

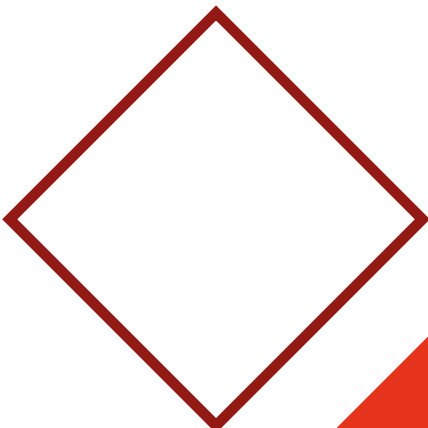
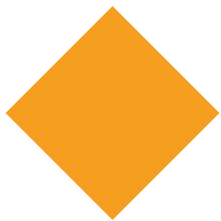
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# CITIZENSHIP AND LIFELONG LEARNING MONITOR 2021

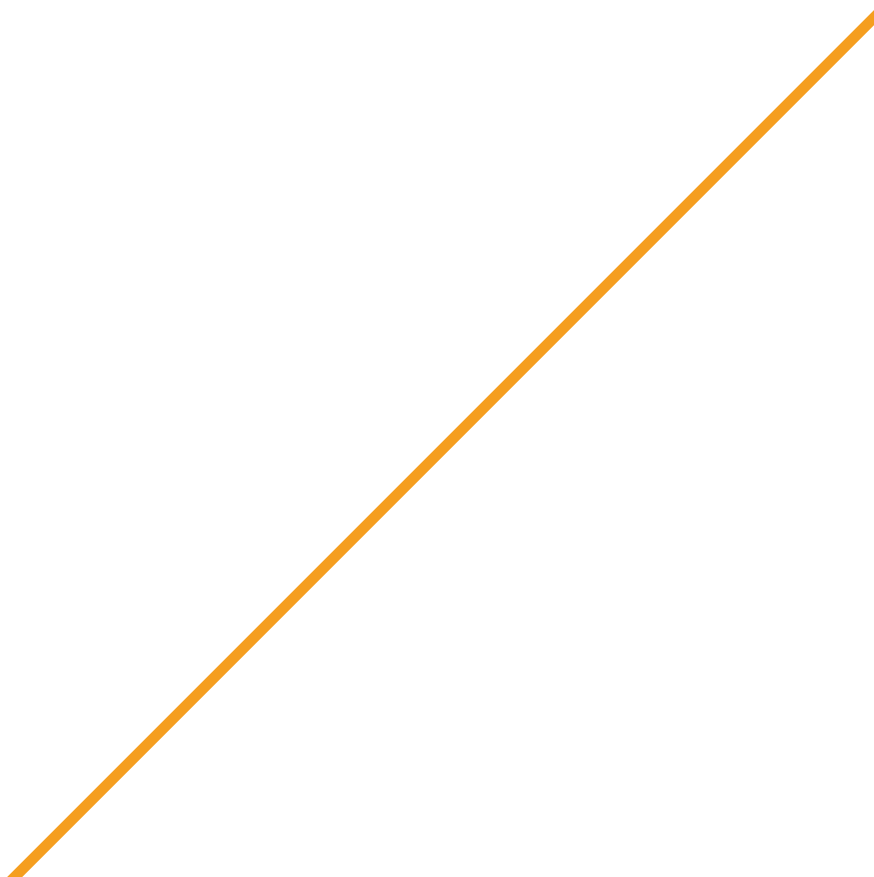
**SLOVENIA**





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## ABSTRACT

The following report represents one of eleven national case studies feeding into the sixth edition of the SOLIDAR Foundation's annual Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor. The purpose of the Monitor is to analyse and investigate the changes undertaken in formal, non-formal and informal education in Slovenia and their relationship with the state of the civic space in the country. The Slovenian report is focused on two main topics: Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) in the frame of Global Citizenship Education (GCE), and the shrinking civic space and Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs) efforts to counter such shrinking. The report will look into the way EES has been implemented in formal education until 2020, highlighting the fact that the topic has been provided as an add-on in formal education, one that has not been prioritised sufficiently especially in light of the current climate crisis. Processes to reform education have begun in 2021, and reference will be made regarding this, analysing how comprehensive they are and whether there are any barriers in achieving them. Similarly, the situation in non-formal and informal education is left to the devices of active providers in this field, with insufficient coordination from the state level. Considering this and the low rate for adults participation in

education, the case in Slovenia reveals a situation in which many learners do not have access to lifelong and lifewide learning process when it comes to EES, which is problematic considering how this topic should underpin any educational paradigm if the learners are to be equipped with the tools needed to fight against the climate crisis. The report will consider, in connection to this, the situation of the civic space, as the learners must be able to exert their green competences as activists and as engaged citizens as well. The current efforts from the side of the public authorities to reduce funding for CSOs and NGOs, to adopt a combative tone towards such actors and to further increase hurdles for them while using the pandemic as a pretext, have led to a narrowing of the civic space in Slovenia. The report considers the good practices coming from SOLIDAR Foundation partners regarding the inclusion of EES and the protection of the civic space, underlining the importance of non-formal and informal education, as well as of GCE, in tackling the global challenges of the 21st century. This will be concluded with a set of recommendations aimed at EU institutions and public authorities to better support learners' holistic development in Slovenia in the context of the challenges illustrated.



## INTRODUCTION

The ecological and social challenges of the 21st century require an education which can provide learners with the tools to understand and respond to such challenges. This report starts by analysing the provision of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), particularly concerning its environmental dimension, outlining its implementation in formal, informal and non-formal education. It will consider the strategies in place, the ease of implementation of the said strategies as well as examples of good practices that involve all education stakeholders in providing a holistic education. It then delves into the topic of the shrinking civic space, which, starting from the measures adopted during the pandemic, has progressively worsened, becoming an increasingly challenging environment for civil society expressing dissent. The importance of the civic space

is key as the green competences need to be actualised on a daily basis by all learners, to ensure that they can mainstream them in their efforts to influence and bring changes to the political, social and economic changes in their society. In response to the shrinking of the civic space, civil society in Slovenia has worked on actively campaigning and supporting their peers that were harder hit by certain restrictions, increasing knowledge-sharing and collaboration, and continuing to implement grassroots, solidarity-building projects. The Monitor will go through these processes, emphasising the specific challenges experienced by the civil society during the recent years. Ultimately, the Monitor concludes with a set of recommendations to address challenges linked EES and to the civic space, while also insisting on the interconnection of the two aspects.

# EDUCATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (EES) IN A POST PANDEMIC WORLD

## EES IN FORMAL EDUCATION

In light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is key that all kinds of education foster reflections that expand our possibilities for action, at the local and global level. Education for Sustainable development (ESD) develops the knowledge, skills, values and world-views necessary for people to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living. Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) is a subtopic of ESD and it more urgently connects the learning process with the environment, helping towards preparing learners to combat the climate crisis. In Slovenia, EES is referred to as Environmental Education and represents an integral part of ESD, which is encompassed in primary, secondary and partially in higher education. In the last years, Slovenia has worked towards progressively integrating ESD in formal education through reforms. The [White Paper on Education in Slovenia](#) (2011) was a first step in exemplifying the systematic analysis conducted on the structure of the Slovenian education system, highlighting sustainable development as a concept to be mainstreamed in education<sup>1</sup>. The main document which outlines the planning, implementation and evaluation of the ESD in formal, non-formal and informal education is the Guidelines for Education for Sustainable

Development from Pre-School to Pre-University Education (2014)<sup>2</sup>, formulated on the basis of the objectives of the [United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development \(2005-2014\)](#) and the [UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development](#). The document aims to summarise the key educational themes of sustainable development and highlight the objectives which will contribute to the implementation of ESD in formal education. At the moment, the topic remains a cross-curricular element of the general objectives in education, as such it has a space in the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and secondary education, while ESD in itself can be chosen as an elective in formal education as well<sup>3</sup>. Current criticisms of this approach from the civil society relate to the fact that the topic is considered marginal, without an inclusion into a holistic model of education and with limited possibilities of instilling values in learners<sup>4</sup>. This challenge is also caused by the fact that education professionals are including the topic through their subjects without having sufficiently clear guidelines on how to perform this actions, while the inclusion of the topic depends on the willingness of education professionals to include it. The marginal perspective on ESD is best illustrated by the fact that the topic has more traction through thematic days, activity weeks, or other such actions that can

1 Krek Janez and Metljak Mira (2011). *Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji 2011*. Pp 39-40. Available at: <http://pefprints.pef.uni-lj.si/1195/>. Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

2 Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia (2007). *Guidelines for Education for Sustainable Development from Pre-School to Pre-University Education*. Available at: <https://www.dlib.si/stream/URN:NBN:SI:doc-NLVIZ1PA/1c57a08f-15a8-4a4c-8c79-0d7deea7761d/PDF>. Last accessed: 4 March 2022.

3 Global Education Network Europe (2021). *Global Education Profile – Slovenia*. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f6decace4ff425352eddb4a/t/616828e14383b82ec22721d4/1634216161964/Profile-GE-Slovenia.pdf>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.; UNECE (2012). *Key topics: ESD competencies, green economy, holistic and systemic approach, development of curriculum, permanent teacher training, quality of education (Slovenia)*. Available at: [https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/esd/7th-MeetSC/Country\\_Reports/Slovenia.pdf](https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/esd/7th-MeetSC/Country_Reports/Slovenia.pdf). Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

4 UNESCO (2020). *Slovenia's No Excuse network pushes youth to change the world*. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/news/slovenias-no-excuse-network-pushes-youth-change-world>. Last accessed: 4 March 2022.; UNECE (2012). *Key topics: ESD competencies, green economy, holistic and systemic approach, development of curriculum, permanent teacher training, quality of education (Slovenia)*.

block the education timetable<sup>5</sup>. This approach is not conducive to mainstreaming the topic and adequately prioritising it considering the climate crisis experienced globally while it is also disproportionately connected to the green economy rather than to adapting the learners' mindset towards sustainability<sup>6</sup>.

In February 2021 the Ministry of Education started a process to modernise education programmes in primary and secondary education, as well as in vocational and technical education<sup>7</sup>. The plan encompasses references to the [European Green Deal](#) and the [Council Recommendations on key competences for lifelong learning](#) and further seeks to align with the strategic orientation of the adopted [National Recovery and Resilience Plan \(NRRP\)](#), which includes a comprehensive reform of curriculum renewal across education with a focus on digital and green content. It is unclear what type of curricular reforms are foreseen, but the balance

of mentions between digital content and green content in Slovenia's NRRP skews overwhelmingly towards digital content. Approximately 45 million EUR in grants have been allocated for this overhaul of the education system<sup>8</sup>. The initiative is welcome, but there is caution related to it given the aforementioned imbalance but also given that education is noticeably viewed as an instrument to support the economy and the labour market across the NRRP, focusing less on the importance of instilling new mindsets and values in learners towards the green transition<sup>9</sup>. As for the environmental dimension, reforms focus on soft policymaking which encompasses Environmental Education, such as the [Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan \(2020\)](#), promoting the transition to a climate neutral society among others through increased investment of at least 3% of GDP by 2030 in research and innovation<sup>10</sup>. The commitment to green competences being included in education has been more bold in the Slovenian NRRP compared to other countries studied for the current edition of SOLIDAR Foundation's Monitor, but all this work cannot be evaluated for the moment and will take time to be achieved at a moment when the climate crisis is slowly closing any windows for actions.

## EES IN INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Acting consistently with ensuring the sustainability of the environment cannot be limited to the classroom. Learners must have the opportunity to learn how to actualise their green



5 UNECE (2012). *Key topics: ESD competencies, green economy, holistic and systemic approach, development of curriculum, permanent teacher training, quality of education (Slovenia)*.

6 Ibid.

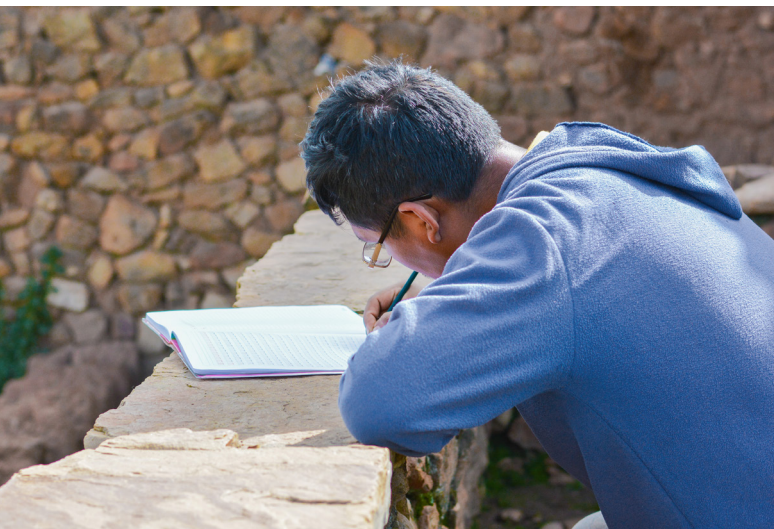
7 Government of the Republic of Slovenia (2021). *Pričenjamo proces prenove programov*. Available at: <https://www.gov.si/novice/2021-03-08-pricenjamo-proces-prenove-programov/>. Last accessed : 1 March 2022.

8 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Slovenia*. Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Implementing Decision on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Slovenia (COM(2021) 384 final). Available at : <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0184&from=EN>. Last accessed : 28 February 2022. Republic of Slovenia Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (2021). *Recovery and Resilience Plan – Summary*. Available at : [https://eu-skladi.si/sl/dokumenti/po-2020/dokumenti-po-2020/povzetek-noo\\_angl.pdf](https://eu-skladi.si/sl/dokumenti/po-2020/dokumenti-po-2020/povzetek-noo_angl.pdf). Last accessed : 28 February 2022.

9 European Commission (2021). *Analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Slovenia*.

10 Government of Republic of Slovenia (2020). *Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan of the Republic of Slovenia*. Available at:

[https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-06/si\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-06/si_final_necp_main_en_0.pdf). Last accessed: 17 March 2022.



competences in a lifelong and lifewide learning manner. At the same time, such an approach to learning underlines the need for informal and non-formal learning opportunities for all adults that have left formal education. The reason for this is the necessity for all learners, regardless of their age, to act in a way consistent with combatting the climate crisis. **The situation, from this perspective, is not encouraging in Slovenia, which has a high rate of lower skilled people and a low rate of participation of adults in education, pointing towards a need for Slovenia to better integrate adult education and lifelong learning into its strategies for transitioning to a sustainable social model and economy.** The OECD reports indeed that 31% of 16-65 year old population in Slovenia – almost 400.000 adults – still have low levels of literacy and/or numeracy<sup>11</sup> and that while participation in adult learning among the employed population increased from 2007 to 2016, participation among unemployed adults decreased<sup>12</sup>. Adults' participation in education four weeks

prior to being surveyed decreased in 2020, reaching 8.4% compared to the 11.2% in 2019. This has come as a result of COVID-19 also, as adult education was hit harder in Slovenia than in other EU countries, considering that the duration of closures of relevant facilities was the longest in the EU<sup>13</sup>. Given the urgency of preparing all adults for the green transition, the difficulties of engaging them in education and training in Slovenia proves to be a significant hurdle considering the green outlook in the NRRP. The [National Programme of Adult Education \(2013–2020\)](#) has been the strategic document that underpinned the national policy in adult education and training. Currently, a new Plan is in the making<sup>14</sup>, and in July 2021 the Ministry of Education published the new draft, which foresees the inclusion of ESD as one of 15 long-term goals and, at implementation level, as one of the priorities when it concerns the content of adult study programmes<sup>15</sup>. This will come in tandem with a set of documents launched in 2020 to address the declining participation of adults in education<sup>16</sup>. These documents were the [Guidelines for implementing adult education guidance as a public service](#), the [Guidelines for preparation of educational programs for adults](#), and the [Rules on standards and norms for financing and performing public service in the field of adult education](#).

The [National Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) also considers the adult education dimension, through the inclusion of several projects to support the process of the modernisation of adult vocational education as well as through the modernisation of continuous education with the aim to reflect the needs of the labour market. **The linkage of continuous education**

11 OECD (2018). *Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Slovenia*. Pp.22-23. Available at: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/skills-strategy-implementation-guidance-for-slovenia/adult-learning-activity-data\\_9789264308459-9-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/skills-strategy-implementation-guidance-for-slovenia/adult-learning-activity-data_9789264308459-9-en). Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

12 Ibid. Pp.26

13 European Commission (2021). *Education and Training Monitor 2021: Slovenia*. Available at : <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/slovenia.html>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

14 European Association for the Education of Adults (2021). *Developments: Slovenian Presidency highlighted adult education*. Available at : <https://countryreport.eaea.org/slovenia/Slovenia%202021/Developments:%20Slovenian%20Presidency%20highlighted%20adult%20education>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

15 eUprava (2022). *Resolucija o Nacionalnem Programu Izobraževanja Odraslih v Republiki Sloveniji za Obdobje 2021-2030*. Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, 2021-3330-0096. Available at: <https://e-uprava.gov.si/drzava-in-druzba/e-demokracija/predlogi-predpisov/predlog-predpisa.html?id=13105>. Last accessed : 23 February 2022.

16 European Commission (2021). *Education and Training Monitor 2021: Slovenia*.

**with market needs, as referenced through the Plan<sup>17</sup>, poses the risk of instrumentalising education, making it a tool for economic development, rather than a tool for individuals to develop transversal competences to adapt to the green and digital transitions.** In order to achieve a [Just Transition](#), it is essential that the Slovenian authorities allocate specific funding for up-skilling and re-skilling all workers, and in a manner that is focused on developing transversal competences as well as sector specific skills, considering that for the Just Transition to be achieved the mindset of all learners has to be adapted.

Though the rate of participation is low, **it is encouraging to see ESD being expanded in adult education, and it must be specified that a reason for why this might be happening more organically in Slovenia is the fact that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is already recognised as part of adult education.** GCE is evident in Slovenia's [Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance Strategy](#) (2018-2030), which outlines its ambition for development cooperation commitments. The document states that "Slovenia recognises the role of Global Education in eradicating poverty and inequality, achieving sustainable development, and educating active and responsible global citizens with a sense of solidarity. Global education involves a lifelong process of learning and action, reflecting the complex interdependence of global actions and developments and the individual's inclusion in these developments"<sup>18</sup>. While the recognition of GCE is positive and it certainly contributed to the current expansion

of ESD formal, informal and non-formal education in Slovenia, the topic of GCE has been, until recently, mostly linked to development cooperation and Slovenia's external action. The commitment to GCE should be reflected through a harmonisation of educational policies, ensuring that GCE is not provided solely with an external perspective, as a separate subject across Europe, while at the same time ensuring that it is either approached from a cross-curricular perspective or it is integrated in the civic and citizenship education classes<sup>19</sup>. GCE must be internalised in the Slovenian education system to facilitate an even more intensive mainstreaming of ESD.

Advancements on GCE and ESD have been made also due to the involvement of the civil society, with a clear example being SOLIDAR Foundation's partner, [SLOGA](#), the Slovenian NGO platform for development, global education and humanitarian aid. They have worked extensively in advocacy for ESD and GCE and encompasses EES in their work on such topics in Slovenia. For the organisation and its members, sustainability is seen as holistic and constitutes a paradigm for thinking about the future in which environmental, societal and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of improved quality of life. SLOGA enjoys a unique position in terms of its capacity to refer to GCE and EES in partnerships with essential educational stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, the [National Education Institute](#) and GENE. Below there is a case study reflecting on the way in which SLOGA strengthened its alliances with national stakeholders by means relying on international networks.

17 Republic of Slovenia Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (2021). *Recovery and Resilience Plan – Summary*. P.18.

18 Slovenia's Development Cooperation (2018). *Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia until 2030*. P.33. Available at: <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MZZ/Dokumenti/multilateral/razvojno-sodelovanje/Development-Cooperation-and-Humanitarian-Aid-Strategy-of-the-Republic-of-Slovenia.pdf>. Last accessed: 22 February 2022.

19 SOLIDAR Foundation (2020). *Global Citizenship Education Policy Paper*. P.2. Available at: [https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/148/original/GCE\\_Policy\\_Paper.pdf?1594110914](https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/148/original/GCE_Policy_Paper.pdf?1594110914). Last accessed: 4 March 2022.



## CASE STUDY

Within the [Bridge 47](#) project framework, [SLOGA](#) has established a partnership with the [Slovenian Institute for Adult Education](#), the main institution for research, guidance and validation in the field of adult education in Slovenia. The other partnerships formed within the frame of Bridge 47 are with the Department for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the [Centre of International Relations and Faculty for Social Sciences](#). The partnership encompasses the organisation of joint events, policy meetings, advocacy actions. Through the partnership, SLOGA has carried out several editions of the Slovenian [Lifelong Learning Week](#), a yearly festival which gathers individuals, institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders

active in the field of lifelong learning. Through this collaboration, at European level, [SLOGA](#) was included in the preparation of the [Declaration on Adult Learning and Education by 2030 in the European Union](#) and the shaping of the new Adult Learning and Education programme of the EU, where EES topics are included. The cooperation at EU level is further exemplified by the organisation of the [EPALE Community Conference 2021](#), which took place on 12-13 October 2021. The forum served as an avenue for the discussion on how adult education and learning can help reshaping our society after the pandemic, providing learners with the tools to address climate change and disruption and promoting environmental sustainability and green competencies.

**Beyond its role in advocacy, [SLOGA](#) further champions community-led initiatives that use experiential learning to support EES. Such methodology is key to foster the understanding of environmental and climate challenges, through the promotion**

**of the notion that learners can be part of the problem, but also a part of the solution, using this methodology to support the unlearning of harmful consumption practices<sup>20</sup>.**

<sup>20</sup> The Experiential Learning developed by David A. Kolb's describes the ideal process of learning which empowers learners to take charge of their own learning and development. It works in four stages—concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

## CASE STUDY

“[End Climate Change, Start Climate of Change](#)” is a European project which aims to raise awareness about climate change induced migration and enhance the critical understanding of the phenomenon by young people. The project is co-designed and implemented by 15 European CSOs and funded by the Education and Awareness Development Program (DEAR) and the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Further partners of the projects are ACABAS - Italy; Alleanza Italiana per lo sviluppo sostenibile (ASviS) - Italy; Associazione Noi del Tosi - Italy; Austrian National Youth Council (ÖJV) - Austria; Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar - Senegal; Fairtrade Polska - Poland; Mekelle University - Ethiopia, Municipality of Milan - Italy; National Youth Network (bOJA) - Austria; Polish Council of Youth Organizations - Poland. As part of the Climate of Change project, [SLOGA](#), organised in August 2021 a contemporary circus show in collaboration with the Municipality of Nova Gorica through the initiative European Capital of Culture (GO! 2025). The aim of the activity was to promote community sustainability through hands-on learning and the creation of communal graffiti art, specific to

the local context. Later in 2021 a call for third party project proposals will be published in 12 EU countries, including Slovenia, aimed specifically at engaging grassroots movements, working in the field of environment, climate and sustainability practices. More specifically, the call will support initiatives aimed at raising awareness and non-formal learning initiatives.

The project expanded over 40 months, operating in 13 EU countries and 10 subgranting countries, reaching 14000 students and 600 educators and teachers. The project produced 4 case studies on countries most affected by climate change, it polled EU citizens on the nexus migration, climate change and the current economic model among EU citizens aged 16-35. It even provided a human economy report to reveal the current economic system is an important root cause of climate emergency and climate-induced migration, proposing systemic changes. All feeds into a pan-European campaign to raise awareness on the systemic changes needed and the role of education in this sense. All project publications are available [here](#).



Source: End Climate Change, Start Climate of Change project

Participation of a wide variety of stakeholders, especially from the informal and non-formal education sector, in policy discussions on the implementation of EES is essential to ensure a well-rounded strategy for mainstreaming the topic in a lifelong and lifewide manner. To this end, cooperation with grassroots movements is crucial to achieve this aim and establish avenues for knowledge-sharing on how to best raise awareness on environmental and climate issues. SLOGA has been walking the talk from this perspective as during the process of preparing the second Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda<sup>21</sup> in Slovenia, SLOGA implemented a series of consultations, where local actors from different sectors and the interested public were invited to jointly evaluate and plan sustainable initiatives and actions for their community. Through such initiatives the

organisation fostered a learning environment where different stakeholders can support the integration of EES in formal, non-formal and informal settings. It is this co-creation and collaboration process that is required to ensure that learners can actualise their green competences, have ownership over green initiatives and, as a result, have the desire to replicate sustainable behaviours and promote them, effectively ensuring a mindset change and ensuring the mainstreaming of EES as a holistic topic. For this reason, SOLIDAR Foundation expresses concerns in relation to the recently adopted budget for 2022 in Slovenia as it foresees a reduction of the Climate Fund by 70% seriously impacting the capacity of environmental NGOs to access funding<sup>22</sup>. This recent development is putting into question how meaningful the government's approach towards the greening of the Slovenian society actually is.



21 Government of Republic of Slovenia (2020). *Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals – Second Voluntary National Review*. Available at: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26451VNR\\_2020\\_Slovenia\\_Report.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26451VNR_2020_Slovenia_Report.pdf). Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

22 CIVICUS (2022). *Independence of RTV Slovenija Under Threat; Culture and Environmental CSOs Face Funding Cuts*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2022/01/11/independence-rtv-slovenija-under-threat-culture-and-environmental-csos-face-funding-cuts/>. Last accessed: 25 February 2022.

# SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

## SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE IN PANDEMIC TIMES

Civic space is pivotal to empower learners with the tools to understand global phenomena. To this end, a healthy and thriving civic space is paramount, especially in times of crisis, as it enables citizens to organise, participate and express their views to influence and shape the political, economic and social life of their societies. This becomes even more essential in light of the climate crisis considering how active citizens can work from the bottom-up in promoting the mainstreaming of EES and pressuring the decisionmakers to recognise the urgency of the climate crisis and take meaningful decisions in this direction. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact over the civic space in Slovenia as it had in many other European countries. The Slovenian government imposed a temporary ordinance that prohibited individuals from gathering at public meetings and other events in public places, in order to contain the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic<sup>23</sup>. Further, the Intervention Measures Act was introduced to provide emergency support measures for different spheres in Slovenia, such as companies, CSOs, the self-employed, employees, and so on<sup>24</sup>. Restricting the freedom of assembly while also providing emergency assistance have been measures adopted across many other European countries to contain the spread of the pandemic. However, the proposed law went further, as it also contained

two articles, 103 and 104, intended to broaden police powers and surveillance. For instance, Article 104 made a provision for the surveillance of citizens through their mobile phones without a court order. Eventually, owing to the pressure exercised by opposition parties and civil society, the proposed measures were not adopted<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, Slovenia is one of 13 EU Member States that adopted such exceptional measures without declaring a state of emergency or introducing equivalent legislation<sup>26</sup>. Similarly, in December 2020, the government tried to abolish the state's fund for NGOs through the 7th anti-corona stimulus package, yet again using the pandemic as pretext to attack the functioning of the civil society. Following great mobilisation from the CSOs in Slovenia, in cooperation with the opposition parties, the abolishment measure was removed<sup>27</sup>.



23 Government of the Republic of Slovenia (2020). *Ordinance on the temporary prohibition of public gathering at public meetings and public events and other events in public places in the Republic of Slovenia*. Available at: <https://www.gov.si/en/news/2020-03-19-ordinance-on-the-temporary-prohibition-of-public-gathering-at-public-meetings-and-public-events-and-other-events-in-public-places-in-the-republic-of-slovenia/>. Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

24 Government of the Republic of Slovenia (2020). *The Government adopts proposal for an act on the intervention measures to mitigate the consequences of the communicable disease SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) epidemic for citizens and the economy*. Available at: <https://www.gov.si/en/news/2020-03-28-the-government-adopts-proposal-for-an-act-on-the-intervention-measures-to-mitigate-the-consequences-of-the-communicable-disease-sars-cov-2-covid-19-epidemic-for-citizens-and-the-economy/>. Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

25 Kučić, Lenart (2020). *Slovenian police acquires automated tools first, legalizes them later*. AlgorithmWatch. Available at: <https://algorithmwatch.org/en/slovenia-police-face-recognition/>. Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

26 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2021). *The Coronavirus Pandemic and Fundamental Rights: A Year in Review*. Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg. P.10. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2021-fundamental-rights-report-2021-focus\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-fundamental-rights-report-2021-focus_en.pdf). Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

27 CIVICUS (2021). *Government Continues Its Attacks on CSOs*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/02/04/government-continues-its-attack-csos/>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

Despite the successful campaign to prevent the expansion of police powers for surveillance purposes or to maintain funding for CSOs, the civic space in Slovenia is undergoing a rapid decline, as it has been marked by CIVICUS, which placed the country on the CIVICUS Monitor [Watchlist](#), a monitoring tool that zoom in on countries where there has been a recent or an ongoing decline in fundamental civil liberties<sup>28</sup>. The decline in the freedom of expression and the efforts to block access to funding for CSOs were the main element of concern, ever since the appointment of Prime Minister Janez Janša<sup>29</sup>. The situation has concerned the EU institutions as well, as on 13 October 2021, a delegation from the European Parliament composed of seven MEPs from the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) Committee and one from the Committee on Budgetary Control (BUDG) met with an extensive list of state, civil society and media representatives in Slovenia. During their visit, MEPs raised issues related to EU values, including media freedom and anti-corruption efforts, as well as the nomination of the Slovenian delegated prosecutors to the European Public Prosecutors Office (EPPO)<sup>30</sup>.

The government has been also targeting the press, through political and economic pressure. For instance, it [stopped funding](#) the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) and exerting pressure on its management, with the aim to definitively dismantle the Agency. The funding was cut in January 2021 by Prime Minister Janez Janša after the coverage of a meeting

he had with populist ally Viktor Orban, representing the start of a period of over 300 days in which the agency has not been funded by the government for its public service<sup>31</sup>. In September 2021 STA resumed negotiations with the government for payments considering that it survived up until then through crowdsourcing<sup>32</sup>, losing sixteen employees and being on the verge of bankruptcy<sup>33</sup>. Over the summer of 2021, the government adopted a regulation to define the scope of public services for STA, introducing also an obligatory annual service agreement and tighter financial and accounting controls under the guise of aiming to resolve the funding issue for the STA<sup>34</sup>. Even with EU condemnation and with the Supreme Court ruling in favour of the STA, the image of the STA has been tarnished, with union officials highlighting how STA's status as a reliable company has been diminished by this discreditation



Source: Euractiv. Poster of the crowdfunding campaign to support STA

28 CIVICUS (2021). *More Than 200 Days Without Funding for Slovenian Press Agency; Attempts to Block Funds for NGOs*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/08/02/more-200-days-without-funding-slovenian-press-agency-attempts-block-funds-ngos/>. Last accessed: 22 February 2022.

29 CIVICUS (2021). *Slovenia added to human rights watchlist as government restricts fundamental rights*. Slovenia Press Release. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/SloveniaWatchlist/>. Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

30 European Parliament (2021). *EU values in Slovenia: MEPs to meet national authorities, civil society, media*. Press Release. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdfs/news/expert/2021/10/press\\_release/20211006IPR14310/20211006IPR14310\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdfs/news/expert/2021/10/press_release/20211006IPR14310/20211006IPR14310_en.pdf). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

31 Andrinek, Gasper (2021). *Slovenia's press agency gets financial reprieve — but at what cost?*. Deutsche Welle. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/slovenias-press-agency-gets-financial-relieve-but-at-what-cost/a-59836651>. Last accessed: 4 March 2022.

32 CIVICUS (2021). *Amendment to Public Law and Order Act Threatens Fundamental Rights, Last Paycheck for STA Staff*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/09/07/amendment-public-law-and-order-act-threatens-fundamental-rights-last-paycheck-sta-staff/>. Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

33 Andrinek, Gasper (2021). *Slovenia's press agency gets financial reprieve — but at what cost?*

34 CIVICUS (2021). *On Our Watchlist: A Rapid Decline in Civic Freedoms as Government Restricts Fundamental Rights*. Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/06/23/our-watchlist-rapid-decline-civic-freedoms-government-restricts-fundamental-rights/>. Last accessed: 24 February 2022.

campaign and by the financial hardships it has undergone as a result<sup>35</sup>. **The resumption of the financing for the STA comes with a new model of disbursing the funds owed from now on, as they will be linked with the amount of publications STA releases, independent of their complexity<sup>36</sup>, in an effective move of trying to water down the work of the STA.** Beyond the crippling of the STA, the government's actions represent a chilling effect on any other potential agent that would oppose their position, signaling a worrisome trend in which Slovenia is descending.

The examples represent a portion of the different tactics used by the Slovenian government in the past years to reduce the voice of the CSOs and of any opposant to the governmental directions. The situation is deeply problematic and is reinforced by the combative approach of the Prime Minister of Slovenia which will be presented in the section below.

## SPOTLIGHT: CRIMINALISATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY



Prime Minister Janša has been engaging in harassment campaigns, especially in the online sphere, where, on 6 May 2021, he posted a [tweet](#) implying that the director of the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) had been involved in the murder of a former STA editor-in-chief more than a decade ago<sup>37</sup>. Such tactics have also been used to harass public figures such as the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, as the Prime Minister declared in a tweet that the Commissioner is “part of #fakenews network”, a comment construed as a response

to her recent memorandum on freedom of expression and media freedom in Slovenia<sup>38</sup>. The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) [condemned the tweet](#) and called for the Prime Minister to “cease denigrating the report and instead take action to address its findings.”<sup>39</sup>



**Such direct attacks occurred also towards NGOs, which are often mischaracterised as enemies of the state, particularly when working on topics that the authorities consider unfavourable, namely human rights, migration and media freedom.** The stark reduction of financial support for NGOs has been one of the tools to shrink the civic space and has manifested itself through the reduction of public calls for NGOs and the redirection of funding allocated for them. The aforementioned example about the anti-corona stimulus package being used for cutting funds for NGOs was followed by the Prime Minister using his social media accounts to label the NGOs as “partners” of the leftist parties and claimed they

35 Andrinek, Gasper (2021). *Slovenia's press agency gets financial reprieve — but at what cost?*

36 Ibid.

37 Safety of Journalists Platform (2021). *Slovenia PM Janša Accuses STA Director of Collaborating in “Murder” of Journalist*. Council of Europe. Available at: <https://fom.coe.int/alerte/detail/99251551>. Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

38 Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (2021). *Memorandum on freedom of expression and media freedom in Slovenia*. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/slovenian-authorities-should-halt-the-deterioration-of-freedom-of-expression-and-media-freedom>. Last accessed: 23 February 2022.

39 Safety of Journalists Platform (2021). *Slovenia PM Janša Accuses STA Director of Collaborating in “Murder” of Journalist*.

were enriching themselves at the expense of hardworking taxpayers.<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of July 2021, the Minister responsible for cohesion, Zvone Černač, introduced discriminatory criteria to exclude the participation of NGOs in the calls for Norway and European Economic Area (EEA) grants<sup>41</sup>, continuing the process for defunding the organisations which the Prime Minister had been virulently attacking. The Centre for Information Service, Cooperation and Development of NGOs, condemned such discriminatory criteria in a [Statement](#). As remarked by SOLIDAR Foundation's members in the [Statement on the state of the civic space in Europe](#), transparency in the decision-making process for allocating funds to CSOs is a paramount feature for ensuring their independence and for preventing the interference of authorities in their possibility to work and access funding.

**The narrowing of the civic space in Slovenia has further been marked by the decrease in inclusion in policymaking processes, which has manifested itself through the lack of consideration of the views and concerns of civil society and the limitation of participation in public consultations, for instance through the provision of limited time allocated for their contributions.** Such a practice has been observed for example, during the preparation of the [National Recovery and Resilience Plan](#), which was approved by the European Commission in July 2021. During the designing phase of the Plan, the government has resorted to different tactics to effectively exclude social partners

and civil society in the preparation and drafting of the Plan<sup>42</sup>. Once the new government coalition came into power, in March 2020, it dissolved the working groups for the programming of the cohesion policy which were partly composed by civil society representatives of NGOs, leading to lack of information available on the draft proposals<sup>43</sup>. While the Guidance note issued by the European Commission in September on the preparation of National Recovery and Resilience Plans<sup>44</sup> does not set any legal obligations on Member States, it does include recommendations for effective engagement of all stakeholders in the designing phase of Plan. As called for by the European Parliament, all stakeholders including CSOs have to be included at all stages of the implementation process in order to create a multi-level stakeholders dialogue, which is the precondition for inclusive and democratically supported reforms to build sustainable societies in the aftermath of the pandemic<sup>45</sup>. In light of the dangerous trends in the restriction of the freedom of expression that are developing in Slovenia, it is urgent for the EU institutions to ensure the recognition of civil society as a key ally which fulfils the role of watchdog for governments against corruption and plays a vital role for democracy by safeguarding and promoting EU values. Civil society further plays an important role in bridging the distance between the EU institutions and its citizens, by supporting the connection with citizens and boosting the Union's efforts to find new ways of decision-making that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of European citizens<sup>46</sup>.

40 Ibid.

41 CIVICUS Monitor (2020). *More than 200 days without funding for Slovenian press agency; attempts to block funds for NGOs*.

42 Caimi, Valentina and Farrell, Fintan (2020). *Participation of civil society organisations in the preparation of the EU National Recovery and Resilience Plans*. Civil Society Europe and the European Center for Not-For-Profit Law. Available at: [https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CSE-ECNL-Participation-of-CSOs-in-the-preparation-of-the-EU-NRRPs\\_spread.pdf](https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CSE-ECNL-Participation-of-CSOs-in-the-preparation-of-the-EU-NRRPs_spread.pdf). Last accessed: 22 February 2022.

43 Ibid. P.12.

44 European Commission (2021). *Commission Staff Working Document: Guidance to Member States - Recovery and Resilience Plans part 1*. P.33. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/document\\_travail\\_service\\_part1\\_v2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/document_travail_service_part1_v2_en.pdf). Last accessed: 1 March 2022.

45 European Parliament (2021). *Resolution of 20 May 2021 on The right of information of the Parliament regarding the ongoing assessment of the national recovery and resilience plans*. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0257\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0257_EN.html). Last accessed: 2 March 2022.

46 Porschlegel, Sophie (2020). *Countering shrinking spaces: Recommendations to support EU civil society*. European Policy Centre. P.5. Available at: [https://wms.flexious.be/editor/plugins/imagemanager/content/2140/PDF/2020/Countering\\_shrinking\\_spaces.pdf](https://wms.flexious.be/editor/plugins/imagemanager/content/2140/PDF/2020/Countering_shrinking_spaces.pdf). Last accessed: 3 March 2022.

## CIVIL SOCIETY STRIKES BACK

SOLIDAR Foundation's partner [SLOGA](#) reports that NGOs significantly contribute to the development and implementation of innovative, engaging and participatory educational methods in Slovenia. Within the non-formal sector, there is a wide variety of actors and a correspondingly large number of small-scale projects regarding citizenship education, however, such fragmentation leads to less impact. In this regard, it could be beneficial to have better coordination and cooperation between the great varieties of activities by different actors active in the field of citizenship education. This is the case also if we consider the importance of this topic for building up the competences of all learners to take an active role in fighting for the maintenance of the civic space.

At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis highlighted inequalities between and within countries but also emphasised the pivotal role of cross-border solidarity to overcome the devastating impacts of the pandemic as well as favour a post-crisis recovery and regeneration that is community-based and rooted in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. During the pandemic, CSOs reacted impressively promptly to the crisis, transforming and adapting their regular activities to social distancing, putting in motion material and immaterial solidarity actions by directly supporting their communities<sup>47</sup>. Cooperation among CSOs is crucial to create sustainable solutions. [SLOGA](#) reports that in some cases, during the pandemic, close cooperation was encompassed by acknowledgements of CSOs working on same or connected issues in other countries. Cooperation among CSOs has been found to decrease the costs, foster innovative solutions, influence and raise awareness among public opinion and put concerted pressure for social change on policymakers on regional, national and EU level.

Knowledge-sharing, peer learning and evaluation among NGOs (nationally and internationally) has been one of the pillars of SLOGA since its establishment, thanks to Study Visits, peer-to-peer exchanges, training, monitoring and evaluation activities. Further, they report regularly taking part in knowledge-sharing activities of the networks they are members of ([Forus CONCORD](#), [EADI](#), [NSC](#), [SDG Watch Europe](#), [Bridge 47](#)). Partnership development and knowledge-sharing activities should also encompass the recognition of the interlinkages between local and global, by fostering partnerships among civil society in different regions of the world. Ultimately, [SLOGA](#) emphasises that solutions are not only limited to Global North but also that innovation comes the Global South and from South-South cooperation. Cooperation and knowledge-sharing beyond Europe is crucial and GCE is a pivotal tool to allow such cooperation. Through the same networks, SLOGA contributed to the consultation process for the new Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) programme, while contributing to letters and positions sent by the networks to the EU institutions. The advocacy performed by SLOGA in international networks is then followed by its vast experience in implementing cross-border solidarity projects funded by the national governments, with over 16 years worth of projects being implemented by SLOGA in the Global South and Balkan countries. This has become more essential as the



47 SOLIDAR Foundation (2020). *Putting solidarity in social distancing: CSOs at the forefront of social innovation*. P.2. Available at: <https://www.solidar.org/en/publications/briefing-note-putting-solidarity-in-social-distancing-csos-at-the-forefront-of-social-innovation>. Last accessed: 4 March 2022.



Balkan countries underwent crises such as big floods (2014), the refugee crisis (2015 onward) and the most recent earthquakes (2020, 2021).

The consistent alliance building and delivery of solidarity projects, while boosting people's competences related to GCE and ESD have been the hallmarks of SLOGA's work as it has been creating a solid foundation for all learners to be able to engage in society and to contribute

to bringing about the political, economic and social change they wish for their lives. The reaction of the people in protecting the STA and in maintaining anti-government protests for over 70 weeks in a row<sup>48</sup>, signaling a society aware of its rights and responsibilities and willing to fight for maintaining the civic space. The response of the society is encouraging while developments related to the government's work will have to be continuously monitored.

## CONCLUSION

The Slovenian national case study puts forward a country that has worked on declarative level on the inclusion of EES in education but that is still taking a tokenistic approach to the inclusion of EES and ESD in formal education. The topic is being upscaled in the recently announced reforms, especially those tied with Slovenia's National Recovery and Resilience Plan, but it remains to be seen how this will exactly be done and also how long this task will take consider the urgent need for action due to the climate crisis. At the same time, this commitment is replicated with new measures to include ESD in adult education and in other forms of non-formal and informal education as well, but the structural issue of declining rates for adults' participation in education and the contradictory move of reducing the financing of environmental NGOs for 2022 reveals a lack of trust in the non-formal and informal education avenues and a lack of understanding of the need to focus on learners of all ages to ensure that everybody can act in ways that can offset the climate crisis and in ways that prepare them for the green transition. The variety of non-formal and informal education providers that have innovatively included ESD and EES in their work is left with inadequate support and

is less likely to be included in policymaking in Slovenia. At the same time, the shrinking civic space is putting pressure on the capacity to educate people in ways that embolden them to actualise their green competences in their day-to-day life. The restrictions of freedom associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have been seen as more extreme than needed, and have come together with denigration of NGOs and CSOs as well as with funding cuts that stunted the capacity of this organisations to prepare all learners to be active citizens that fight towards a more sustainable society. The efforts of the CSOs must be commended as through their protests they managed to limit the restrictions and also to show solidarity towards their peers and partners that were more targeted by the government. This situation is not sustainable in the long-run, as is demonstrated by the new CIVICUS rating for Slovenia which is now seen as a country with a narrowed civic space, and the situation must be continuously monitored. The SOLIDAR Foundation Monitor concludes with a series of recommendations to address some of the hurdles presented in the analysis with respect to preparing all learners for the 21st century green transition.

48 CIVICUS (2021). *Amendment to Public Law and Order Act Threatens Fundamental Rights, Last Paycheck for STA Staff.*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Expand the commitment to ESD from formal education to non-formal and informal education, updating present strategies in ways that boost access to ESD to all types of learners, regardless of their age
- ◆ Ensure that the development of green competences is geared towards supporting learners towards the green transition not just responding to market-based needs, specifically providing high-quality and accessible public education and training for all
- ◆ Increase funding for up-skilling and re-skilling for green competences, in order to achieve a Just Transition, while ensuring that all funding lines are in synergies with the upcoming Adult Education Action Plan, specifically with the long-term goal referring to ESD
- ◆ Restore the freedom of the press and negotiate meaning fully with the Slovenian Press Agency (STA) reaching a consensus that finances without constraints their work as a public service
- ◆ Increase and improve upon the cooperation among education stakeholders through the creation of avenues to discuss the provision of EES at national level, such as multi-stakeholders Working Groups
- ◆ Bring back the funding that was cut in 2022 for environmental NGOs
- ◆ Put an end to the social media campaigns of high-ranking public officials that are smearing CSOs and NGOs, preventing any replications of the chilling effects that engulfed the situation relating the funding of the STA
- ◆ For the EU institutions to politically and financially pressure the Slovenian government in order to discourage oppressive practices against civil society and take measures to ensure a strong and active civic space
- ◆ Ensure the real and meaningful involvement of CSOs as relevant stakeholders in the implementation phase of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and improve the existing frameworks for stakeholder consultations

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