SHRINKING
CIVIC SPACE

A Guide for Partnerships in Countries with Shrinking Civic Space



DUF

Table of Contents

Why We Must Engage with the Rise of Shrinking Civic Space	**3**
Tips and recommendations for you and your partner to consider	**7**
Tools and Resources for your partnership	**12**
Dialogue Tool: How to start a dialogue with your partner about shrinking civic space	**13**
Project and Partnership Risk Matrix	**16**
Incident Preparedness and Response Plan	**20**
Resources when navigating shrinking civic space	**23**
Learn more	**27**

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Why We Must Engage with the Rise of Shrinking Civic Space

All over the world, the space to gather, speak up, and engage in civil society is shrinking. Young people are increasingly facing restrictions on their rights and opportunities to organize and make their voices heard. Examples range from a student being expelled from school for expressing an opinion, a youth organization forced to work in exile, to a scout group denied access to assembly or operating in a culture where criticizing government decisions is taboo. All of these illustrate how civic space is under pressure in different ways. In some countries, restrictions have long been part of the governance system. In others, they stem from the erosion of fundamental rights, the politicization of civil society, or growing conflict and insecurity. This reality is known as shrinking civic space. Freedoms of expression, assembly, and association may be restricted, funding limited, and organizations subjected to surveillance or harassment.

In Denmark, the activities of youth organizations may not be perceived as political or controversial. Elsewhere, however, even running a scout group, organizing a student association, or addressing topics such as gender, democracy, or culture can be viewed as political, and sometimes as a challenge to authorities or social norms. Therefore, the Danish Youth Council (DUF) has created this guide to support member organizations engaged in international youth-led partnerships with organizations operating in restricted civic spaces. Through DUF's youth funding mechanism, Danish youth organizations engage in partnerships worldwide, creating opportunities for exchange, learning, and connection. Operating in restrictive contexts, however, requires both partners to reflect on the realities of their environment.

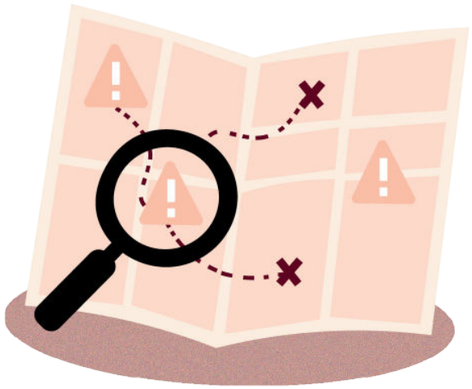
Partnerships in such settings require patience, sensitivity, understanding, and creativity. The role of the Danish partner is not to "save" the local partner, but to work alongside them and follow their lead in understanding local risks and opportunities. While the local partner should lead contextual assessments, both partners share responsibility for managing risk. This means listening, respecting local realities, and adapting when conditions change. By doing so, partnerships can strengthen their resilience and continue working towards youth participation, democracy, and human rights.

This guide introduces key issues to consider when working in shrinking civic space and provides practical tools to understand risks, navigate responsibilities, and support positive change without exposing one's local partners or participants to unnecessary harm. We hope this guide will be useful for those seeking to build meaningful partnerships in contexts where civic space is shrinking.

This guide focuses on three areas:

1. Understanding the Context of Shrinking Civic Space

The insecurity of a context has massive effects on civic engagement. To properly deal with these, we must understand: what are the drivers, tendencies and risks related to working in an insecure and highly politicized civic space? What does it mean for the international engagement of partnerships?





2. Analyzing How Youth-Led Partnerships Can Work in Restrictive Civic Spaces

To continue engagements in the midst of insecurity requires a thorough plan. Therefore, this guide provides information and points to consider about how to strengthen resilience in your partnerships and how to work with it in practice.

3. Designing Measures and Action Points for Safer Engagement

Through tools and resources, this guide provides a starting point for how to design more sensitive engagements that ensure your partners' safety, and introduces even more resources, organizations and funding mechanisms for your safety and security.



What Is Shrinking Civic Space?

The term shrinking civic space describes the gradual backsliding of the freedoms and rights that allow civil society to function. In practice, this can manifest in many ways:

Restrictive legislation: Laws requiring civic organizations to register, banning foreign funding, or criminalizing activism under the pretext of fighting terrorism (sometimes referred to as lawfare). Such laws often give states wide powers to dissolve organizations or arrest leaders.

Digital and physical surveillance: Monitoring of social media, hacking of communication channels, and facial recognition in public spaces put organizations at constant risk.

Stigmatization and violence: Civil society actors, including youth organizations, may be labeled as "foreign agents" or "terrorists," making them vulnerable to harassment, detention, or violence. For example, through unexpected raids of offices and meetings. This often occurs alongside lawfare, whereby national legislation alienates the civil society organizations.

Economic barriers: Opening a bank account for international transfers often requires official registration with the authorities or may even be hindered by state institutions due to lawfare. In contexts where registration is difficult or restricted, the local partners may struggle to access essential funding.

Restricted Civic Space Is Not Only About Politics

Many organizations might not see their work as political as it may relate to faith, sports, culture or community development.

However, shrinking civic space can still affect their work through social norms, self-censorship, unequal participation, restrictions on public dialogue or limited space to address sensitive issues affecting young people.

Understanding civic space therefore also means understanding which conversations are possible, which are difficult and which are considered off-limits.

A Point to Consider for Your Partnership

How might these factors impact your partner's ability to work safely and effectively?

What Can This Mean for Your Partnerships in Restrictive Civic Spaces?

Engaging in partnerships in restrictive contexts requires more flexibility and awareness than partnerships in open societies. Common challenges include:

Security risks: A newsletter, social media post, or even a photo may expose partners to surveillance or retaliation. But it can also be a physical activity that your partners may not be able to carry out due to the targeting from the state or actors who have power. What seems like harmless communication or assembly in Denmark can have serious consequences elsewhere.

Barriers to organizational operations: Local partners may struggle to organize events, access funding, conduct advocacy or meet timelines because of restrictions in their operating environment. Registration requirements, banking challenges, permissions, public gathering restrictions, foreign funding rules or deliberate decisions to reduce visibility can all affect implementation.

Unpredictable changes: Contexts can shift rapidly – after elections, during political unrest, or when new laws are introduced. Adjustments of activity plans and budgets during project implementation are therefore necessary.

Cultural and political sensitivities: Some issues that Danish organizations take for granted, such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, or human rights, may be taboo or even illegal. Navigating these cultural, political and systemic differences requires sensitivity and respect for local realities.

Mental pressure: Partners and volunteers may experience stress, burnout, or feelings of helplessness. Living under constant pressure affects well-being and motivation.



Tips and Recommendations *for You and Your Partner to Consider*

Below you will find key areas and recommendations to consider in your partnership to stay safe, secure and remain adaptable while working in the context of shrinking civic spaces.

1. Building Resilience in Your Partnership

A strong, patient and respectful partnership is the best way to operate in the context of a shrinking civic space. The support, understanding and sensitivity demonstrated by the Danish partner can strengthen the local partner's ability to navigate restrictions and barriers safely.

A way of strengthening your partnership's ability to exist in restrictive civic spaces can be through the following points:

1. Put your partner at the center: Always talk to your partner and listen to their perspective. They are experts on their context and know the risks and opportunities best. Always listen to their assessment before making decisions together. This should not mean transferring all responsibility for the risk to the local partner. You must work together on mitigating and preparing for the worst.

2. Be flexible in your project implementation: Allow for sudden changes in plans or budgets. But also ensure that each activity you are implementing has a security plan in place. If deemed relevant and necessary, budget for safety measures such as safe housing, legal aid, secure software, etc.

3. Do No Harm: Avoid putting your local partners in danger by pushing for visibility or activities that the local partner considers unsafe. This can even be as small as the option of transportation to a venue or place. If possible, budget for safer but more expensive transportation routes.

Resilience

"Resilience refers to the ability of individuals, organizations and partnerships to withstand, adapt to and recover from challenges, risks and crises."[1]

What does this mean for youth-led partnerships?
In the context of shrinking civic space, resilience is the ability of youth-led organizations and partnerships to protect people, adapt to changing risks and continue advancing their mission. Resilience is strengthened through supportive partnerships, strong organizational systems, flexible funding and preparedness to respond to challenges.

Examples of building resilience in practice include:

- Agreeing who to contact if a participant experiences threats, harassment or detention.
- Discussing in advance when an activity should be adapted, postponed or stopped.
- Regularly checking in on the well-being and safety of team members.
- Ensuring important information, contacts and responsibilities are shared among several people.
- Maintaining a list of trusted lawyers, journalists or support organizations that can be contacted if needed.
- Setting aside a small emergency budget for unexpected legal, safety or well-being-related costs.
- Using secure communication channels and agreeing on what information should not be shared publicly.
- Discussing who may face greater risks because of their role, visibility or personal circumstances and adjusting responsibilities accordingly.
- Documenting lessons learned from challenges and using them to strengthen future activities.

1: USAID Resilience Policy 2024

Do No Harm

The principle of *Do No Harm* means ensuring that your actions do not unintentionally put your partner or their volunteers at risk. Even well-intentioned activities can have negative consequences in restrictive contexts.[2]

In practice, this means:

- Always consider the potential risks before sharing information or visibility about your partner.
- Let the local partner determine what forms of visibility, communication and participation are safe in their context.
- Remember: silence or low visibility can sometimes be the most supportive action.

Do No Harm is about acting responsibly: your partnership should strengthen your partner, not create additional risks for them.

2: [Anderson, The Local Capacities for Peace Project]

A question to consider as the Danish Partner

How can you take action in support of your local partner without creating additional risks for your partner?

4. Prioritize mental health in your partnership: Volunteers may face stress, burnout, or depression. Consider how your partnership can respond with care and support for them. Examples of initiatives to do so could be establishing mentorship programs or psychosocial support groups.

5. Seek knowledge: Learn about the local context through the experiences and recommendations of the local partner. Be involved in the mapping of their context, and ask them for recommendations on relevant articles, podcasts, websites, or newsletters to read or follow. Mapping local and regional resources can also help partners understand the context; e.g. trusted lawyers, national human rights institutions, civil society networks, regional mechanisms and organizations able to provide emergency legal or protection support.

Building resilience is not only about helping your local partner organization cope with challenges. It is also about creating partnerships that can adapt together when circumstances change. In practice, this means sharing responsibility, supporting one another through difficult situations and recognizing that adapting, postponing or sometimes stopping an activity can be a responsible response to changing risks.

2. Communicate Safely and Strategically – Both Online and Offline

Safe communication is critical as local partner staff, volunteers and participants may be monitored, followed or exposed to surveillance. Digital responsibility is also important in restricted civic spaces as anything might be used against your partners. Risks can also come through very ordinary program administration: participant lists, photographs, ID copies, phone numbers, travel itineraries, beneficiary stories, attendance registers and monitoring databases.

1. Establish agreements within your partnership: Decide together what information can be shared externally and what must remain confidential.

2. Use secure communication channels: Choose end-to-end encrypted apps such as Signal. Avoid using SMS or unencrypted email for communication. Also ensure that you agree on which platforms to use for sharing sensitive information, so that there are not critical documents on someone's phone such as on WhatsApp that may put your local partners at risk.

See CIVICUS' civil society guide for cyber security.

Useful guiding questions for management of information

- Do we really need to collect this information?
- Who needs access to it?
- How long do we need to keep it?
- What happens if someone else gets access to it?

3. Be careful with visibility: Do not share meeting locations or travel plans publicly. If you want to post, make sure to remove location tags on photos and do not post a photo of a live location immediately. Wait until you have left the location. The safest option is to post updates or photos once activities have fully ended.

4. Protect accounts: Use strong, unique passwords with two-factor authentication. Consider password managers such as Microsoft Authenticator, Bitwarden, NordPass, etc. for added security. It would also be important for the whole partnership group to discuss what might happen if a phone or account is searched or compromised.

5. Use alternative devices: In highly restrictive contexts, consider using "backup" or "decoy" phones and avoid storing sensitive data on personal devices.

6. Come up with a security and communication plan for physical meetings: You never know who might be listening to your conversations in the background when you are in a public space together. In these cases, be mindful of what you say and the language you use. It can be a good idea to talk with your local partners about what is okay and not okay to say publicly. You can also come up with safety words or hand gestures that you can use in your partnership to signal danger or possible risks.

1. Contact the Danish embassy: Contact the Danish embassy before travel and discuss with the local partner what information is safe to share about the visit. Remember that any information you share can put your local partner at risk, so it is important to think about how much information is necessary for you to share.

Find an overview of embassies and representations.

2. Choose neutral venues or countries: The Danish partner and local partner should jointly determine whether meeting locally, online or in a third country is the safest option. Consider using safe, neutral spaces rather than your local partner's office, which might be monitored. It can also be traveling to a third country for meetings to create both psychological safety for both partners and ensure that you can conduct safe meetings together.

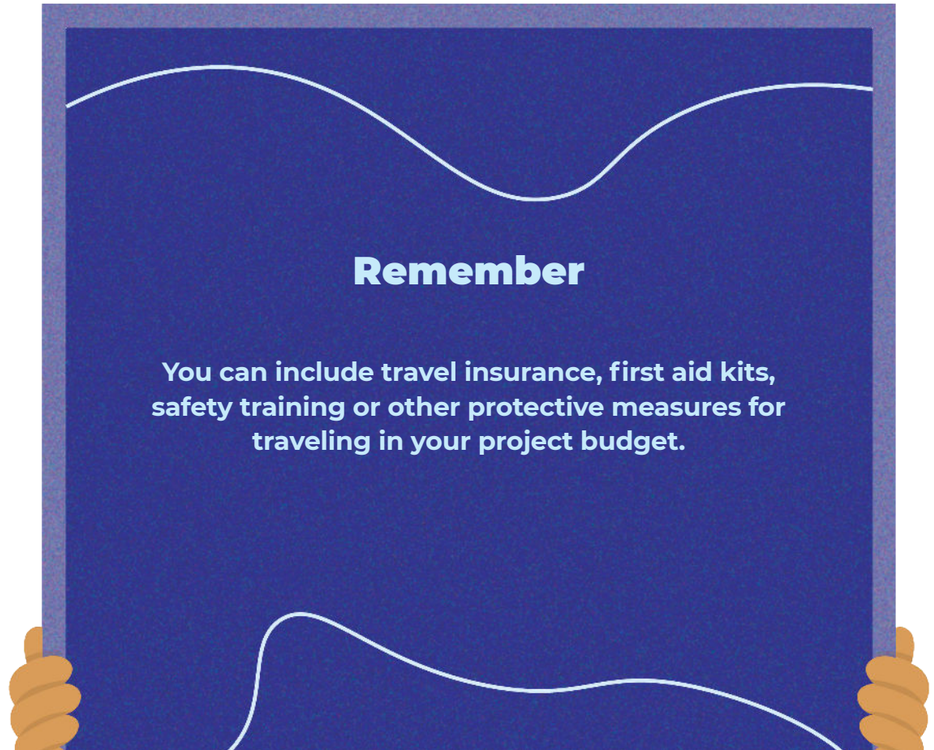
3. Screen participants: If you organize events, it can be a good idea to screen participants by having registration forms, locked virtual meeting rooms, and doing background checks – infiltration is a real risk!

4. Prepare your travel group: Ensure everyone in the travel group is briefed on risks, safety, and context. Remind everyone not to share photos or locations that could put members of your partnership at risk.

5. Adopt policies: DUF is not responsible for the safety of your volunteers. DUF member organizations must establish their own travel and security policy including travel insurance.

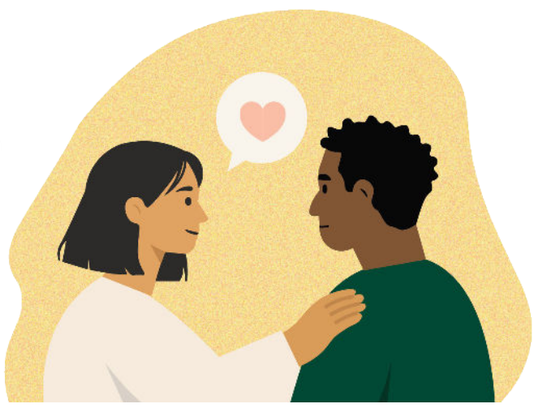
3. Stay Safe While Traveling

This section is primarily intended for representatives of the Danish partner traveling to visit the local partner. When traveling, your presence can expose your partner to additional risks. Before traveling, you should prepare yourself mentally for what is ahead. It is also advised to receive security training for how to navigate and plan for your upcoming travel. It is important you think about proper planning and the risks involved when meeting your partner physically. In such situations you can reduce risks and insecurity by:



Tools and Resources *for Your Partnership*

It can be difficult navigating where to start and how to design safe and secure engagements in contexts you cannot fully grasp. Therefore, we have created three tools and a collection of resources that your partnership can use to begin diagnosing and responding to the risks and barriers that are part of the context in which you work.



1

Dialogue Tool: How to start a dialogue within your partnership about shrinking civic space

Questions designed to help start conversations with your partner about shrinking civic space.

2

Risk Matrix: Mapping external risks in the project's context

A technical mapping tool that lists potential conditions, risks and circumstances that you can rate and talk over how to act on the identified risks.

3

Incident Preparedness and Response Plan

This tool helps project teams and partners agree in advance how they will respond if a serious incident occurs during project implementation.

4

Resources when navigating shrinking civic space

Links to emergency funds, grant mechanisms, legal and technical support, and reporting mechanisms on human rights violations.

Dialogue Tool

How to Start a Dialogue within Your Partnership About Shrinking Civic Space

This Dialogue Tool is designed to help start conversations within your partnership about *shrinking civic spaces* in their countries to better understand their context and challenges, how to collaborate safely and effectively, and to identify how you can support each other best within your partnership.

Mental awareness:
This can be a difficult conversation because shrinking civic space and its impacts are sensitive topics, so remember to approach the conversation with care as it can be difficult to completely understand each other's lived realities.

Use the tool as inspiration - not as a checklist.
The aim is to listen, learn, and strengthen trust within your partnership.

Before having this dialogue, ensure that people feel safe and ready to have the conversation. It could be a good idea to do a mindfulness exercise or some shared grounding principles for the space before beginning this exercise.

Understanding the context
A shared understanding of the situation in your local partner's country is the foundation for good cooperation. Talking openly about the context helps you both identify opportunities and challenges.
Questions to discuss:

- Which topics or activities are considered sensitive or political in your context?
- Are there laws, rules, or informal barriers such as public perception or social norms that make your work more difficult?
- Have you or other youth organizations experienced new restrictions recently?
- Can you recommend any articles, podcasts, web-sites, or newsletters to read or follow to learn more about your context?

Understanding Visible and Invisible Restrictions

When discussing civic space, remember that restrictions are not always legal or political. Social norms, religious dynamics, self-censorship and unwritten rules may also shape what organizations and young people feel able to say and do.

Reflect together:

- Which issues are easy to discuss publicly?
- Which issues are difficult to discuss publicly?
- How could our partnership create safer spaces for these conversations?
- Are there topics people avoid even when they are important?
- Are there unwritten rules that influence your organization's work?
- How do religion, tradition or social expectations shape participation?
- What concerns affecting young people are discussed privately but rarely publicly?

Flexibility and adaptation

In restrictive contexts, changing circumstances are constant. Being flexible and responsive helps keep the partnership safe and sustainable.

Questions to discuss:

- How can we adjust activities or budgets when new challenges arise?
- What kind of flexibility do you need from us as a partner?
- How do we keep each other updated when situations change suddenly?

Working safely together

Security and safety are shared responsibilities. Talk about how you can protect each other and avoid unnecessary risks.

Questions to discuss:

- What are the main risks your organization faces?
- How can we communicate safely — online and offline?
- Are there local networks or support systems you can rely on in times of increased risk and pressure?
- What kind of information should not be shared publicly about our partnership?
- How do we, as a partnership, decide when to stop an activity if a situation becomes too risky for ourselves, our target group or our organizations?

  For example, by identifying exit routes and splitting up to avoid revealing the group's location.

Well-being and Mental Health

Volunteers working under pressure may experience stress or burnout. Talking about well-being and mental health helps build understanding and care in the partnership.

Questions to discuss:

- How do you and your volunteers take care of your mental health?
- What are the biggest sources of stress in your daily work?
- How can we support each other when pressure increases?
- Are there periods when you need to slow down or pause activities?

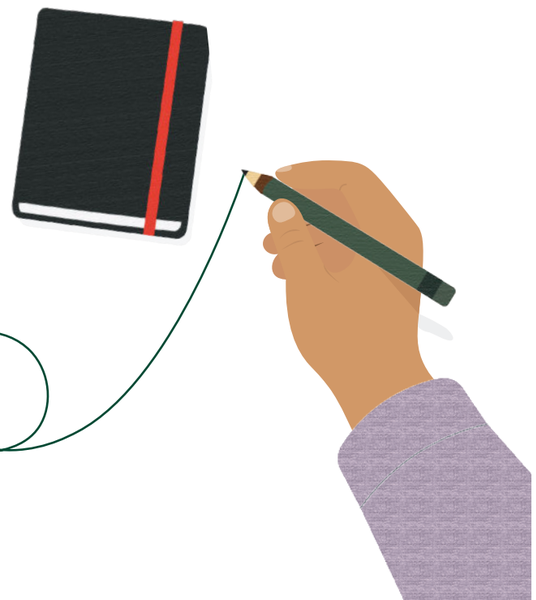
Communication and visibility

Visibility can strengthen the message of the change your partnership seeks to create and the overall reputation of both partners - but it can also increase the risk of your local partner. It's important to agree on what is safe to share, how you convey a message and where it is shared. But also agree on what other ways you can support your partners in times of endurance. E.g. private check-ins, legal/protection referrals, engagement with trusted networks, quiet diplomatic engagement, regional/international advocacy, and then public communications where appropriate.

Questions to discuss:

- How visible should our partnership be on social media or websites? Who has final approval over public communication involving the local partner?
- Are there risks linked to using names, locations, photos, or logos publicly?
- Who should approve public materials before they are published?
- How can we show support or raise awareness without putting anyone at risk?

As a rounding on your dialogues with your partners on security, you can consider creating a binding document that consists of all your agreements and strategies put in place. This can be shared with both your organizations, collaborating actors and volunteers that you have involved in the partnership. You can also include the answers and solutions you come up with in the Risk Matrix below. But first make sure to consider whether the safest option is a "need-to-know" approach with general partnership agreements shared more widely and sensitive information kept much more restricted.



Project and Partnership *Risk Matrix*

This tool expands the context analysis by helping partnerships identify potential risks that can impact the work of your partnership within a shrinking civic space. Restrictions on civic space do not only affect project implementation. They may also impact individuals, the local partner organization, the partnership itself, and the long-term sustainability of the collaboration.

This matrix tool lists potential conditions, risks and circumstances related to travel, partnerships, project implementation, personal safety and legal/administrative factors that may affect your international projects.

Based on these, your partnership can assess what consequences participation, activism and engagement could mean for both the partnership and the involved people's realities.

Instructions

Use the matrix to identify the likelihood of each listed risk, identify who might be affected, and determine whether existing mitigation measures are sufficient.

Assess each risk factor by estimating probability and consequence (green/yellow/red). Identify mitigation measures and additional action needed. Prioritize risks with high probability and/or severe consequences and review throughout the project lifecycle.

For a more detailed and comprehensive version of this tool, including additional risk categories and guidance on mitigation measures, ***please visit DUF's Toolbox for Partnerships.***

NOTE: Not all the listed risks might affect your context or be relevant to you. It can therefore be a good idea to complement this tool with an initial brainstorm on the risks and needed mitigation efforts to ensure the results truly reflect your situations and needs.

What is a risk?

A risk is the combination of a threat and your vulnerability to the threat. By analyzing the risk, you can identify mitigating actions to lower your vulnerability and decrease the risk.

What is mitigation?

A mitigating action is an act that either decreases the likelihood of or the impact of a risk. It can also lower both.

Risk examples

Low probability/consequence
Medium probability/consequence
High probability/consequence

Risk Area	Example Risk	Who is affected?	Probability	Consequence	Risk Mitigation Measures	Overall Risk Level	Responsible Person to Address Issue	Comments
Implementation & Partnership	Limited access to target groups	Local partner, project participants	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Implementation & Partnership	Lack of stakeholder engagement	Project, local partner	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Implementation & Partnership	Political changes affecting project activities	Partnership	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Implementation & Partnership	Authorities monitor or interfere with activities	Local partner, participants, partnership	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Legal & Regulatory	New NGO registration requirements	Local partner organization	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Legal & Regulatory	Restrictions on foreign funding	Local partner organization, partnership	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Reputational & Personal risks	Staff or volunteers experience intimidation or threats	Individuals, local partner	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Reputational & Personal risks	Loss of employment or livelihood due to participation	Individuals	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Reputational & Personal risks	Increased stress, burnout or mental health challenges	Individuals, organizations	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Online Safety & Communication	Online harassment targeting staff or volunteers	Individuals, local partner	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Online Safety & Communication	Hacked accounts or compromised communication channels	Individuals, organizations, partnership	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Online Safety & Communication	Sensitive information exposed through digital platforms	Local partner, participants	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Travel & Meetings	Travel disruptions affecting safety or accessibility	Partnership, project	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Travel & Meetings	Lack of access to legal, medical or emergency support during travel	Individuals, local partner	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Travel & Meetings	Danish partner's presence increasing the risk for the local partner	Local partner, participants	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Financial	Delayed fund transfers or banking restrictions	Local partner, project	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Financial	Delay in registration forms for foreign collaborators	Local partner, project	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Identify your own			○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Identify your own			○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				
Identify your own			○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○				

Incident Preparedness
and Response Plan

This tool helps project teams and partners agree in advance on how they will respond if a serious incident occurs during project implementation.

The tool is a short conversation tool to use before an activity, exchange, training, campaign, or international visit. It enables partners to agree on red lines or thresholds for pausing or stopping an activity.

Sometimes the safest and most responsible decision is to pause, postpone, adapt, or stop an activity. Doing so should be recognized as good leadership and care for participants, not as failure.

1 If Something Happens, Who Do I Contact?

Complete before the activity.

Situation	First Contact
Feeling unsafe	
Harassment or threats	
Emergency situation	
Legal or police issue	
Well-being or mental health support	

Emergency Contact Number: _____

2 What Are Our Red Lines?

Sometimes good risk management means stopping an activity.

Discuss and agree:

- ☐ We will pause activities if someone's safety cannot be reasonably protected.
- ☐ We will pause activities if participants or partners face serious threats.
- ☐ We will stop activities if continuing would create unacceptable risk.
- ☐ Participants can opt out without negative consequences.
- ☐ We agree that safety is more important than completing activities.

3 Which individuals or groups face greater risks if they are publicly linked to the partnership?

Different people may experience the same activity differently.

Ask:

- Does anyone have higher visibility or public exposure?
- Could participation affect someone's family, job, studies or well-being?
- Are there participants who may need additional support?
- Have we asked participants how comfortable they feel taking part?

Additional support needed? Identify what

4 Do We Have What We Need?

Question	Yes	No
Do we know who makes decisions during an emergency?	☐	☐
Do we know who can approve emergency expenses?	☐	☐
Do we know where to get legal or protection support if needed?	☐	☐
Do we know how to communicate with families if relevant?	☐	☐

5 One-Minute Reflection

Complete and answer together:

- What is the most likely challenge we could face?
- What is one thing we can do now to reduce that risk?
- If things become too risky, who can decide to pause or stop?



Resources When Navigating *Shrinking Civic Space*

The following pages provide additional resources, contacts, and materials to support your partnership in navigating safety and security challenges when working in restrictive civic spaces. It is now your turn to reflect, identify what is relevant to your context and take ownership of the measures that will make your efforts as meaningful and effective as possible.

Organizations providing financial and technical support to civil society actors around the world

Emergency Support and Relocation

Global Focus
Human rights defenders, civil society organizations

- Rapid emergency support
- Support for proactive responses to shrinking civic space

Global (OECD DAC)
globaltfokus.dk/en

Front Line Defenders
Human rights defenders

- Emergency security grants
- Legal aid
- Relocation

Global
frontlinedefenders.org

ProtectDefenders.eu
Human rights defenders

- Emergency grants
- Relocation (incl. family)
- Legal & digital support

Global
protectdefenders.eu

Freedom House
Human rights defenders, including LGBTQI+

- Emergency support
- Relocation
- Medical/legal assistance

Global
freedomhouse.org

AfricanDefenders
Human rights defenders

- Safe relocation within Africa

Africa
africandefenders.org

Digital Security

Access Now

Activists/organizations needing digital security

- Digital security helpline
- Real-time technical assistance

Global

accessnow.org

Digital Defenders Partnership

Activists/organizations needing digital security

- Digital emergency response
- Audits
- Funding

Global

digitaldefenders.org

Media & Culture

ICORN – International Cities of Refuge

Writers and artists

- Long-term relocation

Global

icorn.org

Reporters Without Borders

Journalists and media workers

- Emergency relocation
- Legal/medical help
- Equipment

Global

rsf.org

Specialist / Targeted Support

Urgent Action Fund

Women, trans, non-binary activists

- Emergency grants
- Relocation
- Legal aid
- Digital/physical security

Global + regional (Africa, Asia/Pacific, Latin America)

urgentactionfund.org

Climate & Environment

Climate Activists Defenders

Front-line climate justice activists, FLINTA, Indigenous and LGBTQI peoples

- Physical security
- Digital security
- Legal support
- Media support
- Well-being support

Global

climateactivistdefenders.org

Democracy & Civic Space

Democracy Endowment

Provides flexible support to democracy activists, complementing other EU and EU member state democracy support programs

- Public accountability
- Human rights monitoring
- Media support
- Environmental activism

Europe

democracyendowment.eu

Support by Diplomats and Foreign Missions

Some governments have issued guidelines for their diplomatic staff at embassies and foreign missions on how to support local human rights defenders. Some of these guidelines can be publicly accessed, while some cannot. Support by diplomats and foreign missions can include monitoring the local human rights situation, funding civil society, raising awareness, trial monitoring and prison visits, emergency assistance, temporary relocation, etc. Governments and institutions with public guidelines on supporting human rights defenders include EU, Norway, Canada and Ireland.

Denmark does not have publicly accessible guidelines. It is, however, a good idea to contact the local Danish embassy to get updated information on the security situation and recent context developments as well as advice on how to react in cases of shrinking civic space and human rights violations.

Governments and institutions with public guidelines on supporting human rights defenders include

- EU
- Norway
- Canada
- Ireland

UN Mechanisms for Reporting Human Rights Violations

United Nations (UN) Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. They manage complaints of human rights violations, conduct country visits, release statements, and engage in raising public awareness. The experts report annually to the Human Rights Council, and the majority of the mandates also report to the UN General Assembly. Read more about the Special Procedures here.

Any individual, group, civil-society organization, intergovernmental entity or national human rights bodies can submit information to the Special Procedures. Submission of information is done through the Special Procedure Submission online form.

Submit information: Special Procedure Submission online form

Read more about the Special Procedures here.

Learn More



Resources About Fragile Contexts

- Read more about fragile contexts on the CISU webpage
- Read more about the dimensions of fragile context on the OECD webpage under the Fragility Framework.

Resources About Shrinking Civic Space



- Read more about shrinking civic space on Global Focus' webpage
- Read more about shrinking civic space on CISU's webpage
- Read more about protecting human rights under pressure on the Danish Institute for Human Rights' webpage
- Read more about the latest political trends around the civic space in European Civic Forum's "Civic Space report 2025"
- Follow civic space scores and the monitoring of human rights violations with CIVICUS' monitoring tool

Tools to Explore



- The right to defend rights is a monitoring tool by the Danish Institute for Human Rights
- The Digital Rights Check by the Danish Institute for Human Rights and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
- Courses such as "HEAT", "Crisis Management" and "Travel Safe" by Travel & Risk
- Emergency funds such as rapid response mechanisms from Global Focus' Claim Your Space.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide helps DUF's member organizations build safe and meaningful partnerships in countries where civic space is shrinking. It offers practical tools for understanding risks, adapting to restrictive contexts, and supporting partners without exposing anyone to unnecessary risks.

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