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## CIVICUS Annual Plan Narrative 2021-2022

### Introduction

CIVICUS is currently concluding its annual planning 2021-2022 process. We have taken an **iterative approach**, adapting current plans in light of changes to external context, as well as programmatic, funding and staff changes. Along with the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are seeing increasing restrictions to freedom of peaceful assembly, resourcing crisis for civil society, and the acceleration of digital transition which will be reflected in our workplans for the coming year and is also supported by new funding opportunities that are coming online.

It is important to note that 2021-2022 is the final year of CIVICUS' current Strategic Plan 2017-2022. The CIVICUS Board have approved the CIVICUS Secretariat's recommendation to **amend the current Strategic Plan** this year to reflect the updated context, assumptions, and Theory of Change, in response to our current operating environment.

### Institutional priorities

Similar to last year, we will be continuing to plan and align our work according to the following institutional priorities:

#### 1. Amending our current Strategic Plan 2017-2022

In March 2021, CIVICUS concluded a 'light-touch' 6-month strategy scoping process to inform the decision on the next steps of CIVICUS' strategy. Based on recommendations made by the CIVICUS Secretariat, the **Board approved a strategy amendment**, mindful of the need to optimize our time and attention towards responding to the continuing challenges and changes posed by the pandemic, whilst ensuring we remain relevant in the current context.

Whilst our four Strategic Goals would remain intact, the **amended strategy content** would include:

- Updated context and assumptions

- Sharpened focus areas (e.g., people power, digital, predictive analysis) as identified in the mid-term strategy review
- Updated Theory of Change
- Added focus on securing an enabling eco-system for civil society

Amendments would be made based on existing member feedback and intelligence gathered through various surveys and feedback processes to date.

## 2. Continued implementation of our mid-term strategy review [recommendations](#):

Since completing our mid-term strategy review in December 2019, we embedded short term actions, in response to the review recommendations into our annual plans for 2020-2021. In 2021-2022, we will continue to progress short term as well as our medium-term actions which will include:

- Beginning work on a holistic programme quality framework
- Theory of change update, alongside the strategy amendment process
- Further roll out of our Member2Member platform (“MangoApps”)
- Adopting a digital innovation strategy across the organisation

## 3. Nurturing our talent and promoting a work-culture of equity and transparency:

We are prioritising various people processes, in alignment with our HR workplan, to ensure we embed systems and processes that allow staff to learn and grow both within CIVICUS as well as the wider sector and doing so within a culture that supports our diversity, inclusion and accountability values:

- Implementing our new Remuneration Policy and Job Grading system
- Finalising a learning-oriented performance review system
- Taking stock of progress against our Racial Justice Action Plan
- Adopting a composite D&I framework

## Thematic focus areas

Our **thematic focus areas** provide CIVICUS the ability to collectively plan and collaborate more strategically on key areas of work that are integrated across teams. We continue with our thematic focus areas from last year, namely **Resourcing local civil society** and **Shifting Narratives**, whilst adding a third focus area on the **Right to Peaceful Assembly**:

### 1. Strengthening the resourcing of local civil society

*The Strengthening 21st Century Citizen Action Programme’s* flagship activity in 2021-2022 will be the launch of a **grassroots-led influencing and communications campaign** that will roll out throughout 2021 until approximately March 2022. The process is led with a co-creation team of 5 activists, and will seed a grassroots community of action and learning, engage funders/enablers along the way and use creative formats based on storytelling to influence target stakeholders.

Moreover, we will build on research and the [Rebuilding for Good](#) recommendations and make the demand for structural, long-term investments to enable the resilience, relevance, and sustainability of

civil society a central element of our advocacy and mobilisation efforts for the coming years. We will encourage civil society organisations to join forces, co-create and use a guiding framework to promote tailored influencing strategies and national multi-stakeholder dialogues around the actions needed to support and resource civil society in their countries. We will encourage governments, donors, the private sector and other power holders and decision-makers to use these recommendations to assess and improve their COVID-19 recovery plans and to make bolder investments and reforms to enable the sector.

## **2. Shifting Narratives**

Building on the foundation and understanding of what we mean by “shifting narratives,” we continue to explore how we can incorporate narratives for change into our work. In 2021-2022, we aim to continue connecting civil society to further narrative power, while also building narratives that reinforce the critical role of civil society and people power. This will focus on:

- Clarifying our unique position to build and encourage narratives for change
- Creating conversations about narratives, building connections, sharing experiences and tools across the alliance
- Developing narrative, storytelling and framing tools and resources to help build internal capacity
- Showcasing civil society actions and presenting civil society voices, stories and experiences.
- Testing narratives with key areas of work – such as around Rebuilding for Good in the wake of Covid-19 and advocating for action in support of HRDs by focusing on the irreplaceable roles they play in society.

## **3. Right to Peaceful Assembly**

Although CIVICUS has been and continues to work on the Right to Peaceful Assembly, in 2021-2022, this area of work will have dedicated resourcing which will allow CIVICUS to build on its core capacities and strengths, while co-creating, innovating, testing, and adapting how we work to ensure relevance to the protest groups and movements. Indicative activities include:

- Research that enhances our real-time data and forecasting capabilities related to freedom of peaceful assembly (FoPA), and contributes to a better understanding of the main drivers of assemblies, mobilisation tactics, and where and how FoPA is unwarrantedly restricted
- Advocacy support to those who exercise their right to FoPA to directly engage with and influence relevant decision-makers to actualise international and constitutional norms governing FoPA, including strategic litigation and sanctions for violations
- Coalition building through a global communications campaign based on narratives for FoPA, and facilitated connections between protest movements and with other civil society groups for mutual learning and support
- Resourcing (financial and non-financial) and curated support mechanisms that ensure the safety, security, health and wellbeing of people and their communities who are exercising their right to FoPA

Our Performance Story will be updated with these initiatives, annual targets and indicators for 2021-2022 once team/project-level planning has been completed. Our Performance Story will be

updated every 6 months, along with Goal progress reports that will be shared with internal and external stakeholders.

## High-level Plan per Strategic Goal Area for 2021-2022 (Our Performance Story)

<b>Goal 1: Defending civic freedoms and democratic values</b>	
<p>CIVICUS’s work with respect to Goal One includes several approaches ranging from participatory research, in-depth analysis, strategic convenings, emergency resourcing, coalition building, solidarity advocacy, and engagement with multilateral institutions. In 2021-2022, we plan to explore a few new initiatives that build upon our existing work and deepen our engagement in areas such as policy analysis and data harvesting, targeted advocacy to release of prisoners of conscience, and narrative changing outreach with opinion formers, decision makers and the general public. We will also continue our push for greater compliance with international norms at multilateral forums.</p> <p>At the end of 2020 civic space conditions around the globe remained extremely challenging with serious restrictions in 114 countries covering 87% of the globe’s population. Covid-19 emergency measures led to a further deterioration in civic space and respect for democratic norms even as large mobilisations for justice and equality continued with some significant victories. Pushing back on these negative developments through key initiatives below will form the focus of our work in 2021-2022.</p>	
<b>Key Initiatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Publishing the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the <b>State of Civil Society Report</b> alongside the creation of a knowledge and political analysis hub for real time analysis from a rights-based civil society perspective</li> <li>● Building onto the <b>CIVICUS Monitor</b> a data centre to capture trends on civic freedoms, forecasting civic space dynamics and sites of resistance and produce our People Power Under Attack Report, as well as thematic, regional and country reports</li> <li>● Responding to member and partner requests for solidarity through the <b>Crisis Response Fund and Vuka! Coalition for Civic Action</b></li> <li>● Ramping up work on release of prisoners of conscience through <b>#StandAsMyWitness campaign</b></li> <li>● Engaging and <b>supporting protest movement and mass mobilisations</b></li> <li>● Engaging with <b>UN, regional human rights and sustainable development mechanisms and multilateral institutions</b> to advance civic space norm setting, presenting CIVICUS Monitor and other findings</li> <li>● Providing opportunities for our members and partners to access these bodies, advocate and represent their concerns</li> <li>● Exploring avenues to translate international norms and standards, into regional and national action</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CIVICUS’s analysis is used to defend civic space and promote democratic values by decision makers and opinion formers beyond CIVICUS’s usual spheres of influence.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Global civic space conditions have improved, spurred by CIVICUS’ evidentiary findings and focus on gaps between policy and practice.</li> <li>● The right to peaceful assembly is recognised and protected in more compelling ways through support for and solidarity with movements by CIVICUS.</li> <li>● Prisoners of conscience are released through concerted advocacy and campaigning by CIVICUS.</li> <li>● Demonstrable action is taken by multilateral institutions and their member governments to defend civic space and democratic values following CIVICUS’ research, analysis and advocacy.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Goal 2: Strengthening the power of people to mobilise, organise and take action</b></p>	
<p>In 2021-2022, we are excited to take our commitment to foster greater solidarity and engagement between CIVICUS members to the next level with the launch of our first-ever peer-to-peer, online and secure networking platform. As part of our communications strategy, we will also develop evidence-based approaches to strengthening public engagement with the contributions made by civil society in national and global contexts through a continued focus on story-telling and positive narratives. In addition, we will focus on expanding our civic space resourcing efforts through targeted campaign and advocacy initiatives that allow us to test assumptions and amplify lessons on the shifts needed to make grassroots and national civil society efforts more resilient and sustainable. We will also be paying special attention to replicable methods and outcomes in relation to youth-related leadership and resourcing in this context.</p>	
<p><b>Key Initiatives</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strengthening the resourcing of local civil society through a <b>grassroots-focused resourcing campaign</b> and a range of networked, trans-national advocacy efforts</li> <li>● Launching a <b>new online platform to enable peer-to-peer learning</b> and engagement across the CIVICUS alliance</li> <li>● <b>Strengthening existing initiatives for networking</b>, solidarity and collaboration across the alliance</li> <li>● <b>Enhancing public engagement</b> with and understanding of civil society’s role and relevance (positive narratives) through strategic media and social media tools and platforms</li> <li>● Designing and demonstrating methods for <b>youth-focused civic space</b> monitoring and resourcing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A focused campaign on grassroots-resourcing enables greater resourcing support for local activism and social movements.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Advocacy efforts, led by AGNA and other relevant networks, call for and catalyse long-term reforms in civil society resourcing and related infrastructure at national and regional levels.</li> <li>● CIVICUS members can access and use a secure online platform – MangoApps – to interact directly with each other and are therefore able to explore and activate opportunities for mutual learning and engagement.</li> <li>● Existing initiatives for networking, solidarity and collaboration – including ICSW 2.0, the CIVICUS Solidarity Fund and the Youth Action Lab – provide lessons on ways to enhance the meaningful engagement of members within the CIVICUS alliance.</li> <li>● A better understanding and strategic use of narratives in civil society for change through analytics-based engagement in and through media and social media.</li> <li>● Evidence is established of how the leadership of youth as well as the resilience and sustainability of youth-led initiatives has been enhanced within the context of CIVICUS’ work, with lessons that can be shared and replicated more broadly across civil society.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Goal 3: Empowering a more accountable, effective and innovative civil society</b></p>	
<p>We will introduce new mechanisms that will help us to understand better our members’ needs and priorities and curate offerings specific to these, while also contributing to members’ work by offering innovative tools and approaches that leverage good practice within the alliance and enhance the accountability and impact of the sector writ large. We will also develop a strategy to provide the digital resources necessary to navigate the digital transformation, while curating partnerships with new actors and communities that represent an ecosystem approach to social change.</p>	
<p><b>Key Initiatives</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhancing <b>programme quality</b>, learning and innovation with new <b>capacity development</b> tools, resources and partnerships for the Secretariat and the alliance, while sharing CIVICUS’ learning journey with the sector writ large</li> <li>● Responding to the growing role of digital technology by undertaking action-based research to produce key insights on a <b>digital strategy</b> that supports our rights to assemble, associate and express ourselves digitally</li> <li>● Investing in various <b>diversity and inclusion</b> initiatives in response to CIVICUS research, which indicates marginalised people bear the brunt of restrictions to their fundamental freedoms</li> <li>● Promoting <b>dynamic accountability</b> to help build more relevant, responsive, inclusive and resilient organisations, working to enhance the alliance’s constituent accountability policies and practices, and building on expertise, tools and networks developed through the <b>Resilient Roots</b> project</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing CIVICUS innovative monitoring and evaluation capacities to collect and analyse outcomes, and using these outcomes to amend our Theory of Change for stronger organisational <b>impact and accountability</b></li> <li>Exploring new ways to harness the diffused power of civil, testing new civil society formations and models of organising and collaborating, while also bridging traditional civil society with social entrepreneurs, technologists and others working for social good, building on the experience of <b>Innovation for Change</b></li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CIVICUS has agreed on a sustainability strategy for the Innovation for Change network with key stakeholders, and has defined its innovation objectives for the new strategic period with the broader alliance</li> <li>CIVICUS products and services reflect the needs and priorities of members and are developed in partnership with expertise within the alliance (especially, smaller less formal groups and movements in the Global South)</li> <li>CIVICUS has defined a digital strategy that will help the alliance to navigate the digital world in which we find ourselves and ensure that the expertise and experience of the communities and civil society groups we represent are reflected in emerging digital systems, technology, and policy</li> <li>CIVICUS governance, engagement, and programming has enhanced a sector-wide culture and reflects our commitment to constituent accountability and diversity and inclusion</li> <li>CIVICUS staff and members are utilising a dynamic framework for programme innovation and quality that incorporates best practice from across the organisation and broader alliance, and facilitates shared learning and iterative programme development</li> </ul>

<b>Goal 4: Building a fit-for-purpose organisation</b>	
<p>In 2021-2022 we will continue to improve CIVICUS' systems and processes to ensure that they are fit for purpose and function in a streamlined and holistic way. We will be working to improve our sub-granting management system, as well as our grants management system, to centralise and simplify data access and reporting. Further, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, CIVICUS will actively continue to investigate and develop new processes around data security. We are investing time into developing a number of risk management systems and processes as related to partners to ensure and improve our risk mitigation across the organisation. Hand in hand with this, CIVICUS is reviewing all internal and external policies related to risk. Lastly, due to the requirements of the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act our immediate focus will be on the implementation of all requirements, policies and actions required to bring the organisation into compliance with data privacy requirements.</p>	
<b>Key Initiatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivering an <b>amended Strategic Plan</b> that strategically positions CIVICUS to respond in our new context beyond 2022</li> <li>Continuing the roll out of the <b>HR workplan</b> which includes the operationalisation of the remuneration policy and job grading process</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Investing in and testing a <b>learning-oriented performance review system</b></li> <li>● Adopting a composite <b>Diversity and Inclusion framework</b> which institutionalises recommendations of our Racial Justice Action Plan</li> <li>● <b>Transitioning our way of working</b> (people, facilities, travel/meetings, IT support etc.) post Covid-19</li> <li>● Strengthening our operational and governance policies, such as the sub-granting policy</li> <li>● Continuous improvement of supporting finance and operations processes (e.g. moving to activity budgeting per Strategic Goal, and expanding our reporting against the International Aid Transparency Initiative, roll out of the new risk management policy)</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CIVICUS' amended Strategic Plan has been approved and the Secretariat has transitioned and equipped to begin its implementation in July 2022.</li> <li>● Updated organisation and governance policies and supporting processes are successfully rolled out and adopted.</li> <li>● Operational and systems improvements have allowed for more flexible reporting, data management, cross-organisational actioning, and inter-cluster collaboration.</li> <li>● CIVICUS people processes have contributed to a work culture that reflects our diversity, inclusion and accountability values.</li> <li>● CIVICUS team is equipped to deal with the data and security requirements around Covid-19 related requirements and concerns.</li> <li>● Our new ways of working, supporting processes and structures are shared as leading practice resources across the alliance and wider sector.</li> </ul>

### Initial key moments calendar for 2021-2022

July – September 2021 (Quarter 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● High Level Political Forum - SDG 16 reviewed</li> <li>● UN General Assembly</li> <li>● Networking event for International Youth day/ month</li> <li>● AGNA's Global Learning Exchange (tbc)</li> <li>● Financial Audit 2020-2021</li> <li>● IATI reporting</li> </ul>
October – December 2021 (Quarter 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● International Civil Society Week (ICSW)</li> <li>● Youth Lab Reflection Week (Co-design)</li> <li>● 39th UPR Session at Human Rights Council</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of People Power Under Attack report</li> <li>• CIVICUS' Annual General Meeting</li> </ul>
January – March 2022 (Quarter 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 40<sup>th</sup> UPR Session at Human Rights Council</li> <li>• Approval of amended Strategic Plan 2022-2027</li> <li>• UN Commission on the Status of Women and International Women's Day activities</li> </ul>
April – June 2022 (Quarter 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State of Civil Society Report</li> <li>• 41<sup>st</sup> UPR Session at Human Rights Council</li> <li>• Annual and Budget Planning 2022-2023/alignment to Amended Strategy</li> <li>• Elections &amp; Voting for Board Members</li> </ul>

*\* This calendar will be updated throughout the year and the Secretary General update will be used to share moments throughout the year*

**Monitoring our plan**

We will monitor progress against this plan, as well as against our Mid-Term Strategy Review actions through our quarterly DevResults reporting, which will include a trend analysis per Cross-Organisational Priority and Thematic Focus Area. Our Performance Story will be updated every six months, providing an update on initiatives status as well as indicators, informed by our impact reflection process, where we will reflect on how our activities and initiatives are responding to our external environment (see also [CIVICUS' Accountability Framework](#)). As per our Board Reporting Guidelines, update on progress against our plan will be shared through the Secretary General Update and there will be dedicated time allocated on the Board meeting agendas to discuss each Goal in more detail.

Our formal [Annual Report](#) which will be produced at the end of this annual plan (September 2022) will highlight achievements, outcomes and learnings.