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Membership Policy

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Introduction

The goal of this document is to ensure that the informal and formal processes of European Civic Forum membership are clear, transparent, and consistent, so that the European Civic Forum (ECF) strengthens its internal governance and membership, promotes trust among its members, and demonstrates its commitment to long-term responsibility and sustainability towards the network.

Membership Status

ECF membership is open to legal entities, and not individuals, that are non-profit, non-governmental organisations that share our values and vision for democracy and civic space in Europe, that are active at local, national, regional, European or international levels.

We actively encourage applications from organisations that support freedom of association, civic space, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Full Members

Full members are organisations which share ECF vision, values and objectives laid out in the Statutes. They have roles in the strategic decision-making of the network in relation to their participation in the general assembly or as elected members of our Board of Directors and Steering Committee.

As such, organisations are entitled to:

- Participate in the statutory life, i.e. vote in elections and statutory assemblies, but also put themselves forward as a candidate for a position on the Board of Directors and on the Steering Committee (their participation in meetings is covered financially for part or all);
- Contribute to and access to the network's resources for the exchange of information, best practice, research materials, partners for projects;
- Take part in ECF internal working groups and committees (including national platforms, strategic planning, etc.);
- Attend events, talks and internal capacity-building activities and training and be refunded for travel and subsistence costs, whenever possible, in full or partly, according to EU guidelines on unit costs;
- Contribute through joint advocacy to European decision-making (namely by receiving invitations to participate in relevant thematic events);
- Disseminate their work and increase visibility through ECF communication channels (social media, newsletters, articles on website, etc.);
- Be eligible to apply for regranting, through the annual European Civic Micro-Grants, as and when available.



Full Membership Added Value and Benefits

Political role

Join forces with associations and NGOs from across Europe to advocate for civic space and association rights as a condition for a society based on shared values of equality, solidarity, democracy and inclusiveness.

Platform for democratic civic organisations

ECF connects different forms of organisation and activism, a great variety of civic organisations ranging from federations and national platforms of NGOs uniting thousands of organisations across different sectors, human rights advocacy and campaigning organisations, civic movements, as well as groups working at community level or engaging with the public on local issues.

Advocacy

ECF has led the effort at the EU level to promote awareness of the crucial role that civil society plays in securing democracy and the rule of law. In doing so, we have contributed to an extended understanding that, to defend democracy and the rule of law, civic space needs to be protected and enhanced. ECF is working on EU policy and legislation to ensure an enabling space for civil society, including a structured dialogue between institutions and civil society. ECF does so with its members' involvement, participating in alliances with other European networks. ECF is a founding member and active contributor to Civil Society Europe, the cross sectoral coordination of civil society at EU level.

Monitoring, reporting and campaigning

Monitor and report on the trends and developments affecting civil society and fundamental rights in Europe, co-creating positive narratives and campaigns to counter shrinking spaces and rights.

Scaling up

ECF contributes to amplify the impact and visibility of local issues, supports and amplifies members' initiatives and capacities. Its broad network of members across Europe enables access to a wider range of resources and opportunities. This can be particularly helpful for local NGOs when they are looking to expand their reach. And also, for national and international ones to increase their impact.

Networking

ECF provides opportunities for its members to connect with each other, exchange knowledge and experience, support and learn from each other. The Annual General Assembly, the European Civic Academy, online forums, and working groups are providing such opportunities for collaboration on projects. This can help members to build long lasting relationships with other NGOs, and to develop transversal approaches.

Access to training and resources

Relying on its members' experience, ECF offers a range of training and resources to its members, including on topics such as fundraising, advocacy, and campaigning. This can



help members to build their capacity and improve their effectiveness, learn from each other, share best practices, and develop new partnerships.

Solidarity

ECF stands in and organises European solidarity with national and local campaigns on issues that are in line with its mandate: civic space, rule of law, democracy. Whether you need support in advocating or campaigning to amplify and “europeanise” an issue or simply need to get a message across asking for solidarity, ECF’s network of over 100 European organizations can be of great help.

Full Membership Responsibilities

By being a full member, your organisation supports ECF’s mission, vision and values and should be willing to invest some time in ECF related activities. The network only thrives through the participation of its members. The Secretariat and Governance Bodies do their best to coordinate among the members, but this can only succeed with your active participation. The following points outline in more detail what we expect from you:

- At least two people subscribed to our general list, with at least the one person to regularly checking and responding to emails. Our email lists are the main communication channel within the network.
- Sharing relevant information on the respective mailing lists. You likely come across information in your work that could be valuable to other organisations, such as a meeting with a politician, a report, or news. As a member, you are invited to share this information on the relevant list, including updates on national policies or political developments. Since the secretariat works mainly at the European level, ECF cannot track everything happening in each country. That said, email traffic should be kept to a minimum to avoid overload.
- Commenting on information and policy discussions where relevant. Your input is highly valued, and we invite you to contribute to policy discussions or information exchanges where relevant. As with the previous point, this should be kept within reasonable limits, but the exchange of ideas and open discussions is essential.
- Ownership of common positions. Members are expected to take ownership of common positions adopted within the network and apply them where relevant in their work.
- Full members are encouraged to actively promote ECF’s campaigns and communication materials through their own channels, helping to amplify our collective voice and increase visibility across Europe.
- Informing the secretariat if you are attending any EU events or engaging in advocacy with EU institutions, so we can collaborate where appropriate.
- Reaching out to the secretariat if you need special support (e.g., strategy, talking points). We are here to support your work. If you require special information or believe the network should adopt a specific strategy, please contact us directly.



- Participating in General Assemblies and other ECF meetings. As a member organisation, we would like to see you contribute to the network by attending our General Assemblies. Full members should attend all General Assemblies or appoint a proxy if unable to attend. Members should also participate in our strategy meetings, taskforces, and working groups when relevant to their work.
- Paying the membership fee. ECF asks for an annual membership fee from all members (see fee structure below).

Affiliate Members

An organisation that is interested in joining ECF but does not want to enjoy all rights and obligations or does not meet all full membership criteria could be granted Affiliate Member status by the General Assembly.

Reasons for assigning Affiliate Member status may include the applicant organisation having advocacy, campaigning, and capacity-building on freedom of association, civic space, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as **secondary** rather than **core** objectives. It may also apply if the organisation intends only to engage sporadically (rather than continuously) in these areas or if the organisation declares that it cannot participate consistently and actively in all network activities that are part of the responsibilities of a Full Member.

Affiliate members receive ECF internal network emails and can use ECF communication tools for wider dissemination and visibility (through social media, newsletter, website, etc.).

Affiliate Members do not enjoy the rights listed in ECF Statutes and in the section “Full Membership Added Value and Benefits”, namely, they do not have voting nor election rights in the Governance Bodies, they cannot benefit from the reimbursement of travel costs, and they cannot apply for the European Civic Micro-Grants.

Full Members may be automatically downgraded to Affiliate Member status in cases of non-payment of their membership fee, as detailed in the section “Collection Strategy and Automatic Change of Status from Full Member to Affiliate Member Due to Non-Payment of Fees” (see below).

An Affiliate member can claim a Full membership at any time of the year, under the condition that it meets criteria for Full Membership, settles the annual membership fee and is endorsed by the General Assembly. To achieve this, the Affiliate Member must submit a request to the Secretariat, which will forward the proposal to the Board of Directors for review. The Board will then submit the proposal to the General Assembly, which holds the authority to approve the application.



Membership Fee

Fee Structure

Full members pay a membership fee on an indicative scale according to their total annual budget, excluding from it the amounts regranted to other organisations.

Members will be asked to place themselves on the indicative scale and then will be asked how much in fact they can pay.

<250,000€ (200 €)

250,000€-500,000€ (500 €)

500,001€-1,000,000€ (1 000 €)

1,000,001€-2,000,000€ (2 000 €)

>2,000,000€ (3000 €)

The minimum fee is 200€.

Under request, a temporary exception or discount clause can be applied to organisations in exceptional financial circumstances, with the ECF Steering Committee able to waive the minimum fee on a case-by-case basis.

The fees do not limit the possibility of additional contributions. All members are encouraged to support ECF's work with financial contributions beyond the required membership fee.

Collection Strategy and Automatic Change of Status from Full Member to Affiliate Member Due to Non-Payment of Fees

- Every year, the Secretariat will send a call for membership fee payment.
- Members are invited to pay the fee within one month. If the fee is not transferred, the Secretariat will make a reminder phone call to the organisation's main contact (or alternate or financial person or general phone number, if the main contact is not available).
- If the fee has not been received, the Treasurer will send one warning email (giving one month deadline) and explain the consequences of non-payment (namely, status change to Affiliate and its loss of voting rights, coverage of participation in ECF events and other benefits).
- If no answer or payment is issued after the given deadline, Full members will automatically be transformed into Affiliate Members.



Membership Applications

Eligible Entities

To become members of the ECF, organisations must meet the following conditions:

- ✓ Being a not for profit legally registered organisation (association, non-governmental organisation, and other civil society organisations) which act locally, regionally or nationally.
- ✓ Embodying and endorsing the goals, vision, mission and values of the ECF.
- ✓ Abiding by and promoting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
- ✓ Organise, support, speak up, champion or advocate for citizen participation and civil society in a country, region, or globally - including for the protection and promotion of civic space, democratic values and the pursuit of social justice.
- ✓ European networks are only eligible if their main area of action does not overlap with ECF's. If they are working in specific areas, their main purpose for joining ECF should be to work on civic space.

Application Process

1. First contact (usually by email)
 - If recommended by a member organisation, skip steps 2 and 3.
2. Secretariat evaluation based on thematic focus, track record and capacity to contribute to ECF's work.
3. Consultation and validation by same country member organisations and / or national platforms.
4. Application meeting with the Network Development Coordinator.
5. Filling in the Application Form + sending Statutes to ECF staff.
6. Board of Directors revision.
7. General Assembly approval.

Mentorship for new members

The Network Development Coordinator will organise an onboarding meeting with all new members, where the network internal /external processes are explained.

A mentorship ("buddy") program will be implemented, where existing organisations will support and guide new members through the first stages of their membership. The buddy's role is to answer questions, provide support, and help the new member navigate the bureaucratic and practical aspects of ECF. The mentor / buddy will be assigned by the General Assembly upon approval of the new member.



Exclusion Criteria

The membership status can be revoked due to the following reasons:

A) Member's resignation,

B) An expulsion declared by the Board of Directors for a serious reason, namely acting against ECF's mission, vision and values. In this case, the member in question is beforehand invited, by registered letter, to explain himself in front of the Board of Directors. The expulsion is ratified by the Annual General Assembly who will vote by simple majority.

C) Affiliate members that haven't been in a General Assembly in the last 3 years without justification, will be sent a "check in" email by one of the co-presidents. If they don't answer in 2 months, their exclusion will be proposed and voted in the following General Assembly.

Glossary

AGA – Annual General Assembly

BD – Board of Directors

EC – European Commission

EU – European Union

GA – General Assembly

SC – Steering Committee

WG – Working Group

