

**Re: Membership of the EU Civil Society Platform
for civil society organisations based in Northern Ireland**

Good afternoon,

As part of its Civil Society Strategy, the EU is developing a new [Civil Society Platform](#) to enhance engagement with civil society actors. Membership criteria is currently being developed and it is important that this includes a wide range of rights-based civil society organisations (CSOs), including those active in social inclusion, education, labour, development cooperation, anti-racism and migration, gender equality, LGBTQIA+ equality, supporting minority communities and environmental justice.

We would like to request your support for expanding the membership criteria for the EU Civil Society Platform to include civil society organisations based in Northern Ireland.

This is important because:

- On the island of Ireland **many civil society organisations operate on an all-island, cross-border basis** given the shared nature of societal and environmental challenges. Some of these organisations are based in Northern Ireland but work across both jurisdictions. [This cross-border work has become more difficult since Brexit](#). The EU Civil Society Platform would create an additional and much needed space for joint working on shared challenges.
- The Windsor Framework (the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland), which forms part of the Withdrawal Agreement that is the legal framework for the UK's departure from the EU contains a **joint UK-EU commitment 'to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation' (Article 11)**. Enabling organisations registered in Northern Ireland but work on an all-island basis or on EU issues to become eligible for membership of the EU Civil Society Platform would [align with this commitment](#).
- **The 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement establishes the conditions for deep cooperation across the island of Ireland.** [The Windsor Framework and post-Brexit arrangements are designed to ensure the 1998 Agreement and the rights enshrined within it are protected](#). As co-guarantor of the 1998 Agreement, the EU should do everything possible to ensure the enabling conditions for continued cooperation on the island of Ireland exist. This includes supporting civil society to undertake cooperative work across the island and ensuring that the border in Ireland does not create barriers to cooperation.
- Under the post-Brexit arrangements, **Northern Ireland is still bound by some EU law and oversight.** [There are significant concerns about the impact of post-Brexit regulatory divergence between Ireland and Northern Ireland](#) and not all policy areas are adequately covered by existing monitoring structures. Civil society organisations based in Northern Ireland who are actively working on these issues should be able to feed into EU level discussions on how these laws are developed and implemented.
- **As part of the EU-UK reset, work is now underway to improve cooperation on policy-areas of shared interest** and to address the imperfect solution for Northern Ireland that emerged in the wake of Brexit. Providing NI-based CSOs with a new potential avenue of engagement could be a positive aspect of this new approach to the EU-UK relationship.

- **Brexit has created a problematic democratic deficit for people living in Northern Ireland.** Providing an avenue for civil society organisations to engage in EU policy-making processes in areas that will directly impact everyone living in Northern Ireland is a small, but important step towards rectifying this deficit.
- Inclusion of voices from Northern Ireland, alongside voices from EU candidate countries would **enhance the work of the EU Civil Society Platform and bring valuable perspectives on transboundary issues.** It would also boost the capacity of civil society based in Ireland by bringing valuable expertise and capacity.

We would appreciate your support in our request to expand the membership criteria for the EU Civil Society Platform to include civil society organisations based in Northern Ireland. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at ciara@ejni.net if you have any questions or need any further analysis on this important issue.

Best wishes,



Dr Ciara Brennan
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Dr Anthony Soares
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David Geary
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This request is supported by civil society organisations from across the island of Ireland:

