

## Civic Power: Italy

### Call for Project Proposals

#### BACKGROUND

In recent years, concerns have grown over the erosion of civic space in Italy, with civil society organizations highlighting serious setbacks to civil rights, including freedom of expression, the right to protest, and freedom of assembly. In light of these trends, international reports ([CIVICUS Monitor](#), [Liberties Rule of Law report](#)) have been signaling serious concern for Italy's democratic freedoms.

Activists, journalists, and human rights defenders – particularly those working on environmental and refugee issues – face increasing legal harassment, criminalization, and restrictions under new legislative measures. For instance laws have targeted NGOs engaged in search and rescue operations, while other decrees have tightened penalties for protest activities and expanded surveillance powers. Freedom of peaceful assembly has been severely undermined, with frequent police violence against demonstrators and laws criminalizing acts of dissent. Freedom of expression is also at risk, with new restrictions on media reporting, increased online hate speech, and growing pressure on academic institutions. Political rhetoric, often xenophobic and hostile, has contributed to the normalization of hate speech and discrimination, especially against migrants, minorities, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ communities.

Italian civil society has responded strongly to recent attempts to limit space for civic action. Despite the deteriorating environment, broad and diverse collaboration opposes the restrictive legislations showing significant public concern about the direction of government policy. While civil society in Italy faces challenges, it has an essential role in protecting democratic values and defending the rule of law during times of political pressure.

#### GOAL OF THE CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Civitates announces a call for project proposals open to civil society organizations registered in Italy in order to support efforts to build democratic cultures and support civil society and civic participation in the current context. The specific objectives of the call center on two main goals:

- **Defending and protecting civil society** and the space for people's participation in civic life; challenge and resist efforts to restrict space for civil society
- **Opening and expanding the space for civic action:** strengthen civil society organisations so that they are more resilient, able to adapt challenges, create new alliances, invest in new ways of engaging with people and reach new audiences.

To support these objectives, applicants have a variety of activities to choose from to achieve the grant's goals, including, but not limited to:

- Monitoring and data gathering and analysis of trends related to civic space (e.g. legal restrictions, attacks, intimidation, police violence, etc.)
- Awareness-raising and advocacy on behalf of groups under threat
- Campaigns that mobilize the public against restrictive laws and other interventions that curtail civic engagement and mobilisation
- Actions to shift narratives and foster values that support civil society & civic participation in public debates
- Actions toward expanding civil society and space for civic life to include a broader range of actors and under represented groups
- Testing new ways of organising and building stronger constituencies of support for civic engagement

This list is illustrative, and Civitates strongly encourages applicants with innovative ideas and approaches not described above to apply.

Civitates will provide project funding for one year (with potential no-cost extension) in a **maximum amount of 30.000 EUR** to selected grantees. The grant covers project costs relevant to and reflective of the planned activities.

Selected applicants will be invited to join the international cohort of Civitates grantees and be involved in gatherings, peer-to-peer learning opportunities and strategic exchanges.

## GUIDELINES

Civitates aims to support up to 8 projects by civil society organizations under this call (with 240,000 EUR total budget for this call). The call follows a one step approach: applicants should submit fully developed proposals as well as an organisational questionnaire.

The **language of applications is English**. Civitates realizes the difficulties that language requirements may impose on applicants and accepts proposals translated by translation systems (like DeepL or Google Translate). We recommend applicants to clearly flag if translation systems have been used. Proposals will be evaluated based on content and not on language quality.

Applicants should provide an **analysis of their national context** describing the most relevant threats to civic and democratic space and how their proposal seeks to address these. Applicants should also reflect on potential emerging opportunities that can provide a chance to re-build trust and broad societal engagement in democratic processes.

Applicants should introduce their **ideas and plans** that address threats to civil society identified in their context analysis and seek to find solutions to defend or expand opportunities for civic action. An applicant can design and develop any kind of idea and approach that, according to their assessment, serves the achievement of the above-listed goals. Civitates seeks projects that include concrete, well-designed, and detailed plans and ideas for broad mobilization and joint action in support of inclusive democratic processes. In addition, the projects should contain measurable indicators and expected results. Costs associated with tracking, monitoring, and impact assessment may be included in the project budget as part of the grant application.

Applicants should also identify **relevant partners**, other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), CSO networks, cross-sectoral allies, or other stakeholders that will be engaged in the activities outlined in the application. The applicant should explain how it will share learning and best practices serving the field and assist other CSOs in overcoming, easing, or similar navigating challenges.

An applicant can design and develop any kind of idea and approach that, according to their assessment, serves the achievement of the above-listed goals.

#### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Civitates is seeking civil society organizations **registered** as non-profits and **based** in Italy that have a proven track record of **work** for the participation of civil society and democratic values in the country. Civitates regards an organization as a “key” actor if the organization:

- has a proven track record of defending fundamental human rights and civic freedoms,
- is well connected to civil society networks and movements working across a broad range of societal issues,
- has a well developed methodology to engage with and mobilize citizens,
- has achieved significant results (at local/regional/national level) with demonstrable impact,
- Civitates welcomes applications from groups leading or working with coalitions and networks. Organizations with a clear commitment to connect marginalised communities to broader civil society coalitions may be also considered.

Exclusion criteria:

- **Political party-affiliated organizations are not eligible to apply for our support.**

#### GRANT-RELATED REQUIREMENTS

Grantees will submit annual financial and narrative final reports as well as related documents after the expiration of funding. Grantees are strongly encouraged to participate in online and offline workshops and network events organized by Civitates (with travel costs covered by Civitates).

#### GRANT PROCESS

The deadline for submitting applications is **30 June, 2025 at 23:59 (CET)**. Applications should be submitted through the [Network of European Foundations' Optimy](#) portal.

Questions regarding the application process can be directed to the following e-mail address: [secretariat@civitates-eu.org](mailto:secretariat@civitates-eu.org) with the following subject line: SFI Call Italy 2025 (name of your organization).

## SELECTION OF GRANTEES

Applications that are submitted by the deadline and meet the eligibility and administrative criteria (see below) will be reviewed. Please note that **this is a competitive process under** which a Selection Committee will evaluate all submitted applications based upon the quality, the clarity and relevance of submitted proposals. **Only a limited number of applications will be selected for support (up to 8 proposals).**

### Administrative criteria

- Eligibility (certificate of registration as a non profit, etc.)
- Completed proposal and budget template
- CVs of leadership équipe
- Organisational budget for 2025
- Last official annual report of the applicant (2024)
- Due diligence questionnaire
- Annual accounts for 2023 and 2024 (preferably audited)

### Evaluation criteria

- Organizational commitment: the organisation, including its leadership, is committed to defending/protecting and opening/expanding civic space beyond the timeline of the proposal.
- Relevance: how the planned work of the organisation reflects on the challenges and opportunities concerning civic space and rebuilding citizens' trust and participation in civic life.
- Capacity: the organization has a solid assessment of its capacity as well as its partners' capacity building needs to implement its plans.
- Contextual analysis: the organisation has a strong understanding of the current trends impacting civic space in Italy and has a solid interpretation on their implications for emerging opportunities for change.
- Partnerships and target audience: the proposal identifies relevant partners and networks/constituencies/communities to defend and expand civic space and re-engage citizens in civic life. The proposal reflects how issues of marginalized communities might be addressed.
- Tools and methods: the planned methods of development are well planned and adjusted to the goals of the organization.
- Results, and impact: the expected results and impacts are clear and measurable.
- Diversity, equity and inclusion: organization's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion concerning the representation of different social groups within the team, and addressing the situation of marginalized groups most impacted by restrictions and attacks throughout the project.
- Budget: the planned budget and its items are relevant and reflect priorities of the organisation.

Please note that shortlisted applicants may be subject to a **due diligence process** prior to final approval. This may include a review of governance, financial, and operational practices, and applicants may be asked to submit additional supporting documentation.



Applicants will receive written notification of Civitates' decision. Grantees may expect a final decision on their application around the end of October. **Please note that Civitates is not obliged to provide detailed explanations of its decisions.**

Applicants may submit one proposal per organisation by using the attached proposal and budget templates. The duration of a grant is **1 year**. The **maximum amount is €30,000** for one year and the grant amount may not exceed half of their last year's operational budget. **Expected starting date of the grant: 1 January, 2025.**

## APPLICATION AID

All interested organizations are cordially invited to participate in a webinar on Civitates' Civic Power program on **13 June, 2024 between 12.00 and 13.00 (CET)**. The webinar combines conceptual and practical sessions and features a Q&A with Civitates staff. Please register [here](#).

Limited places are available, please register in time to secure your place.

### **Annexes**

Proposal template

Budget template

Due diligence questionnaire

CVs of leadership team

Operational budget for 2025

Last official annual report of the applicant

Registration document as a non-profit organisation

Annual accounts for 2024 and 2023 (preferably audited)