



Session outline

session title	Building resilience and change
duration	100 minutes
when and how to use this session	This session explores the challenges associated with shrinking civic space and growing polarisation in Europe. It introduces a practical 4-step resilience framework that youth organisations can use to navigate uncertainty and risk: context scanning, risk analysis, mitigation strategies, and continuity & wellbeing. Participants will first explore the external pressures affecting their work, and then apply each step of the framework to their own organisational reality. Through individual reflection and peer exchange, they will identify key risks, assess their impact, and reflect on how to respond while staying grounded in their values. The session also creates space to discuss ethical boundaries and non-negotiables in restrictive environments. By the end, participants will not only better understand the challenges around civic space, but will also leave with a practical tool they can reuse to anticipate risks, adapt their strategies, and protect both their mission and their people.
objectives of the session	• To understand the impacts of shrinking civic space and polarisation across Europe. • To identify organisational risks and resilience strategies relevant to youth organisations. • To explore the interaction between values and non-negotiables in challenging or hostile environments.

methodology**Step 1: Civic Space Pulse Check****10 mins**

The purpose of this activity is to help participants recognise that youth organisations across Europe are operating in rapidly changing environments and that many of the challenges they face are shared.

Instructions for facilitator:

Ask participants to stand up, raise their hands, or use an online polling tool.

Read the following statements:

- Have you seen new restrictions affecting civil society or NGOs in the last two years?
- Do you know an organisation that has been affected by such restrictions?
- Has your organisation experienced increased administrative, political, financial, or public pressure?
- Have you experienced funding cuts, increased funding uncertainty, or changes in funding priorities that affected your work?
- Have you noticed growing hostility towards activists, youth organisations, or civil society actors?
- Have external developments forced your organisation to change the way it works?

After each question, briefly acknowledge the responses.

Debrief

Invite a short discussion:

- What patterns do you notice?
- Which challenges seem most common?
- How predictable do these changes feel?

Conclude by highlighting that organisations operate in increasingly complex and uncertain environments, making resilience an essential organisational capacity rather than an optional extra.

Transition

"If these challenges are becoming more common, the question is not whether organisations will face change, but how prepared they are to respond to it. This is where organisational resilience becomes important."

Step 2: What is Organisational Resilience?

15 mins

Introducing the 4-Step Resilience Framework

Part 1: Exploring resilience (5 mins)

Ask participants to briefly discuss in plenary or small groups:

- What do you understand as resilience?
- What does a resilient organisation look like?
- Can you name what makes your organisations resilient?

After a few minutes, invite participants to share key words or ideas in plenary. Write them on a flipchart or virtual board.

Common responses may include:

- Adaptability
- Strong leadership
- Financial stability
- Clear mission
- Supportive community
- Partnerships
- Wellbeing of staff and volunteers
- Ability to plan ahead

Part 2: Facilitator input (5 mins)

Build on participants' contributions:

"Resilience is often understood as the ability to survive difficult situations. For youth organisations, resilience means something broader: the ability to anticipate change, respond to challenges, and continue pursuing your mission while protecting both the organisation and the people involved."

Explain that resilience is not a fixed state but an ongoing process that organisations can actively strengthen.

Part 3: Introducing the 4-Step Resilience Framework (5 mins)

Present the framework that will guide the rest of the session:

- **Context Scan**

Understanding the environment in which the organisation operates.

- **Risk Matrix**

Identifying which developments could negatively affect the organisation and assessing their likelihood and impact.

- **Mitigation**

Developing actions that reduce risks or increase preparedness.

- **Continuity & Wellbeing**

Ensuring that the organisation and its people can continue functioning during difficult periods.

Explain that the four steps build on one another:

"First we understand our environment, then identify risks, then prepare responses, and finally ensure we can continue operating if those risks materialise."

Transition

"We will now work through each of these four steps and apply them to the realities of our own organisations, identifying both vulnerabilities and strengths that can help us navigate uncertainty."

Step 3: Understanding our environment (Context Scan) (15 mins)

20 mins

Before identifying risks, participants first explore the environment in which their organisation operates.

Individually or in pairs, participants reflect on the following questions:

- What political, social, legal, financial, or technological changes are affecting youth organisations in our context?
- What trends are shaping the future of our work?
- Who are our key allies, supporters, stakeholders, and decision-makers?
- Are there any actors, narratives, or developments that could create challenges for our organisation?
- Which opportunities are emerging that we should pay more attention to?

Participants write their reflections on post-its or a worksheet.

Debrief

Invite participants to share patterns they notice. Are organisations facing similar challenges? Are there opportunities that are often overlooked?

	Facilitator note: The purpose is not to analyse individual organisations yet, but to understand the broader environment in which they operate.	
	Step 4: Identifying and assessing risks (Risk Matrix) This step helps participants identify where their organisation may be vulnerable and prioritise the issues that require attention. Individually, participants complete a Risk Matrix for their organisation. Facilitators are encouraged to invite participants to consider resilience at three interconnected levels: individual (staff, volunteers, activists), organisational (structures, resources, governance), and systemic (funding environment, legislation, civic freedoms). For the suggested columns and the handout for participants check the Handout - Step 4 section below. Notes for facilitator: 1) Funding is not only an organisational resource. Access to sustainable funding can also be understood as a systemic civic-space condition that affects organisational resilience and the wellbeing of staff, volunteers, and young people. 2) If funding-related risks emerge as a significant concern, facilitators may choose to follow up with the "Funding, funding, funding!" session, which explores financial resilience, funding dependencies, contingency planning, and mission-aligned funding strategies in greater depth. Debrief questions: • Which risks appear most significant? • Which risks are already being managed well? • Which risks are currently underestimated?	20 mins

Step 5: Defining responses and boundaries (Mitigation Strategies)

20 mins

Mitigation is not only about reducing risks; it is also about clarifying what an organisation is willing, or not willing, to compromise in difficult situations.

Participants complete the second part of the worksheet individually.

Suggested columns:

Our values

Our red lines

Compromises we
could accept

Questions to consider:

- Which values are non-negotiable for our organisation?
- What would we never do, even under pressure?
- Where could we adapt our approach without compromising our mission?
- What actions could reduce the risks identified in the previous exercise?

Participants post their reflections anonymously and walk around to observe common themes.

Debrief:

- What values appear most frequently?
- Are there common red lines?
- What does this tell us about organisational resilience?
- Which civic space conditions are most important for your organisation to function effectively, and how can you help protect or strengthen them?

	Step 6: Continuity & Wellbeing Participants reflect on how their organisation can continue operating under pressure while protecting both the people involved and the mission of the organisation. Guiding questions: • What activities must continue even during a crisis? • What would a "minimum viable" version of our organisation look like? • What support do staff, volunteers, and activists need to remain engaged? • What do young people need in order to continue participating safely? • What systems or practices are already in place? • What is currently missing? Participants identify 1–2 concrete actions they can take to strengthen organisational continuity and wellbeing. Closing reflection: Ask participants to share one insight or action they are taking away from the exercise.	15 mins
preparation	Familiarise yourself with new concepts and terminology to be confident enough to present them. Consider if you want to run the session on its own, or connect them to Building resilience and change: Theory of Change for uncertain environments or Funding, Funding, Funding!	
material/ space needed	• Post its & papers • Markers or pens • Print outs of the matrix, flipcharts, depending on how you want to run the sessions	
results/ takeaway/ outcomes	Participants: • understand the 4-step resilience framework; • identify key contextual trends and risks; • define mitigation and continuity actions; • recognise resilience at individual, organisational, and systemic levels.	

Handout - Step 4

Risk Matrix

Threat	Level	Likelihood	Impact	Current response
What could happen?	At which level would it affect us primarily?	How likely is it?	What would the consequences be?	How would we currently react?
Funding cuts	Organisational	High	High	Diversified fundraising
Online harassment	Individual	Medium	High	Safety protocol
Restrictive legislation	Systemic	High	High	Advocacy coalition