukseen yhä laskussa. 2024.

than EUR 580 million in 2022.<sup>40</sup> In an international comparison of fundraising, Finland lags behind other Nordic countries, which emphasises the need to develop a culture of donation based on private funding.<sup>41</sup>

## Target

A culture of donations based on private funding will develop and the self-sufficiency of CSOs will improve.

## Objective

Strengthen the preconditions for independent funding by CSOs in order to increase the opportunities for CSOs to acquire more private funding. It is expected that the implementation of the objective will have impacts on central government finances, which must be examined separately as part of official duties. Measures based on tax statements shall only be taken if the resulting reduction in tax revenue is accepted. The attainment of the objective will be monitored on the basis of information on small-scale money collections and money collection campaigns by CSOs as well as information on taxes.

## Measures

The donation deduction will be extended to donations to youth, physical activity, sports, and cultural organisations and to child organisations that meet certain requirements in accordance with the decision of the spending limits discussion.<sup>42</sup> The donation deduction applies to donations made by individuals, companies and organisations. In addition, to increase private funding for CSOs, the extension of the right to tax deductibility of donations to more widely registered associations and foundations will also be explored.<sup>43</sup> In order for this operating model to be as effective as possible, it should already enter into force in 2026. It will also be investigated what costs of fundraising could be eligible for government grants, and the acquisition and efficient production of common services in CSOs in matters requiring high levels of administrative expertise, such as fundraising, will be supported. Other tax incentives for CSOs should be explored separately.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Raivio, Tuomas, Aho, Jatta, Saarinen, Iina. 2023.

<sup>41</sup> World Giving Index. 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Lisäsopeutustoimet ja velkaantumiskehityksen vakauttaminen. 2024.

<sup>43</sup> Arajärvi, Pentti. 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Yhteisötalous: Komissio ehdottaa keinoja hyödyntää yhteisötalouden potentiaalia työllisyyden, innovoinnin ja sosiaalisen osallisuuden edistämiseksi. 2023.

## 3.2 Continue the development of discretionary government grant activities and operating methods

In recent years, the development and harmonisation of practices related to government grants awarded to CSOs has been investigated, for example by the Ministry of Finance and the National Audit Office. The suggestions for improvements concern the appropriateness of the administration of government grants and the prerequisites for effectiveness, as well as the conditions and restrictions for the use of government grants. The latter two differ, in part unnecessarily. Civil society organisations expect concrete changes to government grant activities.<sup>45</sup><sup>46</sup><sup>47</sup> <sup>48</sup> The regulation related to the granting of discretionary government grants was reformed when the funding model for non-profit organisations financed by gambling proceeds was updated.<sup>49</sup>

### Target

The effectiveness of discretionary government grant activities will increase and their productivity will improve.

### Objective

Reduce administrative burden and the multi-channel nature of government grant activities and improve the productivity of activities.<sup>50</sup> The objective of reducing administrative burden is emphasised through savings to discretionary government grants meaning CSOs can allocate savings to administration and avoid savings to their activities. The implementation of the objective is expected to have impacts on central government finances and improve productivity, as estimated in the Ministry of Finance's discretionary government grant project.<sup>51</sup> Discretionary government grant activities and operating methods will be developed as part of official duties. The attainment of the objective is monitored on the basis of discretionary government grants to civil so-

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<sup>45</sup> Järjestöjen valtionavustustoimintaa kehittävä työryhmä. 2023.

<sup>46</sup> National Audit Office of Finland 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Järjestöjen valtionavustuskäytänteiden kehittämisjaosto. 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Lainsäädäntöjaosto. 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Finnish Government. 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Pöytäkirjamerkinnot. 2024.

<sup>51</sup> Valtionavustustoiminnan tietojohdaminen ja vaikuttavuus. 2024.

ciety organisations, which can be seen in the Tutkiavustukset.fi (Exploregrants.fi) service. In addition, the use of discretionary government grants and what is achieved with discretionary government grants are monitored.

## Measures

The joint government grant services produced by the State Treasury will be used and government grant practices will be reformed when there is no justified reason for separate operating methods. At the same time, the aim is to emphasise general grants instead of project grants in government grants.<sup>52</sup> The Act on Discretionary Government Grants and the conditions and restrictions for government grants will be reformed.<sup>53</sup> At the discretion of government grant authorities, volunteer activities will be taken into account as a free resource when awarding government grants.<sup>54</sup> Voluntary activities can, for example, reduce the share of co-financing required in awarding government grants, and they are already often taken into account in EU-funded projects as self-financing.<sup>55</sup> Overlapping discretionary government grants will be reduced, and CSOs will be invited to take part in the planning and evaluation of the objectives related to discretionary government grants, as proposed in the joint operating model for discretionary government grant activities.<sup>56</sup> The aim is to have uniform documents for applying for government grants and reporting on their use, to which government grant authorities only make necessary changes on a case-by-case basis.

## 3.3 Supporting access to EU funding in Finland

EU funding is highly competitive, with an administrative burden that CSOs consider unreasonably heavy. On the other hand, potential is seen in EU if public administration were to support CSOs more with its existing steering instruments or new services. For example, the Finnish contact point for the CERV funding programme provides support in application for funding and in networking.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Pöytäkirjamerkinnot.2024.

<sup>53</sup> Julkisen talouden suunnitelma vuosille 2025–2028.

<sup>54</sup> Lainsäädäntöjaosto. 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Käsitelyryhmä. 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Valtionavustustoiminnan tietojohdaminen ja vaikuttavuus. 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Kansalaisuus, tasa-arvo, perusoikeudet ja arvot -rahoitusohjelma (CERV).

## Target

EU funding to Finland will grow, and Finland will benefit more from the European Union.

## Objective

Support attainment of EU funding in Finland by increasing the ability of CSOs to apply for EU funding and their ability to cooperate in a network-based manner. It is estimated that the implementation of the objective will have impacts on central government finances, which must be examined separately as part of official duties in terms of the production of funding application services and the establishment of a fund. The attainment of the objective will be monitored on the basis of government grants granted for EU revenue and own contributions [self-financing contributions].

## Measures

Applying for EU funding will be made easier for CSOs. At the same time, support will be provided to CSOs to pass on EU funding to other CSOs. Joint funding application services will be designed for CSOs to apply for EU funding, national coordination will be increased and it will be ensured that government grants can be used as self-financing in EU funding applications. The possibility of setting up a fund that could combine public and private funding and could provide grants to cover self-financing will also be explored. Access to EU funding will be expanded, in particular for CSOs active in the prevention of violence and crime.

## 3.4 Encouraging civic and voluntary activities

According to the Citizens' Pulse survey, more than three out of four feel that association activities benefit the well-being of Finns.<sup>58</sup> It is important for Finland that CSOs continue to operate as desirable, accessible places to participate in civic and volunteer activities. For example, CSOs play an important role in preparing for disruptions, in addition to which they coordinate the participation of volunteers in disruptions.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Kansalaispulssi: Luottamus terveydenhuoltoon ja koulutukseen yhä laskussa. 2024.

<sup>59</sup> Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös. 2017.

However, civic activity will change its form, which must be better taken into account in legislation and official activities. Public administrations should increase the opportunities for action in a controlled manner so that registered associations and other civil society actors can independently decide on the introduction of new opportunities.<sup>60</sup>

Volunteering is a popular way of participating in society both in association activities and parallel to these, and this has been somewhat investigated in recent years. Volunteering increases the overall well-being of society, and, according to calculations, its value in 2023 totalled EUR 3.2 billion.<sup>61</sup> The amount invested in voluntary activities is estimated to be six times as much.<sup>62</sup> The total time used on volunteering activities was 224 million hours in 2020, and in 2018 it was noted that about half of the population participated in volunteer activities during the previous year.<sup>63 64</sup>

## Target

Participation in volunteer activities and the importance of volunteer activities will increase.

## Objective

Encourage people to participate in civic and volunteer activities by easing and dismantling standards for civil society organisations, reforming the practices of the authorities and harmonising the interpretations of the authorities. The attainment of the objective is expected to result in one-off costs but with minor cost impacts. The measures will be carried out as part of official duties. The attainment of the objective will be monitored on the basis of how many norms affecting CSOs have been eased or dismantled during the Government Programme period. In addition, information on the number, structure and life cycle of registered associations as well as information on volunteer activities, such as the computational value of volunteer activities, will be monitored.

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<sup>60</sup> Jauhiainen, Jyrki, Tervola, Markus. 2021. Communal civic activities in the 2020s

<sup>61</sup> Hoffrén, Jukka. 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Vapaaehtoistyön arvo on yli kolme miljardia vuodessa. 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Lahdenperä, Sini. 2023

<sup>64</sup> Tilastokeskus. 2018.



## Measures

Impact assessments for legislative drafting will ensure that there is no unnecessary increase in the additional regulation of organisational and voluntary activities. For example, changes in consumer safety or public order could have an impact on the operating conditions of CSOs. Legislative obstacles to organisational and volunteer activities will be investigated, and it will be ensured that the official interpretations concerning the taxation of volunteer work and the unemployment security of a person participating in volunteer work are clear and consistent throughout the country.<sup>65</sup> The Associations Act will be reformed to enable, for example, mergers of associations, including the CEO role and universal succession. Enabling the CEO role will, in particular, contribute to the management of associations that provide services, and mergers will promote the operational continuity of associations suffering from membership loss.

## 3.5 Building the knowledge base for civil society policy and cooperation

Finland performs excellently in comparisons that measure open government and the judicial system.<sup>66</sup> The Open Government Action Plan shows that Finns have clearly lower confidence in their own abilities and opportunities to participate and influence than people in the reference countries.<sup>67</sup>

Information on civil society seems fragmented and needs to be brought together. Long-term civil society policy requires foresight, academic civil society research, and raising awareness of research and development in order to share results and broaden the impact.<sup>68</sup> The assessment of CSO and civil society impacts in advance (ex-ante) and afterwards (ex-post), as well as inclusion in government, will also be identified as a development target.<sup>69</sup> The aim is for CSOs to feel that they have been listened to, not just heard.

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<sup>65</sup> Vapaaehtoistoiminnan koordinaatiota ja toimintaedellytysten kehittämistä selvittävä työryhmä. 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Suomea koskevat tiedot. WJP Rule of Law Index.

<sup>67</sup> Avoin hallinto. Toimintaohjelma 2023–2027.

<sup>68</sup> Ruuskanen, Petri, Maukonen, Pauliina, Tuikkanen, Anu. 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Saloranta, Pauli. 2024.

## Target

Knowledge-based management, administrative inclusion and cooperation with CSOs will improve in central government.

## Objective

Build a knowledge base on civil society policy and utilise this in decision-making. The attainment of the objective is expected to result in one-off costs but with minor cost impacts. The measures will be carried out as part of official duties. The attainment of the objective will be monitored on the basis of management documents and the development of personnel competence and capabilities, and by measuring stakeholders' experience of administrative inclusion and cooperation.

## Measures

The monitoring of civic space, knowledge-based management and foresight will be developed. A common picture of and outlook for the relationship between public administration and civil society will be formed. Interaction between administration and civil society will be promoted as part of the development of public administration management and personnel competence. This development work will place particular emphasis on dialogue and interaction skills. Officials use the state's joint digital learning environment and existing proven cooperation practices, such as CSO academies and national dialogues. The objectives are an inclusive democratic dialogue based on equality with CSOs and democratic encounters.

## 4 Recommendations for municipalities and wellbeing services counties

The relationship between public administration and civil society is affected by regional needs, welfare disparities and differences in population structure. The relationship between CSOs and municipalities and wellbeing services counties will be shaped in a new way as the tasks and activities of municipalities and wellbeing services counties are reorganised.<sup>70</sup> CSOs expect people-oriented, anti-silo governance and organisational cooperation at all levels of administration.

Municipalities and wellbeing services counties have a statutory task of promoting the operating conditions and opportunities of organisations engaged in work to promote wellbeing and health.<sup>71</sup> The organisation of CSOs varies regionally, which can be a challenge in such instance as during negotiations and tripartite cooperation on the promotion of wellbeing and health.<sup>72</sup> Although CSOs play an important role in the health and social services system, they should not only be reduced to private service providers. Local civic and volunteer activities and, for example, regional cooperation play a wider role.

*The capacity of civil society [should] as a whole be able to support comprehensive security – from villages to the national level. Many civic actors take solutions related to the sustainability crisis forward locally. Combining the resources of different actors in building solutions for such things as climate change mitigation, adaptation to its impacts, regional segregation and the formation of gangs that is harmful to communities, should be sought with curiosity and experimentation.<sup>73</sup>*

CSOs are concerned about the discretionary support they receive from municipalities and wellbeing services counties due to the financial situation of municipalities and wellbeing services counties. Factors supporting local and regional civic and volunteer activities include encounters between civic actors, encounters between civic actors and public administration, networking, funding, meeting facilities, advisory services,

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<sup>70</sup> Alanko, Leena, Kilpi, Jenni, Ahola, Nina, Mäenpää, Pasi, Faehnle, Maija. 2024.

<sup>71</sup> Laki sosiaali- ja terveydenhuollon järjestämisestä 612/2021.

<sup>72</sup> Alanko, Leena, Kilpi, Jenni, Ahola, Nina, Mäenpää, Pasi, Faehnle, Maija. 2024.

<sup>73</sup> Alanko, Leena, Kilpi, Jenni, Ahola, Nina, Mäenpää, Pasi, Faehnle, Maija. 2024.

training, as well as communication and tools. It is recommended that municipalities and wellbeing services counties review these factors with CSOs.<sup>74 75</sup>

It is also necessary to develop civic space and the inclusion of CSOs at regional level, For this reason, it is recommended that municipalities and wellbeing services counties do the following:

- identify the CSOs that are key to their tasks and the added value of working with them
- designate contact persons responsible for cooperation and support for civic and voluntary activities
- take the development of civic space into account in strategies and long-term financial planning
- further develop their inclusion activities
- award grants and reform grant practices, and ensure the availability of facilities for civic and voluntary activities
- exploit the potential of regional network organisations; and
- try combining public and private funding and, for example, volunteer work in suburban development.<sup>76 77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Alanko, Leena, Kilpi, Jenni, Ahola, Nina, Mäenpää, Pasi, Faehnle, Maija. 2024.

<sup>75</sup> Pohjois-Pohjanmaan järjestöneuvottelukunta. 2019.

<sup>76</sup> Alanko, Leena, Kilpi, Jenni, Ahola, Nina, Mäenpää, Pasi, Faehnle, Maija. 2024.

<sup>77</sup> Jousilahti, Julia, Alanko, Leena, Faehnle, Maija, Mäenpää, Pasi. 2023.

# 5 Monitoring and implementation of the strategy

## 5.1 Implementation plan

On 13 November 2023, the Ministry of Justice appointed a cross-administrative working group to prepare the strategy and coordinate its implementation in the Government. The term of the working group extends until 17 April 2027. The implementation plan will be updated at least once a year, more often if necessary. The plan specifies the link between the strategy and other projects and programmes during the government term, such as the National Programme to Promote Democracy and Participation.<sup>78</sup>

The strategy will be implemented in a transparent and inclusive manner across administrative divisions. Reporting concerning the implementation will be submitted to the ministerial working group on internal security and administration of justice.

### INDICATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

**Introduction** (premises)

**Strategy roadmap, follow-up** (overall picture of the progress of the measures)

**Objective-specific assessment** (a situational picture that will become more detailed, management analysis)

**Description of measures and measure-specific assessment** (impact chains, links)

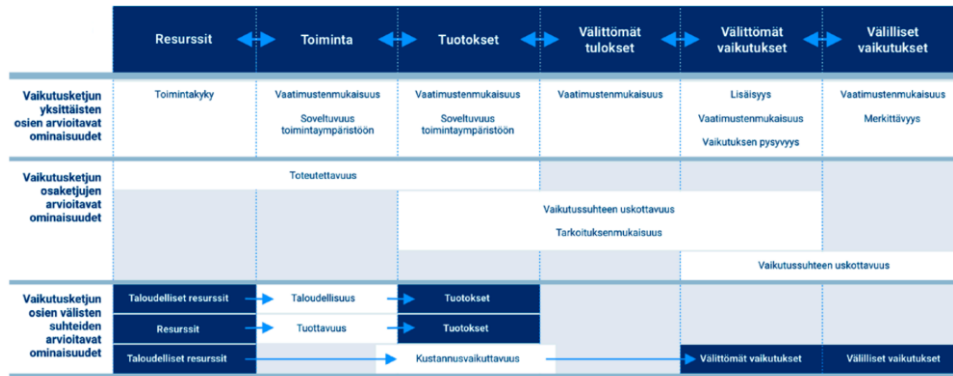
**Foresight work and anticipation** (situation and future image of civil society)

**Communication and interaction**

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<sup>78</sup> Kansallinen ohjelma demokratian ja osallistumisen edistämiseksi.

**Kuvio 3.** Presentation of measures in impact chains<sup>79</sup>



|   | Re-sources                     | Operations  | Outputs   | Immediate results                                    | Direct impacts                                       | Indirect impacts                |
|---|--------------------------------|---|---|--|--|---------------------------------|
| Characteristics to be assessed for individual parts of the impact chain | Functional capacity            | Compliance, suitability for the operating environment | Compliance, suitability for the operating environment | Compliance   | Additionality, compliance, permanence of impact      | Compliance, Significance        |
| Characteristics to be assessed for impact chain sub-chains              |                                | Feasibility   |   | Credibility of the impact ratio, fitness for purpose | Credibility of the impact ratio, fitness for purpose | Credibility of the impact ratio |
| Characteristics to be assessed for links between impact chain parts     | Financial resources, resources | Economic efficiency, productivity                     | Outputs, cost-effectiveness                           |  | Direct impacts                                       | Indirect impacts                |

<sup>79</sup> Valtionavustukset, materiaalipankki. 2024.

## 5.2 Follow-up and assessment systems

The implementation of the strategy is reported in the Government's annual report. In addition to the ministerial working group on internal security and administration of justice, the implementation will be monitored by a monitoring group to be set up in connection with the project, to which civil society actors, civil society researchers and representatives of municipalities and wellbeing services counties, etc. will be invited.<sup>80</sup> The monitoring group will also participate in foresight work and anticipation related to the state and future of civil society prepared by the working group coordinating the implementation of the strategy. Discussions open to all will also be held on the monitoring.

A monitoring report will be prepared on the implementation of the strategy, assessing what kind of measures were used to promote the objectives set in the strategy, what was achieved and what kind of change the indicators set per objective showed. At the same time, the impacts of the measures on CSOs will be assessed. The monitoring report also documents the results of foresight work and anticipation, i.e. a forward-looking picture of the situation and future of civil society.

## 5.3 Analysis and research activities supporting the implementation of the strategy

More information is needed on the vitality of CSOs, on structural changes and the development of activities – also regionally. A report on the activities of CSOs would complement the previously published report on the state and future of civil society in Finland in the 2020s and the quantitative measurement of the strategy.<sup>81</sup> A report on the activities of civil society organisations will be drawn up if separate funding is ensured.

When implementing the strategy, the impacts of the cuts in discretionary government grants are analysed and reported to CSOs in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance and the Parliamentary Advisory Board for the Development of Funding and Operations of Non-profit Organisations, the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy and the Advisory Board on Ethnic Relations. The Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy and

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<sup>80</sup> OM140:00/2023.

<sup>81</sup> Ruuskanen, Petri, Jousilahti, Julia, Faehnle, Maija, Kuusikko, Kirsi, Kuittinen, Outi, Virtanen, Johanna, Strömberg, Lisbeth. 2020.

the Advisory Board on Ethnic Relations monitor the economic and operational development of CSOs and engage in dialogue with CSOs to share good practices concerning the development of activities, increased cooperation and structural reform.



# Appendix 1: Preparation description of the working group

## Working group composition

The proposal for a resolution on the CSO Strategy was prepared by a cross-administrative working group led by the Ministry of Justice between 13 November 2023 and 11 April 2024. The working group was chaired by Permanent Secretary Pekka Timonen and its vice chairman was Johanna Suurpää from the Ministry of Justice.

The members appointed to the working group were

- Risto Alatarvas, Senior Specialist, and his substitute Sanna Malkki from the Prime Minister's Office;
- Ari Ewvaraye, Head of Strategy and his substitute Eeva Koivunen, Eeva Koivunen, Specialist. After the working group's composition was supplemented Eeva Koivunen, Specialist and her substitute Sini Erholtz, Senior Specialist at the Ministry of the Interior;
- Outi Hakanen, Senior Adviser on Foreign Affairs and her substitute Katja Ahlfors, Head of Unit at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs;
- Heta-Elena Heiskanen, Senior Specialist, and her substitute Anu Häkli, Senior Specialist from the Ministry of the Environment;
- Tiina Kivisaari, Director at the Ministry of Education and Culture;
- Pauliina Pussinen, Senior Specialist and her substitute Markku Mölläri, Ministerial Adviser at the Ministry of Finance;
- Olli Rusanen, Senior Staff Officer and his substitute Marikaisa Tiilikainen, Ministerial Adviser at the Ministry of Defence;
- Mona Särkelä, Head of Assessment and her substitute Jaakko Kiilunen from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health;
- Varpu Taarna, Senior Specialist at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment;
- Sami Tantarimäki, Senior Specialist at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry;
- Niklas Wilhelmsson, Head of Unit and his substitute Jyrki Jauhiainen, Senior Ministerial Adviser at the Ministry of Justice.

The specialist members appointed to the working group were

- Emmanuel Sibomana, Executive Director of Paremmän yhdessä ry, and his substitute Jaana Vasama, Executive Director of the Tuglas Society from the Advisory Board on Ethnic Relations;

- Taina Susiluoto, CEO of the Finnish Olympic Committee, and her substitute Riitta Kittilä, Head of Organisation at SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health, and after the working group composition was supplemented Anna Munsterhjelm, Executive Director of the Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi from the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy.

The secretaries of the working group were Mikko Lehtonen, Maria Wakeham-Har-tonen, Peter Kariuki and Oula-Antti Labba from the Ministry of Justice.

## Preparation by the working group

The working group utilised previous reports and recommendations, heard organisa-tions and other experts, and compiled a literature review. The working group collected feedback from public administration and CSOs on the development of the operating conditions of CSOs, but the dialogue between different actors remained relatively mi-nor during preparation.

The working group prepared a proposal for the resolution on the CSO strategy for the ministerial working group on internal security and administration of justice. The pro-posal also included a background note. The working group's proposal took into ac-count the decisions made during the Government's negotiations on the General Gov-ernment Fiscal Plan for 2025–2028 held on 15 and 16 April 2024.<sup>82 83</sup> The ministerial working group on internal security and administration of justice discussed the pro-posal for a resolution on 25 April 2024 and 30 May 2024. At the latter meeting, the ministerial working group advocated a CSO Strategy, which the Government would adopt as a resolution.

## The working group

- collected 25 pieces of feedback through an online survey between 30 January and 11 April 2024
- held a general hearing attended by 125 participants on 14 February 2024
- surveyed the views of 165 registered participants in an online discussion between 14 February and 13 March 2024 and
- carried out a strategy-themed CSO Academy together with the Ministry of Finance on 20 March 2024, which brought together 100 people at the

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<sup>82</sup> Hallituksen neuvottelu julkisen talouden suunnitelmasta vuosille 2025–2028.

<sup>83</sup> Julkisen talouden suunnitelma vuosille 2025–2028.

Helsinki City Hall event square and nearly 300 signed-in participants online on the Helsinki channel.

Nine ministry-specific meetings created links with the Government's strategic objectives and projects in administrative branches and included discussion on the draft strategy at its different stages. The ministries also provided written feedback to the working group. The preparation of the strategy was also discussed when the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy met ministers, state secretaries and special advisers during its early spring communication and influence round. The strategy was discussed at ten stakeholder meetings and workshops, which reached nearly 400 people in the spring of 2024.

## Appendix 2: Feedback summary

Feedback providers confirmed that the CSO Strategy is necessary and justified in terms of its targets, but the expectations of the change brought about by the strategy were moderate. The preparation was praised despite its rapid timetable, and the limitations to the strategy based on the Government Programme were understood. However, respondents felt that a more extensive situational picture of the operating conditions of CSOs was needed, which would also take into account changes in citizen participation and influence as well as the development of democracy. Some CSOs expected a strategy for civic activity or society.

CSOs were concerned about the deterioration of the relationship between public administration and CSOs due to the state of public finances. For this reason, they proposed that the state and future of the Finnish civil society model based on public administration support should be discussed extensively once the measures included in the strategy have been quickly initiated. Sustainable development, resilience, comprehensive security and civic influence in society were identified as topics for discussion.

CSOs almost unanimously supported the draft measures discussed. While the needs of small, local CSOs operating in sparsely-populated areas and large national and highly professional CSOs concerning their operating capacity varied, feedback from CSOs was consistent in their experience of increasing administrative skills requirements and other obligations. The feedback also highlighted a desire for a human-centred public administration that dismantles silos, a desire to increase administrative participation and a need for cooperation between organisations at all levels of administration. The ministries were more cautious, reserved and critical of the proposed objectives and measures than CSOs were.

The proposed resolution and the accompanying background note were modified step-by-step on the basis of feedback. Wording on the diversity of CSOs, recommendations for municipalities and wellbeing services counties as well as a mention on the appointment of a monitoring group were added to the proposal for a resolution. Foresight work and anticipation were included in the implementation of the strategy, referring to the suggestion by CSOs on social debate. For example, the draft proposal for measures concerning the enactment of the Legal Action Group Act was eliminated on the basis of the feedback received. The social economy, the economic activities of CSOs and the reform of the gambling system need to be discussed separately, and these matters were excluded from the background note. Feedback from CSOs included a few mentions on the development of the social economy or the reform of the gambling system.

The targets, objectives and measures related to developing the operating conditions of CSOs were grouped into five entities in the proposal for a resolution, drawing on the feedback received. Although the feedback providers assessed that the entities were in the right direction and in the right proportion, the analysis and overall assessment must be continued in the implementation plan. For the analysis, the ministries noted they would like to see an international comparison of the activities of CSOs and called for an assessment of whether the preparation of fundraising, discretionary government grants and volunteer activities favoured certain NGOs. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators are needed to measure the strategy.

## 1 Easing the additional regulation that applies to organisations and volunteering

CSOs were in favour of easing and dismantling the norms affecting them, especially in government grant activities and volunteer activities, wherein factors affecting their appeal and retention must be seen to. In the view of CSOs, it is contradictory that, on the one hand, the Government Programme aims to lighten the amount of additional regulation, whereas it is being increased. CSOs criticise such points as the extension of the Consumer Safety Act's scope of application proposed in its reform. Increasing public order requirements may also undermine the ability of CSOs to organise events. Public administration was also asked to provide support in matters requiring high administrative competence, for example by funding joint services of CSOs.

The ministries generally noted the need for and purpose of regulation, and they were critical of the enactment of the Act on Action Groups and the fact that the Associations Act would contain provisions on a CEO and executive body. The difference between registered action groups and registered associations was seen as minor in a previously published draft government proposal.<sup>84</sup> A CEO-executive body -based provision would blur the boundary between an association and a company, which both ministries and CSOs would like to keep clear.

Feedback providers unanimously stated that the operating methods must be reformed and the interpretations by authorities must be harmonised. CSOs also saw room for development in the availability and usability of banking services and in the moderation of official costs, referring to a report of the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy and the Ministry of Finance's assessment memorandum.<sup>85 86</sup> There is a great deal of po-

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<sup>84</sup> Jauhiainen, Jyrki, Tervola, Markus. 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Kansalaisyhteiskuntapolitiikan neuvottelukunta. 2024.

<sup>86</sup> Rahoitusmarkkinaosasto. Ministry of Finance. 2024.

tential that can be harnessed in volunteer activities when done in a sustainable manner. In the view of CSOs, the state cannot compensate for cuts in discretionary government grants at the expense of volunteers, and there is no room to lose the value of voluntary activities.

## 2 Investigating the development of independent fundraising by CSOs

CSOs emphasised that they needed government grants as resources, but noted that the process of application for, use of and reporting on government grants has great administrative burden. CSOs urged the government grant authorities to develop and reform the practices of discretionary government grants in an organisation-oriented manner, taking proportionality and equality into account. For example, CSOs were in favour of costs resulting from fundraising being an acceptable use of discretionary government grants, which would also reduce the cost percentage of fundraising. CSOs need expertise, outsourced services and cooperation to launch and develop fundraising.

The ministries' feedback showed that the terms and restrictions lined to discretionary government grants are different for a reason, and in their opinion, fundraising is not a justified manner of use of discretionary government grants pursuant to the purpose of the Act on Discretionary Government Transfers and the sufficient consideration linked to the granting of discretionary government grants. The Ministry of Finance's publication Discretionary government grants as a way to fund the fundraising activities of nongovernmental organisations compiles and describes the ministries' feedback on the matter.<sup>87</sup>

CSOs considered the extension of the right to deduct donations very important and requested that the Ministry of Finance urgently investigate the matter. CSOs also asked that other tax incentives and solutions, such as tax regulation that supports business cooperation be investigated. According to the ministries, it is necessary to assess and monitor the targeting of donations if the donation deduction is renewed in the taxation of private individuals and organisations.

## 3 Improving interaction between administration and civil society

In the view of CSOs, the value of their activities and their societal benefits should be made more visible, although they had contradictory views on the assessment of impact, due to research designs or data collection. In the opinion of CSOs, CSO data

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<sup>87</sup> Järjestöjen valtionavustustoimintaa kehittävä työryhmä, valtionavustustoiminnan kehittämisen- ja digitalisointihanke. 2023.

and information produced by CSOs should be used more in decision-making by e.g. combining it with public administration information. It is necessary to continue to identify information needs and sources, taking into account the data's quality criteria. However, the value or importance of civil society should not be summarised into barometers, indexes or indicators.

Non-governmental organisations were concerned that public administration was not sufficiently familiar with their activities, which is why strengthening civil society knowledge in public administration was welcomed. CSOs expect that they can act as a critical counterbalance to public power and assess the correctness of its activities without fear of losing the funding it provides. NGOs also noted that they have a right to participate in decision-making, while ministries noted their good interaction practices with CSOs.

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