

Civil Society Working Conditions: A Call for Change

Executive Summary

Young Professionals Network, in partnership with the Centre for Labour Rights and International Centre Olof Palme, on January 21, developed the Discussion Forum "Decent Work for Civil Society Organization Employees". Together with 45 stakeholders, the forum discussed the Policy Document "Working Conditions in the Civil Society Sector in Albania: Reality, Challenges and a Call for Change," which analyses employment conditions in the civil society sector and provides evidence-based recommendations addressed to public institutions, donors, and civil society actors.

Why is this discussion urgent now?

Youth and gender equality: Civil society relies heavily on groups already facing labour market inequalities.

EU integration commitments: The EU Strategy for Civil Society calls for a safe, enabling, and sustainable environment for CSOs, including decent working conditions.

Sector resilience: Without fair and stable employment, civil society cannot remain an effective democratic actor or partner to institutions and donors.

Decent work is therefore not a secondary issue, but a prerequisite for a strong, credible civil society that upholds human rights.

Main takeaways from the Policy Document:

Job Insecurity & Retention Risks

- **58%** of respondents work under fixed-term contracts, while only one third holds open-ended contracts.
- Only **23%** clearly see themselves remaining in the sector in five years, indicating significant retention risks and potential loss of institutional memory.

These figures highlight systemic employment precarity within the sector, driven largely by project-based funding cycles and limited access to sustainable financial mechanisms. Without targeted policy interventions to promote longer-term funding frameworks and improved labor protections, the sector risks persistent staff turnover, erosion of institutional capacity, and reduced effectiveness in delivering public-interest services.

Inadequate Pay & Unstable compensation:

- Nearly **two thirds** earn below **ALL 80,000 (gross) per month**, despite many holding coordination or management roles and responsibilities.



This suggests a misalignment between levels of responsibility and compensation within the sector. Inadequate remuneration reduces the sector's ability to attract and retain qualified professionals and weakens its long-term professionalization.

Work intensity/ High Workload and Protection Gaps

- While **73%** report on a formal 8-hour workday, over **45%** experience frequent or constant work overload.
- **77%** reported that they are able to take leave and use their annual leave days without obstacles.
- **21%** are uninsured or unsure whether social and health insurance contributions are paid.
- **63%** work in organisations without HR units, staff representation, or formal complaint mechanisms.

Together, these findings indicate that while formal labour standards may be partially in place, significant gaps remain in their practical implementation and institutionalisation. High work intensity combined with limited internal protection mechanisms can increase vulnerability for employees and strain organisational capacity. Over time, such conditions risk weakening professional standards, internal accountability structures, and the long-term resilience of the sector.

Overall, the evidence points to structural pressures within the civil society employment model that, if left unaddressed, may undermine institutional sustainability and democratic resilience.

A call to action!

Ensuring decent work in civil society requires shared responsibility:

For Civil Society Organisations

- Strengthen inter-organisational cooperation to advance financial sustainability and a more enabling environment for the CSOs' operation.
- Advocate for sustainable operational models aligned with Albania's EU integration trajectory (pre- and post-accession).
- Diversify funding sources to reduce dependency on short-term project cycles.
- Adopt and implement clear internal HR policies, including transparent contracts, fair workload distribution, and performance systems.



- Ensure active governing board oversight of governance and resource management practices.
- Guarantee full compliance with national labour legislation and uphold the right of employees to collective representation and contractual rights.

For Government

- Develop a more enabling legal and fiscal framework to reduce operational burdens for CSOs.
- Integrate decent work standards into national policies related to civil society, employment, and public funding schemes.
- Introduce or expand long-term and institutional funding mechanisms for the civil society's to strengthen sector sustainability and employment stability. This funding must grow consistently year over year, be reflected in long-term fiscal planning, and be distributed through transparent and accessible mechanisms.
- Safeguard the right to unionisation and collective representation in line with national and international labour standards.
- Strengthen both supervisory and advisory roles in the civil society sector, ensuring equal application of labour standards.
- Enhance safe and confidential reporting mechanisms for labour violations to improve trust and compliance.

For Donors

- Systematically integrate decent work principles into civil society funding frameworks.
- Ensure adequate coverage of HR costs, including salaries and social contributions, in proportion to reporting and administrative requirements.
- Reactivate institutional grants mechanism to support organisational development and long-term impact.
- Promote greater harmonisation of donor practices to improve coherence and sustainability of support.
- Donors should simplify application and reporting procedures and broaden the distribution of funds beyond established organizations. Funding opportunities must be made accessible to newer and smaller organizations working closer to communities, ensuring a more inclusive and diverse civil society ecosystem.