

Allianz Foundation Future Labs

Strategies for Strengthening
Civic Engagement
Across Europe



**ALLIANZ
FOUNDATION**

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How can more young people be encouraged to take civic action and to pull together?

To address this question, the Allianz Foundation invited 78 leading voices from civil society, the arts and journalism to seven interactive Future

Labs in seven European cities — Athens, Berlin, Istanbul, London, Palermo, Prizren and Warsaw. The following strategies were elaborated based on the insights and on-the-ground experiences shared by Future Lab participants.

Strategies for Civil Society

To build awareness for their cause and work, civil society leaders should

- > **understand their potential supporters and meet them on their level**
- > **craft a compelling change narrative** that is relatable, using real-world examples, personal stories and role models who potential supporters can connect with.
- > **use accessible language.** All information and messaging should be in plain language that is free of jargon or technicalities.
- > **seize the moment.** Moments of crisis such as the 2023 earthquake in southeast Turkey and northwest Syria can be emotionally taxing. Yet, they can also serve as windows of opportunity for increasing awareness and mobilizing potential supporters.

To encourage new people to take civic action, civil society leaders need to

- > **go to where the people are.** Social contacts (both online and offline) serve as gateways to civic engagement and more strategic use should be made of them.
- > **create entertaining opportunities for engagement,** for example by planning or supporting festivals and other events that draw in new supporters.

- > **start with small and very specific calls to action** and take the individual and systemic barriers that young adults face into account.
- > **show people that their actions make a difference** and celebrate even small achievements.

To retain those who are already engaged, civil society leaders are encouraged to

- > **lead, but learn to let go.** Encouraging others to get re-engaged is not merely a matter of growing the base. It should also be understood as encouraging co-ownership and collective responsibility.
- > **build and leverage networks of trust.** Instead of overinvesting in ever-new outreach efforts to new groups of supporters, networking resources should also be pooled among trusted civil society partners.
- > **prioritize mental health.** Burnout and mental health issues among volunteers and civil society professionals are more common than is generally assumed. Civil society leaders are urged to promote resilience among themselves, their staff and their active supporters, not only by fostering more sustainable work and volunteering environments but also by providing pathways to mental health support.

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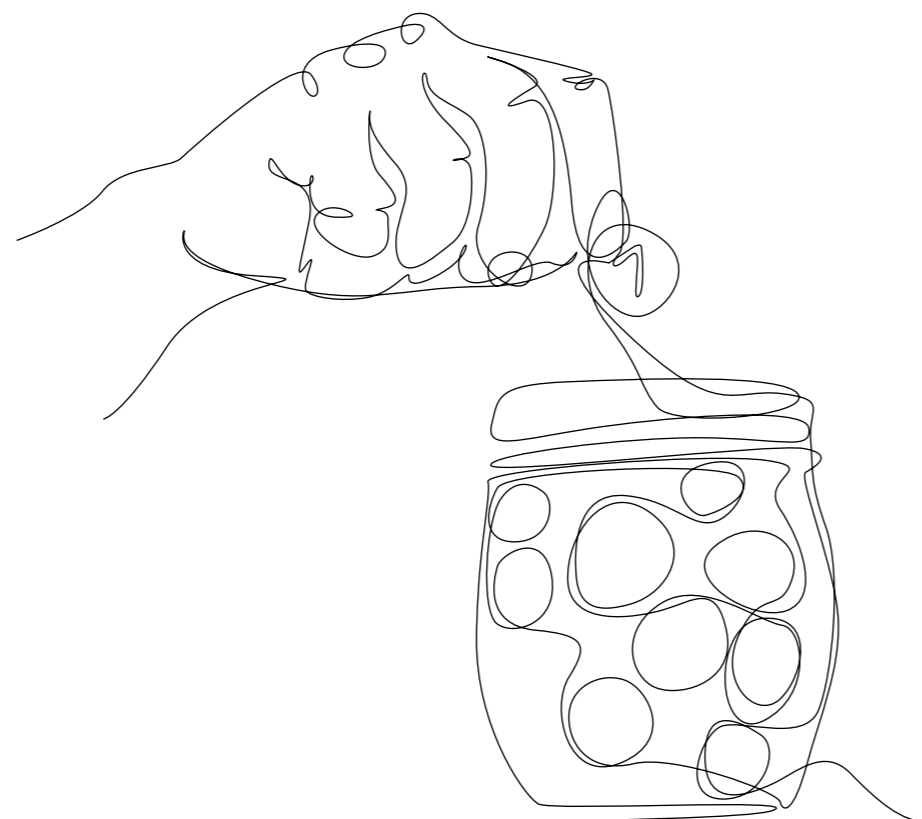
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For civil society to inspire more impactful civic action, funders and policymakers are urged to play their part in improving the conditions for civil society to act. Specifically, they should

- > **strengthen civil society structures.** Here, support should be twofold, comprising (1) longer-term efforts to promote strategic planning, organizational and professional development, along with a robust IT infrastructure and (2) the creation and maintenance of ad-hoc support systems that assist civil society actors with legal advice and other support needs, including fundraising, public relations and organizational development.
- > **create and defend safe spaces.** Community centers, secure online meeting platforms, networking events and other safe spaces should be recognized as laboratories of democracy. And they should be supported as such, especially in places where civil society is under attack.

- > **amplify civic voices.** Funders should provide civil society actors with media contacts and relevant resources so that they can place their messages more effectively in print, broadcast and social media. Furthermore, to help counter current polarization trends and political echo chambers, funders should support the creation of innovative spaces and formats that bring together civil society, policymakers and the media for a meaningful dialogue.
- > **amend funding practices.** Funding programs should be more long term, less bureaucratic and more adaptive, especially when it comes to redirecting funds to seize unexpected opportunities or to cover unforeseen needs, for example in the case of disaster relief.



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1. Room for Growth: Young Adults' Civic Engagement

Civic engagement has many faces — ranging from more formalized acts such as voting to more “hands-on” collective actions like joining a protest march and less visible everyday efforts like shopping and travelling in ways that are less harmful to people and the planet. While all modes of engagement can potentially impact policies and public sentiments, well-coordinated collective actions are often more effective. Protests, political events, sit-ins and other grassroots actions have the power to make individual voices heard, gain media attention, challenge public opinions and pressure decision-makers both inside and outside of government, as social movements like Fridays for Future and Black Lives Matter show.¹ Studies indicate that, when supported by compelling arguments, robust responses to opposition and meaningful links to policymakers, coordinated efforts can effectively shape policies, practices and public sentiment.²

To learn more about how young adults in Europe imagine a livable future society and take civic action to shape that future, the [Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study 2023](#) surveyed 10,000 young adults (aged 18 to 39) in Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the UK. The representative study was conducted together with the SINUS Institute and shows that most young adults want to get civically engaged to have a say in their country's future.

However, on average, more than 70% of young adults have never joined a citizens' initiative, a protest march or sit-in, even though the majority of them call for more grassroots efforts. When asked, against the backdrop of this ambivalence, about their willingness to get involved, about a quarter of the population expresses an interest in doing so (in addition to the 25% to 30% who are already active). That increases the potential recruitment pool for collective action to about 50% of young adults in the five countries surveyed — an invaluable asset for resilient civil societies and strong democracies across Europe.

¹ See, e.g., Mazumder, S. (2019). Black Lives Matter for Whites' Racial Prejudice: Assessing the Role of Social Movements in Shaping Racial Attitudes in the United States, SocArXiv.

² See, among others, Dür, A. (2019). How Interest Groups Influence Public Opinion: Arguments Matter More Than the Sources. *European Journal of Political Research*, 58(2), 514–535 and Thomas, E. et al. (2022). Collective Action for Social Change: Individual, Group, and Contextual Factors Shaping Collective Action and Its Outcomes. In D. Osborne & C. Sibley (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Political Psychology*, 492–507.

But how can more young adults be encouraged to take civic action and to pull together?

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To address this question, the Allianz Foundation invited 78 leading voices from civil society, the arts and journalism to seven interactive Future Labs in seven European cities — Athens, Berlin, Istanbul, London, Palermo, Prizren and Warsaw. The following strategies were elaborated based on the insights and on-the-ground experiences shared by Future Lab participants.

The Future Labs are a place of networking, peer learning and exchange for risktakers from across Europe and the Mediterranean region. “Risktakers,” as defined by the Allianz Foundation, are individuals and organizations that actively advocate and fight for social justice, open societies and a livable planet. Accordingly, the following set of strategies for civil society (section 2), its public and private funders and policymakers (section 3) were formulated with the intention of fostering civic engagement that is explicitly directed at achieving these strategic goals.

As is usually the case with qualitative research, the following findings from the Future Labs are presented in the form of a summative write-up that includes selected quotes from the discussions that took place in the local language. All quotes were translated into English. Although the content of the quotes remains unchanged, light editing has been done for ease of reading. For more details on the research methodology, please refer to the Annex.



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2. Strategies for Civil Society

The Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study 2023 shows that 30% of young adults move toward civic engagement of their own accord, often because they have experienced a certain social or environmental problem first hand. However, more of them credit their social circles and social media with prompting them to action. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations and initiatives also play a role. Though only a minority of young adults reported having first-hand encounters with activists or NGOs, those who did have since participated in a broader range of civic action.

To explore ways of incorporating these and other study findings into practice, the Future Lab participants shared and discussed promising actionable strategies for how their European civil society peers can encourage and acknowledge young adults' civic engagement.

Given the diversity of Lab participants, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. A campaigning organization might be more concerned

with having citizens join their efforts to raise awareness of human rights abuses, climate justice and other pressing issues, while a reproductive rights NGO might be more interested in recruiting and retaining volunteers to build rapport among citizens' initiatives in rural areas. Despite their differences, many of the strategies shared by the Future Lab participants can be subsumed under three dimensions, which are described in more detail in the following:

- > How to raise awareness for their cause or work
- > How to encourage new people to get engaged
- > How to retain the already engaged

How to Raise Awareness

Young adults’ civic engagement is in particular driven by their own ethical concerns and, more fundamentally, by their awareness of a specific problem.³ Climate change, discrimination and racism exert a particular pull: At least 60% of those who are deeply concerned about one of these issues have already taken some form of civic action.

However, to connect with an issue, young adults need to be aware of it and understand it — civil society leaders are therefore encouraged to start with building awareness, more specifically, civil society leaders need to do the following:

Understand Potential Supporters

In order to meet potential supporters on their level, civil society leaders should embrace localized outreach strategies that take into account the geographic and cultural diversity of their potential supporters. For example, young adults living in the inner cities need to be approached with different messages and activities than their counterparts in rural areas. In addition, understanding the concerns and priorities of these groups and individuals is vital. Targeted evaluations and research can offer important insights, enabling more tailored outreach. The Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study can serve as a starting point here, as it shows how young adults see the future, their political attitudes and their previous and potential civic engagement.

³ In addition, young adults’ desire to expand their personal horizon and their willingness to take risks have an impact on their civic engagement.

⁴ This is echoed by the social movement leaders who were interviewed for the Allianz Foundation Risktaker Pulse.

“I’m a middle-class person, and I must learn how to best support people in need. If you don’t make that extra effort, you’re just reminding them that they are in need. [...] So, you very much have to go against business-as-usual, so that people can become protagonists.”

Future Lab participant in Palermo

Craft a Compelling Change Narrative

Civil society leaders need to communicate in a way that is relatable by using real-world examples, personal stories and role models who their potential supporters can connect with. Complex societal and environmental issues, such as climate change, can seem abstract. Therefore, it is crucial to present them in a way that resonates with the everyday experiences of potential supporters.⁴ Demonstrating the practical relevance of climate change or a proposed climate action can generate more support.

“I see it all the time. Campaigns or anyone engaging in the general civic space, a lot of the time people come up with an idea that they get excited about. And, quite frankly, the people they’re talking to don’t care. You’re not going to engage more people by talking to them about something quite niche.”

Future Lab participant in London

Use Accessible Language

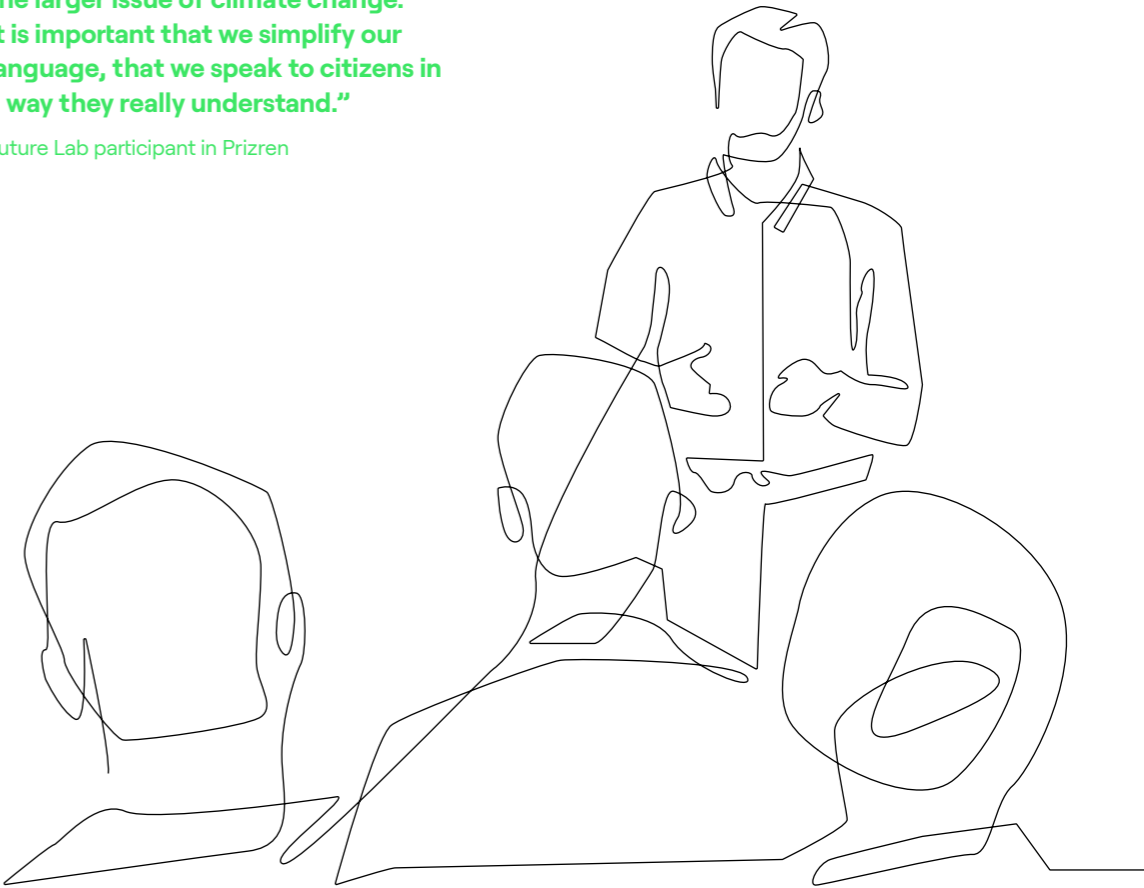
When it comes to initial awareness-building and becoming a first point of contact for an issue, all the information and messaging should be presented in plain language that is free of jargon or technicalities. Simplify complex issues by breaking them down into smaller parts that are easier to understand. To ensure consistent language use, it is recommended that civil society leaders develop and disseminate internal guidelines on using inclusive language.

“It is important that we serve as a mediator who simplifies the information so that citizens can really understand how they are affected by a certain policy. For example, we should be speaking about the lack of electricity instead of speaking about the larger issue of climate change. It is important that we simplify our language, that we speak to citizens in a way they really understand.”

Future Lab participant in Prizren

Seize the Moment

Moments of crisis can be emotionally taxing, even paralyzing. The train crash in Greece and the earthquake in southeast Turkey and northwest Syria in early 2023 serve as a case in point. Yet, civil society leaders are encouraged to see such crises as windows of opportunity for increasing awareness among their target population. In such times of crisis, it is important to give people hope and to point out what they can do, not to highlight what they cannot control. On average, one in three young adults is unaware of how to engage (more) let alone of how to help in acute crisis situations. Making them aware of the options available can go a long way.



How to Encourage New People to Take Civic Action

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To reach out to the pool of new supporters, civil society leaders are encouraged to prioritize outreach efforts and activities that are low-barrier and close to the lived realities of potential supporters:

Go to Where the People Are

Social contacts (both online and offline) serve as gateways to civic engagement and more strategic use should be made of them. They include family, friends and work colleagues as well as NGO staff. The latter are encouraged to reach out more directly, as many young adults hold ambivalent opinions of organized civil society.⁵ These sentiments must be addressed first. And they must be addressed in spaces where young adults congregate, be it online or in person. By actively seeking out these spaces, civil society actors can bridge the gap that currently separates many of them from the younger generation.

“We need to know: ‘Where is this target group?’ Is this target group in a bar or a school or a gym? I don’t know, but we have to go there!”

Future Lab participant in Berlin

“I have noticed that because of a re-fugee’s different ethnicity or different background, people react so differently. An example would be the Ukrainian refugee crisis compared to the Syrian one.”

Future Lab participant in Prizren

Create Entertaining Opportunities for Civic Engagement

Civil society leaders are encouraged to plan or support entertaining events that draw in new supporters. Instead of hosting a panel discussion or another conventional event, they are encouraged to consider music and cultural festivals as mobilization tools, given their aesthetic appeal and their ability to encourage new alliances between civil society, citizens and the cultural sector. Events like the Earth Day Palermo or the Sirän queer rave in Istanbul are two examples that help dispel the idea that civic engagement is dull, hard work and risky – an idea that many young adults currently hold.

“Civil society should also be perceived as an entertaining field of life. [...] I mean, it shouldn’t be a place where people get sick and tired.”

Future Lab participant in Istanbul

⁵ Less than 25% of the 10,000 young adults who participated in the Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study see NGOs as leading the way toward a better future society.



Start With Small and Very Specific Calls to Action

Initial calls to action should focus on problems that can be easily and visibly resolved. Thus, civil society leaders are encouraged to break down larger tasks into smaller, manageable components, thereby fostering a sense of progress and achievement among first-time engagers. Online petitions and other forms of digital civic engagement can not only open the door to new groups of supporters, they can also serve as gateways to in-person involvement,⁶ making the path to civic action more accessible and appealing to young adults.

“Make it easy and make it fun! If you want to get people, you’ve got to make it enjoyable and as easy as possible.”

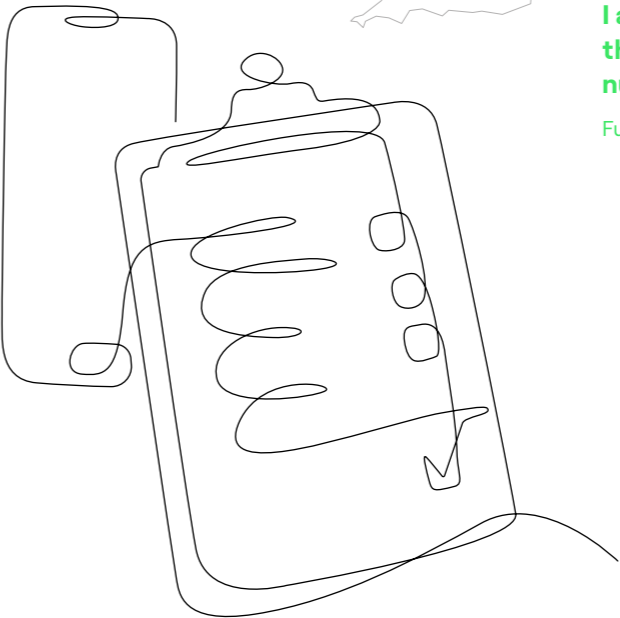
Future Lab participant in London

Show People That Their Actions Make a Difference

Effective advocacy and other forms of civic engagement require patience, persistence and not losing sight of the long-term goals. This can seem intimidating, especially to those who engage in civic action for the first time. Despite, or precisely because of that, it is recommended that civil society leaders put extra effort into showing their supporters that their time and effort are helping bring about positive changes. By highlighting and celebrating the significance of even small steps and actions, they can foster a sense of fulfillment and agency, thereby motivating their supporters to effect further change.

“And from our work on the referendum we learned that it really motivates you when you see success. So, in terms of collecting signatures [...] you could say, I collected 50 signatures, and that was awesome. Because we needed 175,000 and, at the beginning, I also thought that we would not get that many, but counting the growing number of signatures [gave me hope].”

Future Lab participant in Berlin



⁶ Greijdanus, H. et al. (2020). The Psychology of Online Activism and Social Movements: Relations Between Online and Offline Collective Action. Current Opinion in Psychology, 35, 49–54.

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How to Retain the Already Engaged

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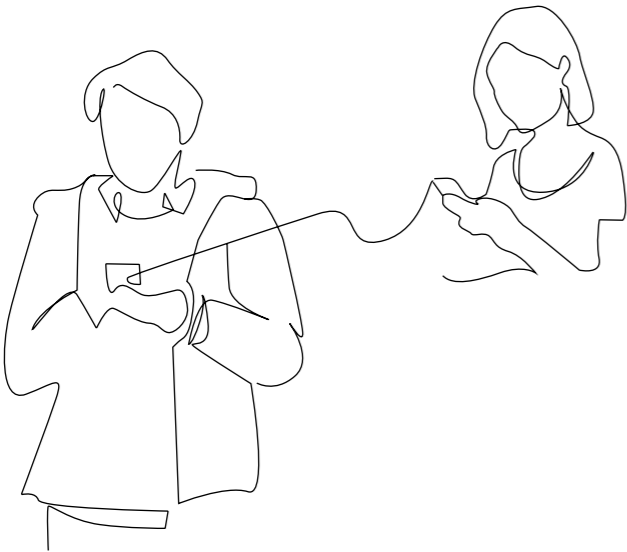
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Around 30% of young adults report having participated in collective civic action. For civil society leaders, these individuals are a valuable asset given their prior experience and, in many cases, their willingness to continue their civic engagement. To keep them involved, civil society leaders are advised not only to adopt the aforementioned guidance, but also to consider the following recommendations for fostering more sustained civic engagement:

Lead, But Learn to Let Go

Encouraging others to get re-engaged and to explore new avenues of (collective) civic action is not merely a matter of growing the base. It should also be understood as encouraging co-ownership and collective responsibility. So, rather than telling re-engagers exactly what they should and should not do, civil society leaders are advised to think and act long term and to equip them with the right tools. For example, training courses in advocacy strategies, campaign management and digital activism can empower young adults to champion their passions with more confidence. Further, civil society leaders should involve re-engagers more proactively in their own decision-making processes. This inclusive, more long-term approach nurtures a stronger sense of ownership and commitment.



“People should know where to go. I told you what my dream is. People come up with ideas and then they say: ‘Okay. Let’s call the people from [name of social movement] and maybe they will come and support us.’ And these things are already happening, but we would like to see more such examples.”

Future Lab participant in Warsaw

Build and Leverage Networks of Trust

Partnerships between NGOs, funders, researchers and a variety of other professionals and organizations can exponentially increase the effectiveness of each participant and the network as a whole. This is also true when it comes to retaining and re-activating those who are already engaged. Instead of overinvesting in ever-new outreach efforts, civil society leaders should pool their networking resources. For example, when organizing a political event, they can tap into each network member’s group of supporters for event preparation, promotion and management purposes. However, building such networks of trust takes both time and a combination of flexible and professional management. That is why, for many, teaming up with like-minded individuals and organizations is more promising than working with partners outside their own bubble. While this approach makes sense given the widespread time and budget constraints, stepping out of one’s comfort zone and partnering with unlikely allies can open up fresh perspectives and access to new supporters. Whichever way civil society leaders choose to go, either networking approach should be underpinned by clear-cut goals, transparent communication, an acute awareness of power imbalances between partners and a long-term perspective.

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Prioritize Mental Health

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Burnout and mental health issues among volunteers and civil society professionals are more common than is generally assumed, especially among those who play a leading role in founding or running a non-profit organization or social initiative.⁷ These psychological risks are recognized beyond the confines of the “activist bubble.” Fifty-eight percent of the young adults surveyed in Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the UK say they are unwilling to take these risks, even in the service of a larger cause. Thus, in the interest of both the people and the issues at stake, civil society leaders are urged to promote

resilience among themselves, their staff and their active supporters, not only by fostering more sustainable work and volunteering environments but also by providing pathways to mental health support. Such support should not only be offered to those working directly with vulnerable groups, but also to those who work extra hours.

“One issue we don’t talk about often, [...] is burnout from verbal attacks, from working overtime; and this negatively impacts our personal lives and our mental health. There is some sort of romanticizing of this, because sometimes we brag about the fact that we work for 10 hours, but there is no change. It has been normalized. And we think it’s very important to start talking about our mental health and burnout.”

Future Lab participant in Istanbul



⁷ See, e.g., ChangemakerXchange (2023). The Possibilists Report 2023. Data-driven Insights Into the Impact, Lives and Needs of Young Changemakers. ChangemakerXchange.

3. Get the Conditions Right: Strategies for Funders and Policymakers

A word of caution: Civil society organizations and initiatives are in fact already spearheading civic engagement across Europe and are therefore in a prime position to encourage more young adults to get involved. At the same time, though, these committed individuals and groups are under immense financial, political and societal pressure. Therefore, **for civil society to inspire more impactful civic action, funders and policymakers are urged to play their part in improving the conditions for civil society to act.**

Nowadays, civil society is facing a crossfire of expectations, ranging from tackling pressing problems like inequality and climate change to promoting civic engagement to safeguarding human rights and fostering community well-being — to name just a few that, technically, are also core responsibilities of the state.

Furthermore, civil society is operating under increasingly challenging circumstances. In some countries, legal frameworks have been changed to effectively “shrink” the space in which civil society can act.⁸ Unsurprisingly,

many smaller and more recently founded initiatives and organizations struggle to respond owing to their limited organizational and professional capacities and the risks they face. The participants in the Future Labs confirmed that in some European countries, certain topics and personal traits can give rise to serious threats, such as LGBTQI+⁹ and pro-refugee advocacy as well as actions to counter authoritarianism.

Beyond direct attacks from online trolls and fringe groups, numerous Future Lab participants are having to deal with government interference. In some countries, funding for refugee assistance, press freedom and other causes has been severely cut and laws have been changed to obstruct how civil society operates. In these countries, an NGO or initiative that chooses the “wrong” side of an issue can face oppression from the state and public.

⁸ For more information, see Pornschlegel, S. (2020). [Countering Shrinking Spaces. Recommendations to Support EU Civil Society. EPC.](#)

⁹ **LGBTQI+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other sexual orientation and/or gender identity

“Criminalization of activists, we’ve already talked about it. The guys who are in court for helping refugees at the borders.”

Future Lab participant in Warsaw

“We have political risks here, you may be punished, you may be penalized, and you may be ‘tagged’ [for further targeting by authorities].”

Future Lab participant in Istanbul

The young adult populations surveyed by the [Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study 2023](#) in Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the UK echo these sentiments. Across the five countries, numerous young adults say they do not have the courage to take civic action, and between 54% and 68% agree that, in their country, doing so could expose them to various risks — including physical harm, hate speech (especially online) or even legal consequences. While many can put up with conflicts with friends and family, stress and frustration, less than one third are willing to face economic, physical or legal risks, even if they strongly believe in the cause.

To help contain some of these risks, it is recommended that funders not only increase their understanding of the salient risks but also help contain them by

- strengthening civil society structures,
- creating and defending safe spaces,
- amplifying civic voices and
- amending their own funding practices.



Strengthen the Structures

For civil society, fending off outside attacks while still inspiring and mobilizing young adults not only requires a committed team that has the right skills but also more resilient and adaptive organizational structures and processes. The [Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study](#) shows that as things currently stand these capacities are more commonly found at the conservative or even the far-right end of civil society.

Based on these findings and the insights gained from the Future Labs, funders are advised to help address this imbalance by strengthening the organizational and professional capacities of those civil society actors who stand up for social justice, open societies and a livable planet. That support should be twofold, comprising (1) longer-term efforts to promote strategic planning, organizational development, the professional development of staff and volunteers, and a robust IT infrastructure and (2) the creation and maintenance of ad-hoc support systems such as [Hate Aid](#) that assist civil society with legal advice and countering online hate.

Other ad-hoc support needs to include fundraising, mental health, public relations and organizational development. Future Lab participants expressed the need for experts from these professional fields to provide their services at affordable rates and that they should be available at short notice, for example during a legal dispute. Most civil society organizations are too small to hire experts in all these areas, so a reliable ad-hoc system could help them broaden their reach and impact. Not all support needs to be in-person. Online services such as virtual legal clinics and digital wellness apps can also serve as valuable resources.

Create and Defend Safe Spaces

Future Lab participants repeatedly stressed the power of networks and personal connections — not only in encouraging young adults to join their cause but also in terms of them and their organizations effecting social and environmental change. Networks of trust are crucial in times of dwindling support — or even outright opposition — from established institutions.

For these personal connections to grow, civil society actors need more safe spaces to meet, co-create, vent and learn from each other. This is also true of young adults who have not yet engaged (much) and whose future engagement is often reliant on such encounters. Yet so far, safe spaces — both virtual and in-person — are rare or even in decline.

Policymakers and funders are advised to recognize and support community centers, secure online meeting platforms, networking events and other safe spaces, not as an add-on but as laboratories of democracy. By investing in and supporting these spaces, civil society actors can be empowered to innovate, grow their base and drive positive change for society and the environment.

“We need spaces where young people are given leadership, let them discuss. Let’s create environments and spaces where they discuss the problem themselves and we do not determine the topic, and let’s create safe spaces. And I think safe spaces not only means physical spaces, but safe spaces for thinking, for free thinking.”

Future Lab participant in Prizren

Amplify the Voices

How members of the public come to understand a social issue and become civically engaged (or not) largely depends on how they interpret the information they receive. In recent years, the spread of inaccurate information, either by mistake (misinformation) or by design (disinformation), has made it harder for NGOs to reach people. Future Lab participants in many cities echoed these concerns and stressed the difficulty average citizens have accessing information from credible sources:

“Ignorance and access to information [are big challenges here in Greece]. So, one barrier for civil society is the failure to provide the public with access to information.”

Future Lab participant in Athens

“We live in a region with very low media literacy. I think the problem is that people get conflicting information. If they understood the problems, they would all be activists.”

Future Lab participant in Warsaw

To counter this trend, **funders** should provide civil society actors with media contacts and the relevant resources so they can place their messages more effectively in print, broadcast and social media. That way civil society can actively participate in the discursive framing of a social or environmental issue from the outset.¹⁰ Research confirms that the general public favors substance over partisan rhetoric and labels — that is if civil society actors manage to grab their attention and present compelling arguments.¹¹ **Funders** should further amplify these and other efforts by sharing key messages with their partners in philanthropy, government and the media.

In general, more space for dialogue is needed. In today’s polarized political environment, **funders** are urged to support the creation of innovative spaces and formats that bring together civil society, policymakers and the media for a meaningful dialogue. **Policymakers** should support that dialogue by accepting invitations to participate and by maintaining an open, transparent and regular exchange with civil society.

“Something that we have observed in Palermo is that often we’re not given due credit by the public administration, the regional authority or the municipality. So, an external mediator might actually be a bridge.”

Future Lab participant in Palermo

Amend Funding Practices

Promoting and strengthening the civic engagement of young adults requires more personnel and more flexibility in how to invest the available resources. While numerous funding programs specify short-term outreach and mobilization as a project outcome, only few permit vital organizational improvements that ensure more long-term sustainable engagement and a more robust civil society at large.

Future Lab participants also criticized funders’ lack of flexibility, noting that many do not seem to understand that sometimes expenditure needs to be diverted or increased quickly and substantially in order to mobilize supporters, for example in the case of disaster relief. The 2023 earthquake in southeast Turkey and northwest Syria serves as a case in point:

“The earthquake is not something that fits with the things that many associations are working on, because projects are already underway. They have the targets and outcomes and everything is prearranged, and you have to rewrite everything accordingly.”

Future Lab participant in Istanbul

Future Lab participants agreed that oftentimes it is also the precarious work conditions within the sector itself that prevent young adults from investing more time and energy. Inadequate NGO staff pay and the exploitation of volunteers are not uncommon, and participants thus stressed the need for fair compensation, ethical treatment and transparency. This notion is also echoed by young adults surveyed in the Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study: Only one in every 10 is “very willing” to accept a lower income in pursuit of a cause they profoundly believe in.

Policymakers and funders are therefore urged to make their funding programs more long term, less bureaucratic and more adaptive, especially when it comes to regranteeing funds to partner organizations that work more closely with a target population on a certain issue and are thus better placed to seize unexpected opportunities to activate people.¹²

“I think the funders must be more open. They should leave a percentage of the budget flexible, so that organizations and local partners can themselves assess where that money needs to go rather than telling them how to outline a perfect project.”

Future Lab participant in Prizren

¹⁰ See also Allianz Foundation Risktaker Pulse.

¹¹ See, among others, Dür, A. (2019). How Interest Groups Influence Public Opinion: Arguments Matter More Than the Sources. European Journal of Political Research, 58(2), 514–535.

¹² See WINGS (2023). Lessons from Climate Funders on Locally-led Development Assistance. WINGS.

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To learn more about how to increase and strengthen the civic engagement of young adults across Europe, the Allianz Foundation commissioned the SINUS Institute with conducting seven interactive Future Labs in seven European cities. The shared experiences and recommendations in this report were derived directly from the Future Lab discussions.

The Future Labs brought together 78 leading voices from civil society, the arts and journalism to connect, share and innovate by addressing two overarching questions:

- > How do you encourage more young adults to take civic action for social justice, open societies and a livable planet?
- > What conditions are needed for more civic engagement across Europe?

Adhering to good practices of sequential mixed-methods design,¹³ the interactive Future Labs were devised to inform and expand upon the quantitative findings generated by the Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study 2023, which produced representative data on the civic engagement of young adults in Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the UK — five countries that reflect Europe’s diverse realities on much-discussed issues such as minority rights, anti-democratic tendencies and climate action.¹⁴

The Future Labs were held in the aforementioned five countries, plus Kosovo and Turkey, which were chosen on account of the acute financial, social and political pressures faced by civil society there.¹⁵ The Future Labs were conducted in Athens, Berlin, Istanbul, London, Palermo, Prizren and Warsaw between February 24 and March 15, 2023. In Istanbul, Palermo and Prizren, the Future Labs were organized with the help of the Allianz Foundation Hubs Autostrada Hangar, Fondazione Studio Rizoma and Postane.

Each Future Lab had between 10 and 13 local participants, who represented a wide range of civil society organizations and initiatives that

deal with social justice and equality issues, climate action and the defense of democratic values and institutions. All the participants were identified and invited to take part by the Allianz Foundation and its Hubs partners. The groups were all diverse with regard to gender, age and cultural background (see the list of participants below).

The Future Labs were conducted in the primary local language by native-speaker moderators with extensive experience of qualitative research and group moderation. Each Future Lab was conducted with simultaneous interpretation into English and was supervised both on the premises and online by the SINUS and the Allianz Foundation research teams. During the five hours that each of the Labs lasted, participants alternated between plenary discussions and working in smaller groups. All the moderators used the same workshop guide and were briefed and debriefed by the SINUS research team.

All the Future Labs were audio- and video-recorded in the local language and in English via simultaneous interpretation. The recordings were transcribed and the transcripts pseudonymized and stored in accordance with the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation to protect the participants’ personal data.

The pseudonymized transcripts were analyzed using an open coding method inspired by grounded theory and classic qualitative content analysis that was adapted to the group discussion context. Throughout the analysis, findings were shared and discussed within the SINUS and Allianz Foundation research teams and with the local moderators who conducted the discussions.

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Executive Summary

Room for Growth

Strategies for
Civil Society

Strategies for Funders
& Policymakers

Annex

Future Lab Participants

All seven Future Labs were conducted under the condition of anonymity and confidentiality. That is why none of the names of the people or organizations taking part are disclosed here.

Future Lab Berlin

February 24, 2023

1. Islamic dialogue activist
2. Digital rights activist
3. Digital rights expert
4. Human rights expert
5. Postcolonial studies curator
6. Cultural exchange advocate
7. Social innovation specialist
8. Migration network organizer
9. Environmental law advocate
10. Environmental law specialist

Future Lab Warsaw

February 28, 2023

1. Women’s rights activist
2. Climate activist
3. Civil rights advocate
4. Human rights activist
5. Civil rights lawyer
6. Activist artist
7. Social campaigner
8. Podcast and radio producer
9. Social theater founder
10. Anti-racism activist
11. Community manager

Future Lab London

March 1, 2023

1. Policy advocate
2. Political affairs manager
3. Ecologist and artist
4. Performance and visual artist
5. Political consultant
6. Artist and European political activist
7. Advocate and Roma community leader
8. Community manager
9. Activist and civil engineer
10. Image artist
11. Youth campaigner
12. Climate activist
13. Artist and activist

Future Lab Athens

March 3, 2023

1. Composer
2. Theatre actor
3. International affairs expert
4. Theatre and film director
5. Climate activist
6. Visual arts curator
7. Student
8. Cultural events manager
9. Cultural producer
10. Curator
11. Municipal councilor
12. Artist

Future Lab Istanbul

March 6, 2023

Twelve undisclosed participants

Future Lab Palermo

March 8, 2023

1. Social activist
2. Climate activist and photographer
3. Web creator and human rights activist
4. Climate activist
5. Student
6. Immigrant rights advocate
7. Social activist
8. Journalist
9. Church leader
10. Climate activist

Future Lab Prizren

March 15, 2023

1. Roma activist
2. Educator
3. Sociologist
4. Civil society activist
5. Journalist and researcher
6. Energy policy analyst
7. Cultural journalist
8. Civil rights activist
9. Political activist
10. Architect and activist

¹³ Creswell, J.W. & Cresswell, J.D. (2019). Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative & Mixed Methods Approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

¹⁴ Details on country selection can be found in the full report.

¹⁵ Political rights and civil liberties in Kosovo and Turkey are much more restricted than in the other five countries (Freedom House (2023). Freedom in the World 2023. Freedom House).

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Visual Concept and Layout

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Photo Credits

Cover Photo: Sushil Nash/unsplash

Suggested Citation

Allianz Foundation (2023). Allianz Foundation
Future Labs. Strategies for Strengthening Civic
Engagement Across Europe.
allianzfoundation.org/study