

International Civic Forum 2025

Advancing Rights Together: Shaping Strategies in the Face of Aligned Opposition

5 – 6 November 2025, Bangkok, Thailand

Concept Note



Overview

The International Civic Forum (ICF) is the International Civil Society Centre's flagship civic space event. Convened annually, it provides a trusted platform for civil society leaders to address pressing civic space challenges, strengthen connections, and explore opportunities for collaboration.

In 2025, the ICF will take place in **Bangkok, Thailand as a 1.5 day in-person workshop on 5 – 6 November**, in conjunction with the [International Civil Society Week \(ICSW\)](#), co-hosted by CIVICUS and Asia Democracy Network. This alignment allows the ICF to draw on the energy and diversity of the ICSW's global gathering that will bring civil society together to celebrate citizen action, reimagine democracy, and advance rights and inclusion. ICF 2025 will provide a complementary space that builds on these debates, leverages synergies, and contributes concrete strategies to global efforts to strengthen democracy and protect civic space.

The ICF 2025 will focus on the theme: **"Advancing Rights Together: Shaping Strategies in the Face of Aligned Opposition."** We will gather in solidarity and with a collective voice to reclaim narratives and shape joint strategies that strengthen rights-based approaches in these challenging times. The Forum will equip civil society actors with evidence-based insights, co-created strategies, and stronger solidarity to address pushback from anti-rights actors. It will provide a space to critically assess existing approaches, generate innovative responses, and build momentum for collective action and collaboration.

Participants are strongly encouraged to attend both ICSW and ICF 2025 to maximise learning, exchange, and collaboration across the two events.



Context

The operating space for civil society is under mounting political and financial pressure, exacerbated by the demise of USAID and cuts to development aid from other countries. These developments are forcing many organisations to reduce or cease their work, or to adapt rapidly to changing circumstances. In the face of growing hostility from authoritarian and populist governments, (I)CSOs must navigate an increasingly volatile and uncertain funding landscape – what some refer to as a “post-aid world”.

At the same time, anti-rights actors are gaining ground: shaping narratives against progressive causes and expanding their influence in regional and international arenas, where they increasingly challenge and erode human rights. We define anti-rights actors as state or non-state actors who undermine a broad range of human rights – including gender, LGBTQ+, migrant, and indigenous rights – often through nationalist rhetoric and fear-driven narratives. These actors build well-funded, strategic coalitions across regions and ideologies. They exert influence in public discourse, amplified through digital technology by various means such as disinformation campaigns and algorithm-driven information, and lobbying policy makers, ultimately contributing to the erosion of international human rights standards.

Traditional civil society strategies appear to be on the back foot in addressing the intensifying pushback from anti-rights actors. Against this backdrop, the ICF 2025 will serve as a strategic springboard for collective thinking, co-creation, and the development of new and adaptive strategies to tackle these challenges and unite around a thriving civil society and the values we stand for.



Establishing the Evidence Base: Baseline Mapping

In preparation for ICF 2025, the Centre is developing a baseline mapping of strategies used by (I)CSOs to counter pushback on rights. This analysis will:

- Examine diverse rights domains, including gender justice, LGBTQ+ rights, migrant and indigenous rights;
- Capture lessons learned from the application of different tactics;
- Identify approaches and examples that have proved effective and highlight key gaps;
- Assess the effectiveness of approaches within today's constrained and contested civic environment and explore their relevance and adaptability for future challenges.

Findings from this new research will form the foundation for discussions and strategising at the ICF.



Co-Creating the Strategic Response: ICF Workshop 2025

The ICF 2025 will be organised as a 1.5-day interactive workshop, prioritising peer learning, collaborative analysis, and collective strategy design.

The Forum will bring participants together to:

Engage with the mapping findings:

Learn from and discuss findings from the baseline mapping to establish a shared starting point.

Validate and enrich: Collectively assess the relevance and resonance of the findings and expand the evidence base with lived experience and contextual insights.

Co-create and refine strategies:

Develop future-oriented, cross-sectoral strategies that are scalable, inclusive, and adaptable.

Strengthen solidarity and narrative power: Identify how civil society can reclaim narratives and act more effectively in solidarity.

The workshop sessions will emphasise collective intelligence and practical collaboration. Special focus will be given to identifying strategies that not only respond to current threats but also anticipate emerging risks and opportunities.

Draft Agenda Outline

**Wednesday
05 November**

**Full day:
9:00 – 17:30
+ Dinner**

- Opening and framing: Welcome, objectives, and introduction of participants
- Keynote: Why we need to come together now
- Presentation of new baseline mapping findings
- Interactive validation session: Discussing resonance, gaps, and additional insights
- Collective reflection: Identifying key challenges and opportunities, and framing the co-creation work
- Co-creation sessions (Part I): Adapting and designing strategies

**Thursday 06
November**

**Half day:
9:00 – 13:00
+ Lunch**

- Co-creation sessions (Part II): Refining strategies for scalability, inclusiveness, and adaptability
- Narrative focus session: Exploring how civil society can reclaim narratives
- Closing plenary: Harvesting strategies, identifying possible alliances, and outlining next steps

Please note: Exact times, as well as the dinner on Day 1, are still to be confirmed.



Outcomes and Next Steps

The main outcomes of ICF 2025 will be captured in an outcome document, which will be shared with the participants and serve as the basis for next steps.

Depending on the priorities identified at the ICF, this work may be further developed through:

- Convening a virtual follow-up exchange to revisit and refine strategies with interested ICF participants and further stakeholders, potentially resulting in a “coalition of the willing” to pilot and test co-created strategies;
- Supporting regional workshop(s) to deep-dive into selected strategies, adjusted to regional context;
- Continuing efforts to deepen global solidarity among (I)CSOs in defending civic space and advancing rights.

The ICF 2025 will serve as a springboard for continued strategising, coalition-building, and joint experimentation across the civil society ecosystem.

Why Join the ICF 2025

Trusted convening power: The Centre will bring together a diverse but complementary group of international and national CSOs and networks in a safe environment for open and honest exchange and collective strategising.

Focus on practice, not just dialogue: A structured workshop format is designed to move beyond discussion towards tangible strategies and next steps.

Future-facing perspective: The workshop will ensure that strategies not only address current dynamics but also anticipate emerging risks and opportunities.

Continuity and follow-through: The ICF outcomes will directly inform further online gatherings and pilot activities in 2026.



Participation

The ICF 2025 is a closed, invitation-only event bringing together a select group of civil society representatives, drawn from a mix of:

- Senior leaders and strategists from international civil society organisations;
- Senior representatives of national civil society organisations, civil society networks and coalitions, particularly those working on gender justice, LGBTQ+ rights, migrant and indigenous rights;
- Practitioners and advocates directly engaged in countering opposition to rights;
- Selected experts and allies from academia and philanthropy, who can contribute evidence, resources, and perspectives.

Participants will be invited with the aim of ensuring diversity in geography, sector, and perspective, while maintaining a safe and trusted environment for open and constructive exchange.



A participation fee applies to help cover organisational and event costs:

100 EUR – national civil society organisations, regional and national networks, individuals

200 EUR – international civil society organisations, international networks

300 EUR – philanthropy and corporate partners

Participants are kindly asked to cover their own travel, accommodation, and related expenses, as we are unfortunately not in a position to provide financial support for these costs.

Logistics

The ICF as well as the ICSW will take place at [Thammasat University](#) in Bangkok, Thailand.

If you need hotel recommendations for your stay in Bangkok or any additional logistical information to plan your trip, please reach out to **Alexandra Schlegel**, Programme Officer, at: aschlegel@icscentre.org. A detailed logistical sheet will be shared in due time.

Contact

For further information on the content or ideas for the ICF 2025, please contact **Eva Gondor**, Senior Project Manager, at: egondor@icscentre.org.

Join us for the International Civic Forum 2025 in Bangkok!

