

ARIADNE FORECAST

2025



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About Ariadne

Ariadne is a European peer-to-peer network of more than 700 individual members from 135 member-organisations in 23 countries which support social change and human rights. Ariadne helps those using private resources for public good achieve more together than they can alone by linking them to other funders and providing practical tools of support. Ariadne is a programme of Global Dialogue, a registered charity (1122052) and limited company (5775827) which promotes human rights and social change by supporting innovative and collaborative philanthropy.

Methodology

The Ariadne Forecast is a community created resource that draws on the Ariadne network. Ariadne participants and other friends of the network were asked six questions about trends in their field for 2025. We collected surveys and interviews from members across Europe and in-person forecast meetings for funders in Germany, France, Italy, The Netherlands, and the UK to discuss and add to the findings. In the end, we estimate that around 192 people have had the chance to contribute to the Forecast. While the meetings and discussions at them were private, the final forecast is publicly available for all, as a reflection on the current direction of the sector.

2025 Ariadne Forecast report was written by Renata Ćuk, Julie Broome and edited by Jana Stardelova and Molly Matthews.

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Ariadne on LinkedIn
#2025AriadneForecast

Introduction



Ariadne's 2025 Forecast report marks a transition. While the report was drafted by Julie Broome, whose vision and dedication have shaped Ariadne and its community for nearly nine years, it was finalised during Ariadne's leadership transition and at a moment when European human rights and social change funders face significant challenges.

However, it is not just Ariadne's transition that makes the 2025 report different. While the Forecast report is designed as a living document, evolving through dialogue with our network, early 2025 has proven to be particularly turbulent. In just a few months, we have seen the Trump administration freeze foreign funding and dismantle USAID—sending shockwaves through our sector—along with growing political uncertainty in Germany ahead of its elections and increasing restrictions on civil society across Europe. At each of our five in-person roundtables—from Berlin to London—these developments raised urgent new questions about the future of human rights and social change funding.

When faced with growing uncertainty, Ariadne members responded with renewed energy and a strengthened sense of community. To bring that energy to the rest of the network, we are including voices from the roundtables in the report, with the hope that you will find these direct calls to action from your peers equally inspiring.

January 2025 has already confirmed that this will be another difficult year for the human rights and social justice sector. Many activists and movements are operating under growing restrictions, with fewer resources and increasing exhaustion. The U.S. funding freeze compounds an overall decline in government support, particularly as far-right politics reshape priorities in key European donor countries like the

Netherlands and Sweden. Funding remains a pressing concern for European philanthropy. Last year, many of you called for coordination to fill the gaps left by large funders shifting their priorities. But 2025 has made it clear—the challenge is too big, and the old ways of working are no longer enough.

Rather than retreating, you called for action. You asked Ariadne to support you in navigating both immediate crises and the longer-term work of shifting the anti-rights narrative. Therefore, this year, we will tap into the collective expertise of our network—learning from your peers how to, as one roundtable participant put it, “hack the system” and sustain critical work despite tightening funding constraints. Expect practical insights from funders supporting human rights in the most restrictive environments, collaborative efforts to build a solidarity infrastructure, and explorations of innovative funding models.

Pushing back against anti-rights forces requires more than crisis management. It also demands space to rethink and rebuild. Many of you have pointed out that the strategies that got us here will not get us where we need to go. In the months ahead, Ariadne will facilitate the necessary conversations to reaffirm our values, confront differences, and align around a shared purpose.

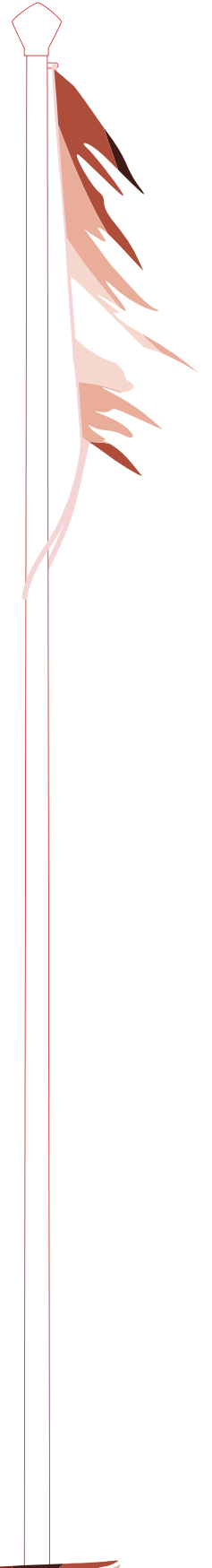
If 2025 is a turning point for European philanthropy, the Ariadne community is already proving it is prepared to respond—with clarity, urgency, and a renewed commitment to rights and justice.

In solidarity,

Renata Ćuk
Director of Programmes

What do you expect to be the most pressing challenge facing your grantees in 2025?

The persistent backlash against human rights over the past decade shows no signs of slowing down. This has taken many forms, including restrictions on civil society and civic action, curbs on sexual and reproductive rights, the rise of anti-gender ideology, and the scapegoating of marginalised communities. While each of these trends is significant on its own, they are all part of a broader political agenda driven by the far right, which continues to gain traction globally, including in Europe. The first months of 2025 have only reinforced funders' concerns that anti-rights and anti-gender movements will not only grow stronger in 2025 but also become increasingly unpredictable.



There is no longer a shared understanding of human rights. (...) The backlash comes not only from the right wing, but also from the centre of society.

*Board Member,
Private Foundation, DE*

The political middle who used to work with the left are moving towards the right.

*Programme Manager,
Private Foundation, NL*

LGBTQI people are increasingly, along with other minority groups such as refugees, being scapegoated and used as a wedge issue in politics. We've seen that in the US election. We've seen that in Europe, and we will continue to see that in Europe. And that also connects to the strength of the anti-right and anti-gender movement and how well funded and well-coordinated they are.

*Executive Director,
Intermediary Foundation, UK*

At a European level - we are regressing on all our commitments. And this is because there is a lack of plural representation. Not only from the obviously liberal and progressive sectors more engaged in human rights and social justice, but also plural in terms of gender equality, the inclusion of women in representation, people with different gender identities, or obviously people with a different ethnic or migratory background. And why is this important? Because public policies that are adopted when representation is more plural are typically more sustainable public policies. This is demonstrated by various political scientists.

Researcher, IT

The growing power of the far right on such a global scale, coupled with ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Ukraine, and elsewhere, have contributed to a sense of uncertainty about the future and fears that philanthropy is ill prepared to face what 2025 might bring.

The increasing power of right (and far-right) politicians, most obviously the new Trump presidency, potentially much more organised than the first one (Project 2025, money from Musk, Thiel, etc) and likely not hampered by a global pandemic, is a big challenge.

But we have a right-of-centre European Commission, too, and a more right-wing European Parliament, and upcoming German elections (AFD), French government weakness (Le Pen), Reform in the UK ... it's so hard to predict how all of this will play out and how much chaos will result. Add Middle East uncertainties, Ukraine, Taiwan, etc. It feels to me that civil society and funders often struggle to be able to react quickly to big breaking events and shifts in geopolitics, in rhetoric, etc. We are too slow, institutionally.

Anonymous, UK

More and more organisations are experiencing direct threats as a result of their work, not only in countries that are considered authoritarian leaning but also in those that have historically been considered democratic (and even been promoters of democracy). SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation) have become a more commonly used tool against activists and journalists, and funders anticipate that they and their partners will need to be more prepared to face such challenges in the coming year.

The increased risks of activism have a chilling effect on the work of organisations and movements as well as lead to burnout from managing the associated anxieties. Funders are seeing this play out among their grantee partners and worry that 2025 will only bring further examples of activists struggling to carry on their work.

Our partners are experiencing burnout after years of hostility and direct threats. We're providing support for wellbeing and security as part of thinking about the sustainability of movements.

*Grants Manager,
Private Foundation, UK*

Our partners are concerned about the potential criminalisation of their work, which is becoming a reality not just in Hungary but also in countries like Italy and Sweden.

*Managing Director,
Corporate Foundation, FR*

Our challenges are, firstly, the continuing and worsening brutal shift to the right. Secondly, the exhaustion, despondency, fear and psychological dejection of our

grantee partners. Thirdly, the real threat of violence, criminalisation, banishment, assault and death threats and murder. Fourthly, as a result, many grantee partners will have a lot to do for their survival as activists and are therefore less able to effect social change directly.

Private Foundation

Some funders frame the problem as an erosion of democracy and are seeking ways to bolster civic engagement as a way to counter the rise of the far right.

The first priority is democracy. The second is meaningful participation—supporting local grassroots organisations. This is what we see every day: the potential for change is more at the local level than at the national level.

*Programme Manager,
Private Foundation, FR*

Many funders are concerned about the funding landscape for human rights and social change organisations in Europe given shifts in funder priorities. The withdrawal of Open Society Foundations from a few thematic areas and its overall shift away from Europe has had a strong impact on the field, and as tie-off grants come to an end in the coming period, organisations and their funders are scrambling to fill the gaps. The announcement of Wellspring Philanthropic Fund in 2024 that it would be sunseting by 2028 has only exacerbated concerns that the pot of potential funding is shrinking. Several other large international foundations have also made strategic shifts, leaving issues like women's rights, democracy and the rule of law, and LGBTQI rights, among others, underfunded at a time of great need. **Government support for rights-based issues is also decreasing thanks to the rise of the far right in countries that have traditionally been significant providers of international development funds, such as the Netherlands and Sweden.**

Funders predicted that Trump administration would cut or freeze funding for issues such as abortion rights, LGBTQI rights, HIV prevention, and climate initiatives, but did not predict the magnitude of it. Trump's funding freeze that resulted in a shutdown of the US humanitarian aid across the world, sent a shockwave through our sector. Therefore, while in

late 2024, funders still discussed ways to fill funding gaps, in 2025, the conversations shifted to damage control and planning for the difficult period ahead.

Public funding for the integration of Ukrainian refugees in various European countries is also coming to an end and will affect that community.

For our grantees there are big question marks over really important funders in the LGBTQI movement. And there aren't that many. There's not much funding, and there aren't that many major funders, so if a couple pull out or scale back that has a huge impact.

*Executive Director,
Intermediary Foundation, UK*

From a funding perspective, there is a concern that funders are pulling out of wider democracy and rule of law work, not that there was a lot in the first place. Private foundations are pausing or not quite clear what they want to do or are reviewing strategies. It's unclear what funders are shifting to; there's a lot of uncertainty about what funders want to do.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

The most pressing challenge for grantees in 2025 will likely revolve around sustaining their operational capacity amidst tightening funding landscapes. As external pressures increase, including political volatility and limited access to unrestricted funds, grantees may struggle to maintain long-term programmatic stability. The need to balance immediate advocacy demands with structural investments, such as capacity-building and resource diversification, will be critical.

*Programme Manager,
Donor Collaborative*

UK

Top of mind for UK civil society organisations going into 2025 is the question of how best to work with the new Labour government that came to power in July 2024. Some parts of the sector had hoped that the shift from a succession of Conservative governments to a Labour government would dramatically change the landscape and opportunities for activism in the UK. However, after six months, many of those groups are now feeling disappointed.

In the UK, we've already had enough opportunity, I think, to be disappointed by the new government, in relation to migrant justice, in particular. Our thematic areas are migrant justice, racial justice, and social economic rights, and on all of those fronts, we don't see much getting better. We do see growing threats to migrant justice organisations. I think the migrant rights groups were really leaning on that hope that things would change, and the disappointment has been proportionate to that.

*Executive Director, Private
Foundation, UK*

There is still the potential to help shape the policies of this new government, but civil society groups are still trying to find their way in this new environment. They need support to identify where the opportunities are and how best to influence this new set of actors.

On the policy side, our partners are going through a shift and getting used to the new Labour government. Before Labour came to power, there was a general sense that civil society would want to propose repair, rolling back things that were introduced under the previous government, but also try to think about more progressive approaches going forward. Many have struggled with that and are still finding their feet with Labour, and it's

still not entirely clear what that will mean for them. It will take some time to get used to and to really understand the opportunities for influencing.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

UK civil society is still grappling with the effects of the racist riots that took place in August 2024 and were driven by far-right propaganda and misinformation.

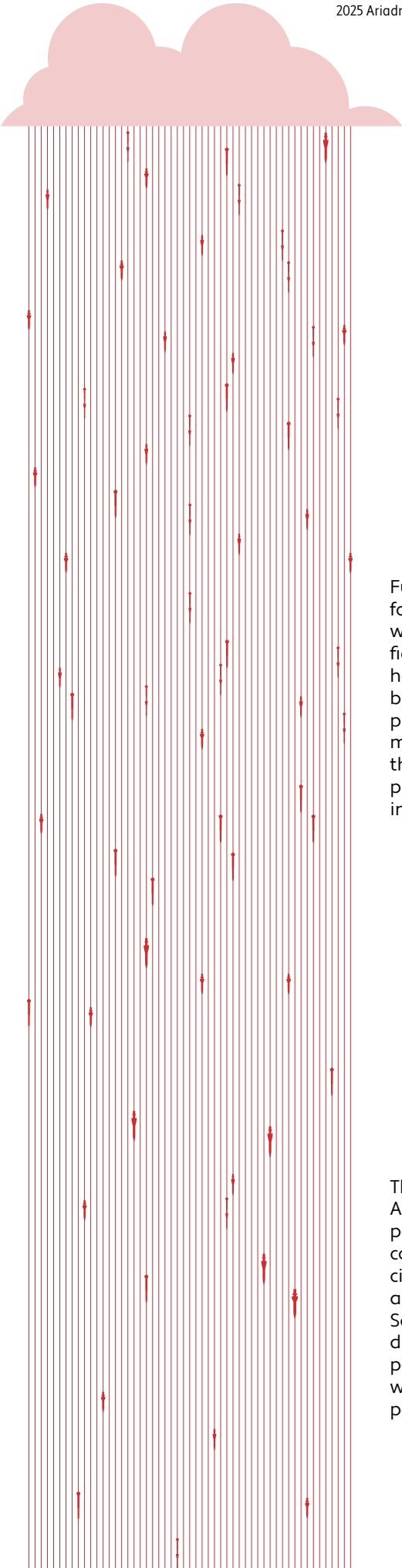
A lot of our partners are struggling after the summer; it's really affected them on an organisational level. It's had a chilling effect on the sector. With the international and European political contexts going in similar directions, it's quite worrying.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

There are concerns that, despite the change in government, the negative discourse around human rights will continue to impact public opinion and become a salient political issue again. Similarly, threats to freedom of assembly have not abated, and it is not clear that the current government has on its agenda to loosen restrictions on the right to protest. Funders are looking for strategic ways to respond to the damaging narratives that are the legacy of the last government.

The Bill of Rights [to replace the Human Rights Act] hasn't been mentioned lately, but it's still out there. Threats to human rights will happen again. The public narratives in the media are negative. How are protests around Palestine and other issues affecting civic space? There's also the influence of what's happening in the US: the misinformation spread by far-right actors there and the resulting polarisation.

*Grants Manager, Private
Foundation, UK*



Even for foundations who get money from companies – the impact of conservatism is clear. Because of the political context, lots of US funders will focus on their own country. European and international agendas are affected if there is less money, because foundations usually step in. I am worried what happens if foundations take over government work. We want to focus on systemic change work and not fill in for the government. The role of civil society is not to set up schools and provide health service. If they focus on service provision, their advocacy role disappears.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

Funders are critical of foundations for not only redirecting funds and withdrawing support from certain fields (or putting grantmaking on hold during long strategy processes) but also for losing sight of their core purposes when designing their grant-making processes. Some funders see this as an additional challenge that philanthropy will continue to place in front of civil society in 2025.

Philanthropy often seems insensitive to supporting the strategic and transformative challenges that third sector organisations promote, insisting on safe and consolidated support methods (such as calls for proposals) that reinforce the strategic disharmony of civil society organisations, focused, in recent decades, on efficiency and cost-effectiveness, neglecting the characteristic feature of their diversity: values.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, IT*

The role of technology, and especially AI, in exacerbating (or potentially being part of the solution to) social issues continues to be a challenge that many civil society organisations and funders are grappling with going into 2025. Some funders are focused on mis- or disinformation and its role in driving polarisation, while others are concerned with the role of AI in facilitating violence, particularly against women and girls.

We work with projects focused on combating online misinformation, but in recent years, we've witnessed a decline in working conditions for all the organisations we collaborate with. Misinformation remains a critical issue, consistently highlighted by the World Economic Forum in its annual report as one of the top 5 global risks—on par with catastrophic climate events, social inequalities, and conflicts between states.

*Project Manager,
Donor Collaborative, IT*

Given the number of crises in recent years, funders have understandably developed more of an interest in crisis response and supporting humanitarian issues. This type of funding is much needed, but some funders are concerned that the growing focus on responding to humanitarian crises pulls attention (and funding) from those organisations that are doing longer-term social change work. As was raised in last year's Forecast, funders are still trying to find the balance between the responsiveness required when an emergency arises, and the long-term commitment needed to achieve real change.

The climate crisis is likely to have an ever-increasing impact in 2025 and into the future. While some groups have been trying to integrate climate into their programming, many are now finding that their work is affected by the climate crisis even if that is not a focus of their work. Organisations will need to find ways to adapt to the changing environment. In Europe, vulnerable people, such as Roma migrant women and women living on the streets, are disproportionately affected by the crisis.

The ongoing conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, Ukraine, Sudan, DRC, and elsewhere will also continue to have an impact on the global political environment and the work of organisations, especially those working in affected regions and those addressing issues like migration in Europe and the UK. One funder active in Israel and Palestine predicted that due to a constricting environment for civil society in Israel some groups will need to register abroad, for example in Europe, much like organisations from Syria, Iran, and Afghanistan have had to do, in order to continue receiving funding.

FR

Political and financial uncertainties in France are posing particular challenges for civil society and funders. National budget cuts are anticipated to significantly impact associations, and the delay of the approval of the national budget into January has made it even more difficult for organisations to plan ahead. From a funder perspective, it has also made it difficult to strategise and determine which sectors will be most at risk.

Many associations are already facing funding withdrawals from institutions that had previously committed to financial support, leading to greater instability. This has created a difficult environment, as they can't reorganize or plan effectively due to the lack of clarity about the financial situation.

*Programme Manager,
Public Foundation, FR*

The political situation is adding to the sense of instability in the country and making it difficult for organisations to engage at the national level in the absence of a functional government. Some funders are critical of the president's decision to appoint a prime minister from the right, despite the left winning elections, feeling that it will further contribute to the political instability in the country.

There is widespread discontent, with the population feeling that democracy is failing, especially as the president appears to ignore public voices.

*Managing Director,
Corporate Foundation, FR*

As in other parts of Europe, the rise of the far right is of particular concern to those working on human rights and social change issues in France. While the National Front did not perform as well as feared in the elections in 2024, the threat remains, especially given the current political instability. While a group of more progressive funders has come together to create a fund for the protection of democracy in France, there is a similar fund that has been created by philanthropists with a more right-wing political agenda.

A new fund in France created a year and a half ago, is advancing anti-rights work, further straining partners who face decreased funding while needing to address rising threats, service delivery, and advocacy.

*Managing Director,
Corporate Foundation, FR*

At the same time, three wealthy men have purchased France's leading journalism schools, consolidating control over the media and amplifying far-right narratives. Therefore, one of the big challenges for 2025 will be finding ways to counter these narratives.

DE

The strengthening of the far-right political party, Alternative for Germany, especially its hold in eastern Germany, poses a concern and a challenge for organisations supporting human rights issues. The increasing power and influence of the party is not only creating more work for groups working on issues such as migration or equality, but it is also impacting the distribution of state funds. The far right has been promoting the idea that civil society organisations should be 'value-neutral' and that those organisations that engage in advocacy work or challenge the government in any way should be denied state funding for allegedly breaching this 'law of neutrality'. We have already seen this play out, following the elections, when conservative leader Friedrich Merz, questioned political neutrality of civil society groups that receive government funding, which sparked criticisms and concerns among civil society, showing they will likely face funding losses alongside threats and attacks.

Democracy work in Germany is not easy to undertake and support in Germany because of its potentially "political" nature. Non-profit entities could lose their non-profit status over it, both due to restrictions from the authorities and based on campaigns by the far right. This might also further extend to other forms of human rights work that can be perceived as too "political". A reform of the tax code on this issue has failed and it is unlikely that the new government will address the issue soon.

Anonymous, DE

Some funders are trying to counter these narratives about civil society, but it will be a real challenge to do so in 2025.

**There is no
longer a shared
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The backlash
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*Board Member,
Private Foundation, DE*

What opportunities do you see in 2025 that might help your grantees advance their work?



A commonly held belief at the start of 2025 is that this is a moment of opportunity for building better collaboration and cooperation in the sector. Cross-movement cooperation and solidarity will be essential to tackle the systemic challenges facing human rights and progressive social change organisations. It is a time to set aside differences and find ways to work together, because otherwise the far-right narratives will prevail.

Intersectional activism and cross-movement collaboration is important. If you look at the anti-rights, anti-gender movement, you see how, despite the differences between those involved, united and effective they can be. There is something about us trying to learn some lessons from that.

*Executive Director,
Intermediary Foundation, UK*

Amongst smaller activist organisations, there does seem to be more cooperation, more understanding that working together is important, that intersectional thematic connections are helpful because they mean people work together. So, in a way, the disillusionment with the old ways of influencing through policy has led them to work more effectively together.

*Executive Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

Partners are increasingly recognising that anti-rights movements can only be effectively countered through joint efforts. There is a growing desire to collaborate, with less focus on competition, creating momentum for collective action. While it feels positive to work together, there is also a sense of urgency driving these collaborations.

*Managing Director, Corporate
Foundation, FR*

Building cross-movement networks is crucial, breaking down silos between HIV, LGBTQ+, women's rights, and sex worker movements, to amplify advocacy efforts and unify voices. Collaboration among

grantees and funders can strengthen collective impact and address shared challenges in funding and advocacy.

*Programme Manager,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

In the interest of fostering such cross-movement strategising, some funders will be leveraging the power of in-person convenings to bring together different partners. Some also see the potential for framing work around cross-cutting issues such as technology as a way of helping different movements and organisations find common ground.

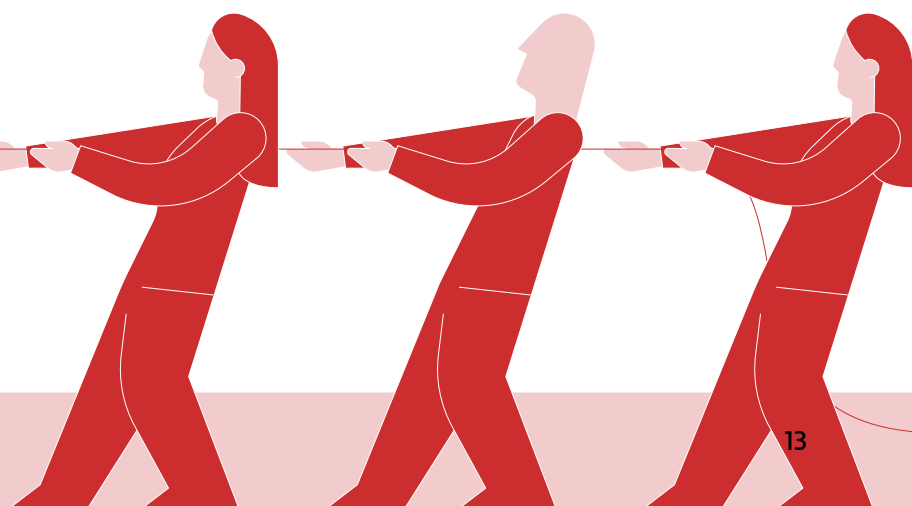
The call for greater collaboration extends not only to partner organisations but also to funders themselves, who increasingly recognise that strategic alignment and cooperation are crucial for maximising impact with limited resources. The events of January further underscored that we are facing a well-organised and unified attack on human rights—spanning women's rights, LGBTQI rights, climate action, and democracy—and that countering this challenge requires collective action across differences. Moreover, funders urged their peers not to shy away from being political, emphasising that the current moment demands we “choose a side.”

The growing scarcity and uncertainty of funding have forced funders to reassess their priorities, exposing a lack of alignment within the sector on what baseline values they aim to protect. While this fragmentation poses a challenge, many funders see the current crisis as an opportunity to address these divisions and develop a long-term vision for the sector's future and how to achieve it.

FR

Responding to the moment

The Fonds pour la Démocratie (Democracy Fund) is a pioneering philanthropic initiative designed to bolster and safeguard democracy in France. Since September 2023, this unique collaborative effort brings together an unprecedented coalition of visionary organisations and individuals committed to advancing democratic values. It is supported by the following philanthropic actors: Porticus France, Fondation de France, Open Society Foundations, Citizens for Europe, and Fondation Choisy Club. The fund will start its activities in April 2025. It will operate with a clear mission: to empower civil society organisations (CSOs) that are dedicated to protecting, promoting, and pioneering democracy. Prioritising grassroots movements and local initiatives, the Democracy Fund aims at amplifying the voices of communities and fostering collaboration among NGOs, while focusing on the narratives that inspire hope and resilience, especially for marginalised groups facing democratic encroachments. Through an innovative approach of long-term, trust-based funding, the Democracy Fund will not only provide the necessary financial resources but also encourage meaningful partnerships across the philanthropic landscape. It seeks to cultivate an ecosystem that supports collaboration among philanthropy, civil society, research entities, and citizens, bridging traditional silos to effectively address complex, systemic issues. Ultimately, the Democracy Fund aspires to serve as a transformative catalyst for action, inspiring other foundations and initiatives in France and beyond to join the cause and embrace a shared vision for a more vibrant and inclusive democratic society.



There is increasing collaboration among donors, with a growing focus on connecting movements across racial, gender, climate, and disability issues. People are beginning to break down silos that have traditionally separated these causes. Before the elections in France, there was a fear that the far-right could win. In response, foundations have started to come together to discuss democracy, even those that do not typically focus on this area.

*Managing Director,
Corporate Foundation, NL*

The political events of 2024 could lead to new funding alliances. More foundations are ready to fund in eastern Germany because of the election results. Where there are bigger dangers, there are more partners ready to do something. A successful foundation initiative of which we are a member has been supporting small organisations in eastern Germany. In 2025, we will expand to new regions and give more institutional support.

*Research Assistant,
Private Foundation, DE*

There is an opportunity to line up and work together. The sum of each stakeholder brings more. Foundations work with grantees in a linear way, individually with different partners. How can we not work in a linear fashion but systemically? Let's learn from each other - what works, what doesn't.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

Philanthropic networks like Ariadne have the opportunity to bring funders together with the aim to align, imagine, and advance a shared strategy, rather than continue to operate through the fragmented institutional mandates that keep the work of grantees and the movements they're part of weak.

Philanthropy Consultant

In light of the withdrawal of certain funders from the field, cooperation among funders is also likely to focus on cultivating new potential sources of support. Foundations are keen to enhance the sustainability of movements by leveraging new funding for the field. Some see an opportunity

for foundations to play a larger role and make a stronger case for their work as public funding dwindles.

We're seeing new innovative initiatives to grow new sources of funding. And I think as a movement – as an LGBTQI movement but also as a broader human rights movement – we all need to be thinking about that.

*Executive Director,
Intermediary Foundation, UK*

One consequence of these constrained environments and the loss of resources is that some CSOs have started to reevaluate their mandates, priorities, and focus on their overall resilience. Several grantees are now exploring changes to their economic models to diversify their sources of support. This includes raising local funds, initiating profit-making activities, or engaging with new categories of funders.

*Board Member,
Intermediary Foundation, FR*

Some funders are seeing more potential at the local level for groups to organise, have an impact, and gain support. Foundations are also becoming more comfortable with supporting such grassroots activism, which opens more opportunities for such groups.

It feels like society is organising itself into smaller, more localised groups – even down to the neighbourhood level. People are gaining power through self-organisation, partly because of the current social atmosphere where many are fed up and no longer hesitant to voice it. Also, foundations seem more open to engaging with grassroots movements. Activism, for example, is increasingly seen less as something radical or dangerous and more as a legitimate force for change. This shift in mindset creates opportunities to bring more foundations on board and to foster collaboration.

*Programme Manager,
Private Foundation, FR*



Some funders are interested in exploring how technology might be able to aid their grantee partners, specifically around fundraising and the transfer of funds. However, this is tempered by wariness about the power of tech companies. Funders feel they need more information to navigate how to take advantage of the opportunities some of these new tools could provide.

Cryptocurrency could improve the money flow to CSOs; use of AI could increase accessibility to funding opportunities - both need to be explored further to understand advantages and possible implications.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

I'm curious to find out more about how grantees are (or are not) making use of AI though tools like ChatGPT and similar. Should we, as a progressive community, be trying to use these tools to help level the playing field against better funded opponents, by making our work more efficient? Or are we then supping with the devil and reinforcing exactly that which we should be opposing?

Philanthropy Consultant, UK

The AI Summit, held in Paris in February, was seen as an opportunity for civil society to understand the AI landscape. In anticipation of the Summit, some French funders were already working on a collective strategy focused on AI's role in philanthropy. They plan to hold a series of small meetings in 2025 with the aim of creating a roadmap for foundations that are new to AI, helping them understand how it can be applied internally and how to address it through their grantmaking.

Those supporting women's rights are encouraged by the creation of new feminist funds in recent years and see an opportunity for these to bring new momentum to the feminist movement despite cuts in funding from private foundations.

The number of women's and feminist funds has increased in the last couple of years. This can have a positive impact on the movement by facilitating access to funding to activists and increasing connections.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

Although the political landscape is generally regarded as quite grim, funders do see some bright spots and opportunities. In this environment, there is the potential for civil society to play an active and important role in broader society.

In the absence of stable governments civil society organisations will have a greater role to play.

Anonymous, Private Foundation

There may also be an opportunity to influence public opinion on issues like migration or human rights through work to shape cultural narratives.

Engaging in cultural influence to work on changing the narrative could be as effective as the anti-rights movement. There have been conversations for a quite a long time (especially around migration issues) about trying to influence the 'movable middle'. Most people don't have specifically defined political stands and are movable; they act based on their guts. Narratives that make them feel abandoned and neglected push them towards the right. Narratives should focus on what we have in common.

*Programme Director,
Corporate Foundation, FR*

Looking towards the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe, the political situation in Georgia, which has been a relatively safe location for activists from the region for some years, has deteriorated and is becoming a repressive environment. While some funders worry that USAID freeze will only increase Russian influence in Eastern Europe, this might be an opportunity for more funders to engage in the regions. Moreover, some funders point to openings in Moldova and Armenia and the possibility that they could now become regional hubs for activism.

Also, despite fears that Europe is increasingly embracing the far right, some funders are still hopeful that it will be able to provide a counterpoint to the Trump Administration on a global scale.

The UK and EU governments realising that they may need to step in where the US is withdrawing or where it is even becoming adversarial would be an opportunity.

Philanthropy Consultant

The change of government in the UK has also given some funders hope that there will be opportunities to work with the government to advance human rights in both a domestic and international context.

There is a less adversarial government than you had under the Conservatives. So, there are certain opportunities and just energy in the sector for the next few years that I hope doesn't get drained by all kinds of policy proposals and an onslaught by the right. But people are also thinking of what might come next, so there's an opportunity to do reviews of certain policies on things like economic and social rights, potentially a new migration bill next year, things that could provide opportunities.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

There is an opportunity in UK Ministers committing to supporting human rights defenders and their work and the possibility of increased funding from the UK FCDO.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

Finally, despite the grim outlook in 2025, some funders see hope and opportunities through a longer-term lens.

What helps me as an optimist is looking at the broader perspective—considering different timeframes. Not only looking at this year's report; but past reports as well. While there was a slight (positive) peak 2-3 years ago, what we're seeing now (anti rights backlash) is more of a decade-long trend. The findings in this forecast align with reports from previous years. Nonetheless, if we look back over the last 30 years, a lot has changed for the better."

*Managing Director,
Private Foundation, DE*

How do you expect your practice as a funder to change in the next twelve months?

HACK THE SYSTEM!
BREAK THE RULES!

Strategies that brought us here are not strategies that will take us out

*Director,
Intermediary Fund, UK*

Challenges continue to grow, yet funders' practices remain largely unchanged. Despite widespread agreement on best practices—such as long-term, flexible, and core funding—these approaches are still not being implemented at the scale needed to meet today's demands. Over the past few years, multiple crises and external shocks have forced funders to balance urgent responses with long-term strategies, a pattern that is likely to persist in 2025 as new funding challenges arise.

Funders also report facing increasingly restrictive funding environments across Europe, along with their own internal barriers to providing support. Consequently, discussions about the role of intermediaries and the need to invest in solidarity infrastructure are becoming more frequent, with funders actively seeking practical solutions to overcome obstacles and direct funding where it is most needed. Funders turn to Ariadne to facilitate these exchanges, organising spaces like the peer-to-peer workshop we held in London last year, where funders shared creative solutions to some of the most pressing challenges in funding human rights work.

We need to invest in solidarity infrastructure – building something we can leave behind.

Anonymous, UK

One approach more funders are taking is to complement core support with contingency or emergency funding. Some are holding contingency funds themselves so that they can make it available to partners when unexpected and urgent events occur (as many funders in the UK did in 2024 during the racist riots). Others are giving flexible funding to organisations and asking them to keep a portion of it aside as a contingency fund for themselves in case they need to mobilise quickly.

The idea is to provide what we have always done: core support. We are also focusing more on funding grassroots NGOs and giving flexibility. For example, when we provide support, we would like a portion of it to be dedicated to emergencies, such as when you have two weeks to organise before an election. Offering this kind of flexibility is important.

*Programme Manager,
Private Foundation, FR*

While many funders are moving towards larger and longer-term core grants, some funders are responding to the current environment by moving to smaller grants to a larger number of organisations to be able to support as many organisations at risk as possible. The common concern is the scarcity of funding available to keep vital work moving

forward, but foundations are responding to the challenge in different ways.

As funders seek to sustain movements and keep them thriving through this tumultuous period, more of them are thinking about 'funder-plus' models and considering how they can be better partners to their grantees.

In 2025, we will continue and expand our funder-plus programme, which started in 2024. This initiative provides not only financial support to our partners but also non-financial resources to strengthen their capacities and empower their organisations. Funder-plus involves fostering connections among our partners, such as supporting travel for partners to visit one another (e.g., a partner in Poland visiting a partner in France) to build relationships and better understand each other's work, ultimately strengthening the ecosystem. There will be more pro bono work, with employees helping partners develop communication strategies. We will also offer retreats for self-care, recognising the importance of mental and emotional well-being for our partners.

*Managing Director,
Corporate Foundation, FR*

Beyond funding, we do three things. We are connecting our grant partners with our corporate supporters for in-kind pro bono support. The best example of that is the sort of obvious one in terms of law firms. We've had some fantastic partnerships there that we've managed to broker. But we're also doing it now around strategy, working with management consulting firm. We are convening where there is a new and emerging area where we see there being a philanthropic advocacy opportunity. And then finally, because a lot of the groups we support are quite significant regional organisations, while some are very much grassroots, they really value the role we play amplifying their work using our media channels.

*Executive Director,
Intermediary Foundation, UK*

We will move more of the activities we fund administratively into our own organisation, so as to relieve groups we support from admin/finance work.

*Anonymous,
Intermediary Foundation, DE*

**We need to
invest in
solidarity
infrastructure
– building
something
we can leave
behind**

Anonymous, UK

In recent years, we have shifted our focus, drawing from our long-standing work in strategic litigation. For years, we supported legal advocacy and lobbying efforts in defence of migrants. Now, we have taken a further step by establishing agreements with key organisations, to work more systematically in cases where citizenship rights or human rights are at risk. Each year, we identify three emerging legal issues, as proposed by the grassroots organisations within our network, and we pursue legal action accordingly. This approach recognises that without legal cases and direct legal support for organisations, meaningful change is difficult to achieve. Our role is not to replace the third sector's own capacities—after all, we too are part of it—but to provide targeted legal tools and channels for advocacy.

Anonymous, IT

At least one foundation is developing a structured cohort programme for its grantee partners, aimed at fostering collaboration, learning and engagement within a newly formed cohort. Another is forming a community of practice for grantee partners to explore the impact of technology on their work. Others are anticipating more requests for well-being support and accompaniment as well as support for cross-regional and cross-movement convenings. For those funders working in very repressive environments, the safety and security of their partners will be a key priority in 2025.

Funders continue to express interest in trust-based philanthropy and in allowing their work to be led by the field and by those most affected. For some that means deepening their participatory grantmaking practices and looking at different models of co-creation with the field, while for others it means simply changing the nature of the relationship with supported organisations.

The desired practice is the sharing of power by philanthropy, the correction of asymmetric and unequal relationships with partners, the overcoming of the status quo, the minimisation of paternalistic approaches. Often philanthropy is more committed to protecting the exercise of one's freedom than to promoting equality. It is the recognition of what we are that

leads us to have trust in others; in order for trust to be achieved, it is necessary to renounce influence and domination over others. Philanthropy can act as an enabler and activator of trust, to be understood as a common good that must necessarily be built and nourished by a system of shared relationships.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, IT*

The intention behind our strategy is to implement different open and trusting principles much more and be a longer-term and trusting funder. We will shift more to lived experience-led partners and help those that are not doing so to work with the sector to help avoid exclusions and help the sector reform.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

However, some funders remain sceptical about how much philanthropy is likely to change.

Funders claim to want to be less bureaucratic in the future because they see such more flexible support better achieve results. Then again, we hoped for the same effect last year. And the year before, and the year before that...

*Anonymous,
Intermediary Foundation, DE*

Although anti-racism work within philanthropy has progressed more slowly than some had hoped or anticipated several years ago, funders are continuing to grapple with questions around how they can decolonise their own practices, including bringing more people with lived experience into their leadership teams. Some funders are also actively looking for and creating opportunities to support more anti-racism work.

We expect our practice to go deeper in decoloniality. We are moving to a more horizontal and democratic structure with great internal and external implications. We want to reinforce the decolonial approach internally and in the relationships with donors, grantees and providers.

Anonymous, Intermediary Foundation

It's very clear to us that all the issues around protests on Palestine here, and the attitudes in the public around that and the way that it's used, is directly related to anti-racist activity

here. It's not just related to Palestine. We have tried to draw other funders into the conversation – funders who are reluctant to see Palestine in their main strategy and altogether see it as risky but have a sense of discomfort and would like to do something. We initiated some conversations, and actually they've been taken up and they're now being led by others, which is fantastic, so we'll definitely want to continue participating in that. And there is a new initiative to set up a grant-making Palestinian fund in the UK called the Palestine Justice Fund. That's an important development for the possibility of support for human rights and Palestinians here.

*Executive Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

2025 will likely see more funders working in alliance with one another as foundations seek ways to have as much impact as they can with limited resources. There is more interest in donor collaboratives and aligned funding models. This includes reaching out to new types of funding partners and trying to find ways to bridge outside of traditional philanthropy.

I anticipate much more contextualisation of philanthropic money within a broader landscape of potentially progressive funding and financing.

Philanthropy Consultant

One of the most important practices, though, is to just keep funding flowing and not become paralysed by trying to craft the perfect strategy or approach.

What we try to avoid is too much looking inwards. In progressive movements we are pushed in a corner, and we start focusing on ourselves, looking inwards. We need to recognise we are in the midst of a paradigm change. We are not in the driver's seat.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

What issue or field of practice do you think will become more important in 2025?

Intersectional approaches will become more important and more prevalent in 2025. Funders are recognising how different issues overlap and seeing the value in bridging across movements. This type of approach is being prioritised as funders try to get out of their silos and work in a more holistic and systematic way.

In a sense I think intersections, in particular gender with the intersection of race, is often a sort of early warning system. For us, it's a really good way of seeing what's going on more broadly. I think that the intersection of gender, race, class, migration, all of that together, it expresses everything in a way.

*Executive Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

This intersectional activism and cross-movement collaboration is going to be more important. The LGBTQI movement, as well as needing more resources, we've also got a lot to share in terms of lessons learned over the last 50, 60 years globally. We've got a lot to learn but also a lot to contribute to other movements. So, I think this cross-movement collaboration, this intersectional activism is valuable.

*Executive Director,
Intermediary Foundation, UK*

Anti-racism work will remain important and become more pressing. This need is particularly felt in the UK, where civil society and the funding community are still coping with the effects of the racist riots in August 2024.

There is much more thinking going into how you can be an anti-racist and anti-oppressive funder. What would that look like?

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

Work around racism should be a priority. I hope this will be a big issue for funders after the riots and not just end with the emergency support.

Grants Manager, Private Foundation, UK

The focus in 2024 was on the future of democracy, given the number of pivotal elections that took place that year. In 2025, as funders grapple with the results of those elections, many of the questions around the trajectory of democracy remain. Some funders are looking at the voting behaviour of young people and trying to find ways to constructively engage with the next generation. Polarisation remains an important concern, and funders continue to explore ways to prevent and heal societal divisions. Some funders are putting more emphasis on supporting culture as a way of influencing public discourse.

The field of culture will be massively impacted by budget cuts. There may be initiatives to counter this to some extent support the role of culture for exchange, democracy and openness.

*Anonymous,
Intermediary Foundation, DE*

Developing new narratives will become more important in response to the propaganda and disinformation that is being promoted by the far right. As part of funders' efforts to protect democracy, they are recognising a need to shape more positive narratives around the values that are important to them.

Narratives are important. We see the role of social media, misinformation, the need for independent media and access to quality information - it influences democracy.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

It is important to build narrative infrastructure. The same narrative strategies and social inequities that allowed fascism to take hold in Europe a century ago have been used to expand authoritarianism globally today. When philanthropic institutions invest in changemaking strategies with short-term practices that are driven by a sense of manufactured scarcity, it creates a context that sets us all up to fail. Right now, philanthropy has a powerful opportunity to intervene in its own shortcomings by adopting different logics and behaviours that will enable our movements to collectively imagine and live into the world we desire and deserve.

Philanthropy Consultant

Narrative work is going to be fundamental to shift people's understanding of feminist activism - we need to move towards building, rather than only burning, bridges.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

Connected to the concept of narratives is the question of access to information. Investing in high-quality journalism and independent media will be important, as will be the consideration of the impact of new technologies on information access and consumption. That brings us to the question of social media, algorithms and AI.

It's been demonstrated that algorithms and artificial intelligence, as well as social media, tend to favour mainstream opinions and polarise. Since the most widespread mainstream opinion recently is one that opposes liberal values, open society, civic space, and human rights, this trend towards polarisation has increased in digital tools, and it has been increased by the use of AI.

Researcher, IT

The most effective way to counter a specific narrative is through fact-checking, dismantling misinformation piece by piece. However, considering the type of journalism that is most widespread today, this is not the easiest solution. Often, the more convenient response is to counter one narrative with another.

Anonymous, IT

The information landscape is increasingly hostile, with more and more digital and traditional media professionals facing physical threats and aggressive legal actions designed to undermine their ability to practice ethical journalism freely.

Many more funders are thinking about the impact of AI, both its potential uses and the potential harms it may bring. Some funders are also looking at how public-interest technologies can help bolster organisations' work.

In 2025, the intersection of civic data powered by narrative strength and technology resilience will become increasingly critical in public-interest philanthropy. As misinformation and digital vulnerabilities grow, grantees will need tools to leverage civic data for advocacy and storytelling, ensuring accurate representation of marginalised communities. Public-interest technology will play a vital role in building resilience, equipping organisations with secure, ethical digital infrastructure. This convergence will empower grantees to navigate complex ecosystems, drive equitable policy outcomes, and strengthen grassroots movements through innovative, data-driven strategies.

*Programme Manager,
Donor Collaborative*

As in previous years, crisis preparedness and responding to the anti-rights agenda and closing civic space are all top of mind going into 2025. Although people have been talking of a 'polycrisis' for a number of years now, there is no sense that the crisis is receding, and funders continue to anticipate that the coming year will bring more unforeseen challenges to which civil society will need to respond.

As organisations continue to work in this challenging and ever constricting environment, wellbeing and mental health will become more important. Burnout in the sector is already a concern, and funders are giving more consideration to how they can support their partners to look after themselves and their employees.

We're thinking about how to set up something with other foundations to strengthen the capacity of NGOs related to mental health. This has always been an issue, but now it's even more critical. And it's not just for NGOs—it's also a problem within the philanthropic sector.

*Programme Manager,
Private Foundation, FR*

If we want grassroots activism to survive, we must support the well-being of activists. This includes ensuring their safety and stability—both mentally and physically—because only then can they continue to do the vital work that we all recognise as essential. This is why our recommendation is clear: It is time to integrate mental and physical health into our funding strategies.

*Managing Director, Community
Foundation, DE*

Similarly, the safety and security of human rights defenders and investing in protection mechanisms will become more important. Attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights are expected to intensify, and LGBTQI rights, especially trans rights, are also likely to come under greater threat. Migration is always politicised, and it is likely to become even more so as migration flows as a result of conflict and climate increase. Some funders are actively looking at which groups are most likely to face exclusion and underfunding and are trying to direct resources to those communities.

This year we started exploring, as a result of it being let go by OSF, the issue of sex worker rights or sex worker-led organisations. We expect that to continue, and we see it as a good example of trying to reach out to the most excluded groups that are excluded both in society at large and by government, but also by funders.

*Executive Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

The climate crisis will remain a priority in 2025, and although there has been frustration and disappointment with the COP processes, civil society and funders will continue to try to engage with COP 30 in Brazil in November.

As we approach five years since the start of the COVID pandemic, the sector is still coming to terms with the dramatic shift to virtual meetings and gatherings. With more aspects of our lives now dependent on technology, opportunities for physical, in-person interactions are becoming more valued.

The physical - and the role it plays in forming trust - will become crucial. What have you seen with your eyes and ears, that can't be tampered with? What is the value of coming together in physical spaces as opposed to Zooms, videos, social media? With the retreat to remote working, is there a renewed value in those defending rights, freedom of the press, etc, in being in physical buildings, their buildings (and assets) in places, as a way of signalling that they are in and part of communities, and they're not going away?

Philanthropy Consultant

In terms of funder practice, more pooled funds and donor collaboratives are expected to emerge, reflecting the growing interest in trying to enhance impact through cooperation. As critical discussions around the role and modalities of philanthropy continue, the question of how to be a 'trust-based' funder could become more relevant.

Recently, together with other colleagues, reflecting on the crisis of the Anthropocene we have given rise to an original and effective crisis: philanthropocene. A new era that implies complexity and collaboration to promote new solutions. A season in which foundations have the urgency to contribute to the construction of social capital in which social trust takes on primary importance. This implies for philanthropy reciprocity, humility, listening and anti-paternalism, with the implementation of equal, reciprocal and symmetrical relationships through truly participatory processes.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, IT*

**Philanthropy
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Philanthropy Consultant

What political event or sequence of events do you predict will have a substantial effect on your work in 2025?

While 2024 was marked by elections, 2025 may be defined by coping with their aftermath. The far right strengthened its hold in Brussels and made significant gains in several European domestic elections. However, the primary concern as we enter 2025 is the return of Trump in the U.S. The uncertainty and fears are not only about his domestic actions but also his international influence, and how

his election could embolden far-right movements globally. Unfortunately, the early months of 2025 have confirmed these fears, as we witness the consequences of Trump's policies both domestically and internationally—from his announced plans to 'take over' Gaza, funding freeze and dismantling the USAID, to troubling peace negotiations regarding Ukraine.

We've already touched on the impact of Trump's inauguration and then administration on funding, but it's also going to give a boost to the right and to anti-rights, anti-gender movements. And I suppose the concern is that we see that playing out more in other Western democracies and in particular in the EU: how things are going to develop in Germany, how things are developing in France. If the right takes control of these major, major Western democracies, there's the impact that's going to have obviously on funding, but also just the erosion that we've seen of international frameworks. And of the whole international system.

*Executive Director,
Intermediary Foundation, UK*

The start of the Trump presidency will most likely embolden autocratic leaders in Europe; the start of the new European Parliament term with more members on the right will also mean less space for advancing human rights but rather resisting any setbacks.

*Senior Programme Manager,
Donor Collaborative, BE*

I find it hard to predict what the whole situation in the US is going to do here. It's certainly not going to do much good in Israel-Palestine. Not that it was great, but it's very, very unpredictable and that's sort of frightening and destabilising for everyone. I fear the situation in Israel-Palestine could get very much worse, if that's even possible.

*Executive Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

There are many concerns about the impact the Trump Administration is likely to have on funding for rights issues. We have already seen the impact of the international funding freeze on LGBTQI rights and HIV prevention, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights, such as access to abortion and contraception. Additionally, there are concerns that private foundation funding will be redirected to the US and away from Europe or the Global South.

The possible negative human rights developments in the US under the forthcoming Trump administration will mean funding is redirected to the USA away from other parts of the world and will reduce opportunities/funding for global south CSOs.

*Programme Officer,
Private Foundation, UK*

The growing influence of tech billionaires under Trump is also likely to have a detrimental effect on the regulation of tech companies in the US, which could have a global impact. This has already been evidenced by Meta's decision to step back from fact-checking on its platforms.

Elon Musk and other tech entrepreneurs influencing US politics at home and abroad on tech regulation.

*Programme Officer,
Private Foundation, UK*

While funders in the EU are worried about European Parliament and what direction it might take in the next year, UK funders are watching to see how the UK's relationship with both the US and the EU will impact issues like migration and asylum policies.

In the Netherlands, funders are worried about cuts to the Dutch civil society budget, which will impact many of the intermediary funders in the Netherlands who do grantmaking in the Global South with support from the Dutch government.

Italian funders are focused on the local and regional elections that will take place in September.

Upcoming national elections and the potential for shifts in government policy on climate action could significantly impact our priorities.

*Head of Planning,
Private Foundation, IT*

DE

Germany will hold federal elections in February, brought forward from November due to the collapse of the governing coalition in late 2024. State elections in a number of states in eastern Germany in 2024 resulted in the far-right party Alternative for Germany gaining seats at the state level, becoming the largest party in Thuringia, and funders are therefore anxious about how the federal elections will play out. A cross-party group of Bundestag parliamentarians are attempting to get the party banned as right-wing extremists; however, it is not clear how successful that attempt is likely to be, nor is it likely to change the attitudes of those who support the party. Some funders are focusing on how to shift attitudes and voting behaviour, while bearing in mind that international influences are also important.

Ukraine and Gaza also play into democratic attitudes of the population here. Tracking developments in Germany will also focus on these events. The election of Trump also influences attitudes and work of partners, especially with regard to online developments and social media.

*Research Assistant,
Private Foundation, DE*

The anti-rights backlash is affecting the safety and security of civil society groups but also funders, who will be paying more attention to their own security protocols as the political situation deteriorates in some countries.

Because the extreme right is becoming bolder every day, we also fear attacks on our organisation and must learn how we can better protect ourselves.

Private Foundation

Although some funders may be at risk as a result of the nature of the work they support, others are critical of philanthropy's limited engagement with certain political issues.

I would like to focus on those that, unfortunately, do not seem to hinder our actions. Two above all. War. Philanthropy seems immune to the collective awareness of the atrocities of the genocide currently underway in the Middle East; instead, it should promote a culture of peace that can protect the victims of war. The climate crisis. Philanthropy still does too little to promote a non-ideological awareness of the necessary and obligatory transition towards sustainable development.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, IT*

There are calls from within the sector for philanthropy to be more courageous in engaging with political questions even while remaining non-partisan.

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Private Foundation

What is your greatest hope for 2025, in relation to your work or philanthropy in general?



As we enter 2025, European social change and human rights funders are hoping to unite around their common values and find strength by acting in solidarity with one another while also drawing more like-minded potential funders to the field.

The hope is that there is still a lot of us, pushing for the right values – common sense people – and that we stay connected, with one foot on the ground. The hope is we will find people who share our values and define the system that has currently been captured by corporate interests.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

I hope for a greater sense of understanding, compassion and solidarity between people of different backgrounds grounded in a minimum set and sense of shared values.

*Programme Officer,
Private Foundation, UK*

I hope that there will be more unity amongst those who are advocating for human rights and more collaboration between movements. I think that's a reason to be hopeful. I think there's so much untapped potential for new sources of funding if we can be creative about that and think beyond the usual suspects and usual sources. So, I'm hopeful about that too.

*Executive Director,
Intermediary Foundation, UK*

I hope that we will come together more and that there will be stronger leadership to unite as a sector (or as multiple sectors that don't often collaborate enough).

Philanthropy Consultant

I hope for better cooperation between foundations.

*Managing Director,
Private Foundation, IT*

I hope we will see the emergence of new donors for human rights funding who step up to support human rights movements and organisations to reposition themselves to meet the moment.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

We hope to see the unlocking of more resources and the active platforming of activists and frontline defenders into the philanthropic space, rather than people who only wear the hat of "funder".

Intermediary Foundation

I hope that philanthropy does not lose its nerve to support progressive social justice issues

*Programme Officer,
Private Foundation, UK*

In light of the deteriorating situation of women's rights in many parts of the world, some are hoping for more funders to fund gender issues specifically.

We want to see more high-worth individual donors being on board with feminist activism and providing unrestricted funding, and we want to see more flexible and multi-year funding mechanisms that truly respond to the needs of grassroots/ community-based groups.

*Programme Director,
Intermediary Foundation, NL*

I hope more generalist funders recognise the need to address gender issues, with more people coming on board and breaking down silos.

*Managing Director,
Corporate Foundation, FR*

I hope for better and more support for feminist organisations across Europe.

*Programme Manager,
Donor Collaborative, BE*

Similarly, those currently funding work to protect and strengthen democracy are also hoping that, in response to the growing strength of the far right, more funders will show the courage to join them in their efforts.

My hope is that foundations will stop saying that democracy is a partisan topic or a political topic. I'm always explaining that we are doing politics, but we are not doing partisan work. But I'm really fed up with hearing, "Oh, we're not doing politics, we're not talking about politics." Come on, just be daring. So, I hope we can make democracy a mainstream topic and something transversal—not just another silo like saying, "I'm doing education, you're doing migration, you're doing democracy." No. Really having democracy at the centre of everything.

*Programme Manager,
Private Foundation, FR*

I hope that people who don't currently position themselves on a side realise that they should and become more active. Being neutral is still a choice.

*Grants Coordinator,
Private Foundation, UK*

Peace! I hope that all these events that are so worrying finally lead to new alliances. And I hope that other funders realise that democracy is basis of many things. Without a democratic society, other things suffer. Democratic values are not something standing alone but have clear consequences for fields funders might find more important.

*Research Assistant,
Private Foundation, DE*

I hope to see more high-net-worth individuals taking responsibility for funding democracy-related work.

Private Foundation

My greatest hope is that more citizen-led movements for democracy will succeed and that civic spaces will reopen in certain countries, marking a turning point in the fight for human rights and justice.

*Board Member,
Intermediary Foundation, FR*

For those already operating in quite repressive environments, the hope is slightly simpler.

I just hope that philanthropic work will be possible.

Anonymous, Public Foundation, GE

Many funders hope to see philanthropy step up and fulfil its potential to truly empower communities and act in solidarity with the movements it supports, from a position of equity and a desire to transform current power structures.

I hope that philanthropy can assume a maturity and freedom of thought and intervention capable of allowing - regardless of its origin - even uncomfortable positions: for example, the mobilisation on the war in Ukraine was different from the events in the Middle East involving Israel and Palestine. Similarly to the initiatives that have seen philanthropy capable of promoting actions to impact the climate crisis, it would be appropriate to also consolidate a philanthropy for peace, which,

as has been done in similar cases (e.g. IRA and Northern Ireland), can facilitate the cessation of conflicts.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, IT*

I do think that people have become much more politically aware through the whole Gaza activism around the world and much more politically engaged compared to the past. They are much more unwilling to believe some of the more disingenuous things that are said by governments to justify whatever arms trade or whatever. And so, my hope is that more civil society will become more involved in their own fate. And for philanthropy, I hope that some philanthropists who do feel uncomfortable about what's happening will be able to get together to find some courage to do more and to fight back when there are attempts to limit what they do.

*Executive Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

I hope that philanthropy does not lose its nerve to support progressive social justice issues, despite the crosswind brought by polarised politics, far-right leaning governments.

*Programme Officer,
Private Foundation, UK*

I hope that foundations that have been looking at their own work come out other side fully committed and start to address more of the issues in the sector and make everything more transparent and trust-based and led by the sector rather than by the private foundations.

*Programme Director,
Private Foundation, UK*

I hope that we will be able to trust the leadership of younger generations and people with lived experience; build stronger alliances, mobilising other funders and companies; and create safe spaces for our grantees for smart conversations.

*Programme Director,
Corporate Foundation, FR*

How can we be a stable source of support for people? How can we be better allies and work in solidarity? What does that mean beyond money? When we think about shifting power, we also need to think about absorbing the burden and not just shifting risk to others.

*Grants Manager,
Private Foundation, UK*

I hope that philanthropy fully embracing its role, bridging the gap between reflections on the deep narratives and power structures that shape it, and the reality it is called to operate within and help transform for the future we all wish for.

*Anonymous,
Community Foundation, Italy*

My greatest hope for 2025 is to see increased support for Indigenous peoples, quilombolas, Afro-descendants, and local organisations that are building robust networks and participatory spaces to lead on climate justice and technology resilience. Supporting new leadership models grounded in equity and collaboration will drive transformative change. I envision philanthropy prioritising these intersectional approaches, creating ecosystems where communities not only adapt to challenges but also lead innovation, ensuring sustainable and inclusive progress for future generations.

*Programme Manager,
Donor Collaborative*

We hope donors keep and grow their faith in decolonial and antiracist perspectives and continue to financially support these initiatives.

Anonymous, Intermediary Foundation

After a very challenging few years, it is also important to take care of ourselves, whatever our role in the efforts to effect social change.

Rest. Some rest at least.

*Anonymous,
Intermediary Foundation, DE*

But always with an eye to the future.

I hope to find new, creative ways of working that can lead to a future we have yet to envision.

Executive Director, Donor Collaborative, DE

**I just
hope that
philanthropic
work will be
possible**

*Anonymous,
Public Foundation, GE*

Reflections from roundtable conversations

DE

Time to defend civil society:

There was one recurring element in our Ariadne Roundtable in Germany: a fear, or rather expectation, that the new German Government might not look kindly on some elements of civil society, especially on groups fighting for the many forms of justice and for a voice in the debate on democracy itself. Only a few days after the elections, those fears were proven well-founded: The center-right has taken pages out of the far-right's playbook and started a campaign against civil society organisations that had protested for diversity and democracy and against xenophobia and a collaboration with right-wing extremists. The fault of these organisations, according to the incoming chancellor: they are too political, so they better keep their mouths shut. But one thing is clear: civil society organisations have to raise their voice when democracy, diversity and the equal

rights and dignity of all people are being threatened. That is their purpose. And especially so in times like these. Let's defend them. Let's support them. Because they defend and support all of us.

Martin Modlinger, CEO, Änderwerk

In times of ongoing transformation, building and sustaining trust-based relationships is more important than ever. Trust is the foundation for meaningful collaboration, open dialogue, and shared progress. It requires a commitment to listening deeply, reflecting on different perspectives, and approaching partnerships with transparency and integrity. Trust grows when we continuously review our own work, remain open to feedback, and adapt where necessary. In a world where uncertainty is constant, trust remains our most valuable asset - allowing us to work together.

(#VertrauenMachtWirkung)

IT

Shifting Philanthropic Funding Practices has never been more urgent:

Philanthropy stands at a crossroads. The traditional funding model—rigid, project-based, and compliance-heavy—has left civil society organizations (CSOs) fragile, fragmented, and unable to drive systemic change. The dominance of funding mechanisms designed for control rather than empowerment has weakened CSOs, forcing them into starvation cycle rather than fostering their capacity and resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the recent USAID aid freeze exposed the deep structural vulnerabilities of a system that underfunds overhead, ties resources to short-term projects, and fails to invest in organisational development.

Now is the time for foundations to live up to their own responsibilities and potential. The true power of philanthropy lies not in its financial scale but in its ability to provide flexible, long-term, trust-based support. We must shift from transactional grantmaking to transformative philanthropy—one that values CSOs as partners, not just recipients.

Let's move towards trust-based approaches, not bureaucratic ones; invest in mission and processes of social change, not projects. By doing so, philanthropy will be able to empower civil society to tackle the root causes of inequality, climate crisis, and democratic backsliding—not just their symptoms.

Carola Carazzone, Secretary General, Assifero

NL

Elements we do want to highlight are:

- The drastic way bilateral donors are stopping or reducing both their financial and political support is very destructive. Moreover, they do not only stop or drastically reduce direct funding to civil society organisations (CSOs), but also to multilateral institutions. By doing so, they close two important funding channels for CSOs simultaneously. Civil society networks that we have built over time can disappear, thus losing critical voices and infrastructure for the protection, defense and promotion of human rights.
- It is the people and groups that are already in a vulnerable position that are most affected by these political and funding shifts. The human rights and bodily autonomy of LGBTIQ+ persons, women and people affected by migration are under particular pressure from anti-rights forces. At the same time, these groups are seriously and disproportionately affected by funding cuts and lack of political support.
- Philanthropic foundations experience an increase in requests for support. To step up to the moment, they can spend a higher-than-usual-percentage of their endowment. In the US some foundations have already decided to do this.
- Philanthropy itself is also under pressure by anti-rights forces, and by governments even more so if they support the groups mentioned above. As a result, there is a risk of self-censorship. We already see this reflected in the tendency to use less progressive language, and fund less politically contested topics and organisations. But it is precisely these groups of rightsholders that need support most.
- Because the funding demands are high, funders need to prioritise. Global South CSOs are generally not involved in this conversation. This contradicts commitments to local ownership and local leadership. Intermediaries can play a crucial role by facilitating these difficult conversations in the countries concerned, and because they are closely connected to local civil society organisations.
- This will also allow for a conversation about the future of civil society. What do we want civil society to look like after we come out of this crisis?

Hivos

UK

It was encouraging to see emphasis on the need to support cross-movement spaces and organising in the report, as facilitating these is one of Weaving Liberation's core objectives and a central theme in our advocacy to funders.

Philanthropy has often operated with a scarcity mindset, and some groups have been structurally excluded from funding for a long time. And, whilst the current shifts in funding are real and deeply concerning, it is even more important now to challenge the scarcity narrative. There is more money out there, so what can be done to unlock it? And how are we redistributing that funding to support communities most impacted by the sociopolitical context?

We should also reflect on who we are learning from – larger funding institutions tend to follow what their peers are doing, but there are smaller, intermediary funders doing critical work to meet the needs of the communities they resource. What can we learn from them, and how can they be supported with more resources?

Operational staff, particularly legal and compliance, are instrumental in finding creative ways of moving money especially in challenging contexts and we need to create more opportunities to strategise with them.

Lastly, whilst urgent action is needed, and has been for a while, we should be cautious that, much like 2020, we don't have funders mobilising for a year and then it all falls apart. We need to be responsive now but also commit to long-term support to the field. At Weaving Liberation, we are working with others to reimagine what resourcing movements looks like over the next few years as resource mobilisation challenges grow. How can we break philanthropic dependency? What can we learn from funding practices that help groups get closer to financial sustainability and independence? What does material solidarity look like?

Salmana Ahmed, Co-director, Weaving Liberation

In 2024, Ariadne conducted an in-depth analysis of the UK human rights sector, examining how funders can best support civil society ahead of the General Election and beyond. The research found a resilient yet exhausted sector, strained by years of defending human rights laws against increasingly hostile governments. This challenge was exacerbated by systemic shocks such as Brexit, the cost-of-living crisis, and global conflicts. This has made it difficult for civil society to look ahead and meet emerging trends, to advance their own agendas, and to build a bigger movement and collaboration with other sectors. This seemed especially important given that we see the same issues developing in the UK as we do elsewhere in Europe, including closing civic space, and a shift in the political agenda towards authoritarian and anti-rights actors and discourse. We learned that different sectors – human rights, climate and environment, women's and migrant's rights – are all facing challenges from the same trends and, also, need to work together to meet them. Accordingly, many see the next General Election in 2029 one of 'maximum risk' for human rights.

To be ready, it seems like philanthropy in the UK needs to be:

- Supporting efforts to move from reaction and to find ways that both meet immediate current challenges but also help shift us towards a more positive future;
- Looking long-term and to support organisations over a longer time horizon and more flexibly;
- Identifying where the different trends may be taking us and what actions may be needed to be taken now to be ready for the scenarios that emerge. How might civil society be readied for a government led by Reform? This is especially important in the face of closing civic space.
- Taking an ecosystemic approach and work to ensure that the different tactics and actors needed to build a positive future are supported;
- Bringing in new sources of support, including NextGen philanthropy.

- Engaging and investing in bridging work and initiatives that provide infrastructure across sectors and movements.
- Providing the infrastructure for the development and dissemination of collective 'deep' narratives', the foundational stories and values that shape societal beliefs and behaviours and which inform attitudes across a swathe of issues.¹

James Logan, Consultant

1. The full paper "A Gathering Storm, A Time for Action - Social Justice, Human Rights & Democracy in the UK" is available to Ariadne members. Please reach out to the team to receive it.

FR

The recent political events and not-so-recent continuous erosion of democracy confirm that philanthropy has a responsibility to play a pivotal role in safeguarding and promoting democratic values across the continent.

Ariadne's work presenting the challenges and hopes of philanthropy is an excellent opportunity and starting point for foundations to dialogue, organise and, eventually -and hopefully-, act together to take up the challenges ahead of us.

New approaches and practices are indeed needed to amplify our joint efforts and collective impact in the field of democracy, because when it is under attack, all issues are threatened and weakened

The France roundtable provided a safe space for funders to discuss key questions, open-up about shared concerns and explore solutions. Let's keep meeting and collaborating more frequently throughout the year so that we can have better hopes for human rights and social change in Europe in the next Forecast!

Laetitia Veriter, Programme Manager, Fondation de France

**In a
world where
uncertainty
is constant,
trust remains
our most
valuable asset**

#VertrauenMachtWirkung

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