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Answer given by Mr McGrath
on behalf of the European Commission
(30.6.2025)

The Fundamental Rights Agency regularly monitors the state of civic space in the EU, noting that negative media reports and campaigns, online threats and harassment are the most prevalent threats experienced by civil society organisations and human rights defenders¹.

The EU has built a comprehensive legal framework protecting fundamental rights when digital technologies are used. Recently, the Directive (UE) 2024/1385 on violence against women² has defined digital offences, such as cyber harassment and cyber incitement to hatred or violence. It provides for specific aggravating circumstances when such crimes are committed against a person because that person is a journalist or a human rights defender. On 8 August 2025, Article 4(3-9) of the European Media Freedom Act³ will become applicable, protecting journalistic sources and confidential communications, to ensure free and independent media across the EU and to protect them against interference.

Under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme⁴, the Commission also supports the protection of civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders, including in the digital sphere. The 2024 Call for proposals for CSOs protecting and promoting EU values⁵ had a specific focus on supporting CSOs monitor and react to threats and attacks, including through capacity-building activities to develop resilience, with a total budget call of EUR 74.5 million. The Commission intends to step up its engagement with and protection of CSOs and human rights defenders and plans to present an EU Civil Society Strategy in 2025⁶.

¹ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2023/civic-space-2023-update?page=4&pid=45d38e5f-4198-4eee-be43-ca1dd0d1e8e8#read-online>.

² Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence, OJ L, 2024/1385, 24.5.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1385/oj>.

³ Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU (European Media Freedom Act), OJ L, 2024/1083, 17.4.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1083/oj>.

⁴ More information about the Programme can be found on the Commission's Funding & Tenders Portal: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv>.

⁵ <https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-12/CERV%20INFO%20DAY%20VALUES%20CALL%202024.pdf>.

⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/strategy-documents/commission-work-programme/commission-work-programme-2025_en.