# Summit for Democracy cohort on civic space.

Norway, the Czech Republic, and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) will jointly lead a democracy cohort on civic space under the Summit for Democracy year of action.

*Background:*

Civic space[[1]](#footnote-1) is the bedrock of an open and inclusive democracy. For citizens and civil society to organise, participate and communicate to claim their rights and influence the political and social structures – hallmarks of democracy – they need an open civic space. In order to safeguard civic space, states should create and maintain a safe and enabling environment for civil society organisations and human rights defenders. A safe and enabling environment includes guaranteeing respect for the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and freedom of expression. It entails protection from threats or harm, as well as ensuring that the legal, regulatory and policy framework for national civil society does not impede their ability to work.

*Objective and topics for discussion:*

The purpose of the cohort is to identify common commitments to strengthen support to and protection of civil society actors and civic space for democracy. The co-leads suggest to organize discussions and recommendations in working streams under the leadership of different countries, depending on interest and capacity.

We have identified the following topics under the broader heading of civic space, which we are specifically proposing for the cohort to explore. We believe these topics would merit joint recommendations emanating from the Second Summit for Democracies. Additional topics could be included, provided a government and a civil society group are willing to jointly lead work on those topics.

*National level:*

* *Participation of National Human Rights Institutions and civil society, including human rights organizations, in public decision-making process.*
* *Safe and enabling environment for social movements.*

*Civil society in exile:*

* *Opportunities for human rights defenders and civil society to continue work in exile.*

*Global efforts to support Human rights defenders:*

* *Use the 25th anniversary for the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in 2023 to strengthen support to and recognition of human rights defenders.*
* *Implement OECD DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance.*

*Outcomes:*

The co-leads aim for the cohort to prepare commitments that address the need to safeguard civic space. In doing so, the cohort intends to:

* Discuss implementation and share examples of best practices relating to existing commitments on civil society and civic space made during the first Summit for Democracy.
* Consider the need and interest for new commitments relating to cohort workstreams.
* Develop and encourage joint commitments for Summit for Democracy countries relating to cohort workstreams, domestic as well as foreign oriented.

*Process*:

All countries participating at the Summit for Democracy will be invited to participate and to contribute. We will also consider additional contributions from other international organizations, and civil society organisations.

The co-leads foresee several, primarily VTC, meetings before the next Summit, with the option to organise additional meetings as needed. The first meeting will take place on 18 October at 14:30 CET (12:30 GMT).

1. **Civic space** is the physical, virtual, legal, regulatory, and policy space where people can, among other things, securely exercise their rights to the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression, in keeping with human rights. Source: [OECD Legal Instruments](https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/Instrument%20s/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5021). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)