

PRESS RELEASE

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What is civil society and how does it work in Germany?

Public awareness for civil society is mushrooming in Germany as everywhere. When the new federal government was formed in December 2021, civil society was mentioned almost 20 times in the coalition agreement, approx. 6 times as much as in the last one. Yet, knowledge and a fair assessment of civil society are still rare in this country. Biased prejudices and preconceived notions prevail.

The Maecenata Institute has now published **an English translation** of a report, originally published in German a few months ago, assessing the conditions and framework for civil society in Germany. The report takes stock of Germany's heterogenous civil society landscape and shows where there is a need for further action. Restrictions on civil society that prevent citizens from shaping the public space (the 'shrinking space' phenomenon) were also studied, alongside the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work of civil society organisations (CSOs). The report shows that, on the whole, the framework conditions for civil society in Germany are favourable. The rule of law and protection of human and civil rights are firmly in place. However, several factors continue to prevent satisfactory citizen participation and hinder civil society from having an equal say alongside the state and the market. Debates on the legitimacy of civil society in political decision-making processes, increasing political influence on civil society actors and attempts by right-wing extremists to infiltrate the sector reveal the need for political action. Furthermore, administrative regulations are often old-fashioned and cumbersome and do not meet the requirements of a vibrant and active civic space.

It is hoped that government and lawmakers will follow up on what they promised and bring the legal framework in line with 21st century concepts of an open, liberal, diverse, and democratic society.

The report in English is available for free download [here](#).

The original German report is available for free download [here](#).

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The Maecenata Institute (founded in 1997) is an independent research and policy centre, and part of the Maecenata Foundation, a think tank that focusses on the civic space, civil society, civic engagement, and philanthropy and their role in democracy in Europe and beyond.