



Commentary

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Mapping Progressive Organizations in Europe

Summary: the *Cambridge Dictionary* describes a progressive movement as “a social or political movement that aims to represent the interests of ordinary people through political change and the support of government actions”. This policy brief maps progressive organizations across Europe.

Key findings: progressive organizations are based in large urban centres, run similar projects, and tend to focus on equality, democracy-from-below, and ecologism.

This policy brief covers the entire European continent and reviews the operations of 60 self-defined progressive organisations (see Appendix A for the list of associations).

Location. Most of these organizations are based in large urban centres. Others, such as A-id: Agenda for International Development, operate mainly online and have a strong trans-European character. A small number of organizations (6 out of 60) has multiple offices. Associazione Europea per la Democrazia Locale, for instance, has 6 offices (Strasbourg, Brussels, Vicenza, Skopje, Chisinau and Tunis).

Years of activity. 38 out of 60 associations have been operative for at least 10 years. While 3 organizations – Belgian Solsoc, the Dutch Heliomare and the Finnish Natur och Miljö – have been operative for more than 50 years, 18 organisations became operative after 2012.

Activities. There are 4 main activities: publications (mainly articles and blogs), research and outreach, projects, and cooperation. In terms of “research and outreach”, 10 organizations conduct original or policy-oriented research on issues such as human development, social inclusion, and justice, but most organizations are mainly devoted to advocacy, lobbying, and campaigning. Projects cover the great share of progressive organizations’ activities. Donors include private foundations, national and sub-national institutions, and the European Union (see Appendix B for a list of disclosed donors). For instance, the Multicultural Centre Prague implemented the EU-Horizon-funded project “SIRIUS: Skills and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in European Labour Market”; the French Réseau Français D’éducation à la Nature et à L’environnement was financed by the Ministère de la Transition écologique and the Office français de la biodiversité for the project “Mar’eau: outil de

maraudage pédagogique sur l'eau"; and the German Xart Splitta completed the project "DISSOLVING TERRITORIES | cultural geographies of a new eelam" thanks to the support of Stiftung Deutsche Klassenlotterie Berlin. As for cooperation, less than 15 of the selected organizations participate in networks with other associations. For instance, the Belgian Dynamo International participate in the international Street Workers Network and the German Democracy International, which aims to make governments more accountable transnationally, promote organisational development and capacity building in third countries.

6 organizations provide legal advice and aid. Except for the Democracy International, all such organizations are based in Southern Europe. For instance, Fenix Legal Aid (Greece) and the Centre for Peace Studies (Croatia) work mainly on asylum and legal status. The Women's Rights Foundation (Malta) helps women who have suffered violence and discrimination. Aditus Foundation (Malta) and Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti Civili (Italy) provide general civil rights legal aid and advice.

11 associations run educational activities, mainly on equality and ecologism. Natur och Miljö (Finland) and Tilia (Poland) raise awareness of sustainable lifestyles and the relationship between human beings and the environment. Quinoa (Belgium) focuses on development education, also seen as 'education for international solidarity'. Gong (Croatia) implements non-formal lifelong learning projects. Diversity Development Group (Lithuania) implements education projects addressing migration practitioners working on the field. Stand By Me (Greece) implements projects addressing asylum seekers in Lesvos.

We have identified 3 shared areas of concern: democracy-from-below, ecologism, and equality. Even if we study these three areas as distinct from one another, it is important to keep in mind that they should not be understood as separate silos.

Democracy-from-below. Most organizations focused on democracy-from-below are operative at the supranational level. When they operate at the national and subnational levels,

the focus is on community development and local democratic practices. More generally, democracy-from-below organizations promote active citizenship, access to socio-economic and political rights, and democracy. Quinoa (Belgium) help citizens to better understand world challenges through capacity-building and involvement. Humboldt-Viadrina Governance Platform (Germany) promotes democratic processes and governance strategies that can contribute to solutions for societal challenges.

Ecologism. Here, most organisations work at the national and supranational levels with the goal of achieving sustainable and zero-carbon society while enabling democratic processes, conserving natural resources, and protecting the environment. Cobh Zero Waste (Ireland) is the only organization mainly operative at the local level. In most cases, these organizations work on education, public participation and mobilisation, and community development. The Swedish Green Forum Foundation supports the expansion and development of green movements and parties worldwide. Educational projects include lifelong educational projects (Etopia, Belgium), environmental educational advocacy (The French Réseau Français D'éducation à la Nature et à L'environnement, France), environment protection education (Go Green, the Republic of North Macedonia). Public participation projects aim mainly at putting the pressure on lawmakers. For instance, Trash Hero World (Switzerland) brings communities together against waste. Finally, the only association dedicated to community development is the Swedish Green Forum Foundation.

Equality. In this case, progressive organizations are operative at both the local and supranational levels, FOS (Belgium) is committed to decent work and social protection at the global level. Rede Sem Fronteiras (Portugal) defends and promotes the rights of migrants and refugees. Overseas Progressive Pakistanis (the Netherlands) acts as a platform for Pakistani people and promotes progressive values. The above-mentioned Stand By Me and Fenix Legal Aid assist asylum seekers and refugees on the island of Lesvos.

Equality tends to be conceived very broadly to cover human rights, multiculturalism, social and economic inclusion, and social development, covering issues such as, migration, disabilities, gender, and economic justice. For example, Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti Civili, from Italy claims to protect and promote civil freedom. New Women for Inclusion and Social Justice (the Netherlands) is a migrant and refugee-led organization that focuses on the challenges and opportunities for refugee and migrant women in Europe.

We find that despite clear objectives and common values, progressive organizations tend to lack a precise policy dimension. VOICE of Irish Concern for the Environment (Ireland) promoted the introduction of a plastic bag tax in 2001. Associazione 21 Luglio (Italy) and Centre for Intersectional Justices (Germany) seek to address the limitations to the protection of vulnerable groups, discrimination, and systemic inequality. The breadth of the topic democracy-from-below exacerbates shortcomings in proposing actionable policy proposals.

Well-established and actionable policy strategies would help progressive organizations to position themselves politically and to achieve more tangible results. Advocating actionable policy proposals is not easy, though. For this reason, ***we think that it is imperative for progressive association to***

join force, cooperate, strengthen their network, and diversify their policy areas to amplify their actions. Progressive organizations may learn from the Online Progressive Engagement Network (OPEN), which is a global association of national grassroots campaigning organisations, including two European organizations, such as, Campax (Switzerland) and Aufstehn.at (Austria). To work as a coherent network, OPEN requires network participants to run campaigns on various progressive goals, connect with one another, share innovations and lessons, and collaborate on transnational campaigns, like climate change or trade. Another case in point is the 'Defunding Big Coal: Abbot Point and Save Our Reef' where the Campact (Germany) supported GetUp (Austria) in campaigning against a new coal export facility called Abbot Point. By partnering with Campact, GetUp could capitalize on its work in Germany and submit a successful petition at the Deutsche Bank annual meeting. The bank eventually announced that it was no longer considering funding Abbot Point.

These cases confirm the amplifying potential of networking across European progressive associations operating in different policy areas. In connecting with other organizations, they can benefit from various viewpoints, leverage resources, learn and share best practices, exchange expertise, and fill gaps in local and technical knowledge.

Appendix A. List of Progressive Organizations

	State	City	Publ.	Stud. and Or.	Prj.	Coop.	Other
Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti Civili	Italy	Rome	X	X			X
Multicultural Centre Prague	Czech Republic	Prague	X		X		X
Associazione Europea per la Democrazia Locale	More states	More cities	X	X	X	X	
Solsoc	Belgium	Brussels			X		
Centre for feminist foreign policy	More states	More cities	X	X	X	X	
Let's do it foundation	Estonia	Tallinn			X		X
Democracy International	Germany	Cologne	X			X	X
Partnership for Community Action and Transformation	Romania	Bucharest			X		
Tricontinental Centre	Belgium	Louvain-la-Neuve	X	X	X		X
Quinoa	Belgium	Brussels			X		X
Centre for Peace Studies	Croatia	Zagreb	X	X	X		X
Initiative for Development and Cooperation	Serbia	Belgrade	X		X		
Rede Sem Fronteiras	More states	More cities	X	X	X		
HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform	Germany	Berlin	X		X		X

	State	City	Publ.	Stud. and Or.	Prj.	Coop.	Other
Aditus foundation	Malta	Hamrun	X	X	X		X
Antirasistisk senter	Norway	Oslo	X	X			X
Prodiversa – Progreso y Diversidad	Spain	Malaga				X	X
Etopia	Belgium	Namur	X				X
Green Forum Foundation	Sweden	Stockholm			X		
Aufstehn.at	Austria	Wien	X	X			
Stand by me Lesvos	Greece	Lesvos			X		X
Natur och Miljö	Finland	Helsinki	X	X	X		X
Agir pour l'Environnement	France	Paris		X			
VOICE of Irish Concern for the Environment	Ireland	Dublin		X			
Klimabevægelsen	Denmark	Frederiksberg		X		X	X
Campax	Switzerland	Zurich		X			
Go Green	Republic of North Macedonia	Skopje	X		X		
European future forum	none	none			X	X	
Associazione 21 luglio	Italy	Rome		X		X	X
Diversity development group	Lithuania	Vilnius		X	X		X

	State	City	Publ.	Stud. and Or.	Prj.	Coop.	Other
LOKALNA AKCIJSKA GRUPA ZAGORJE – SUTLA	Croatia	Zagorska Sela			X		
Tilia	Poland	Torun			X		X
FOS	Belgium	Brussels				X	
Scottish community development centre	Scotland	Glasgow			X	X	X
Gong	Croatia	Zagreb		X			X
New women connectors for inclusion and social justice	The Netherlands	Zoetermeer		X			
Cube	The Netherlands	Maastricht		X			
Mine Vaganti NGO	Italy	Sassari		X	X		
European Platform for Rehabilitation	Belgium	Brussels	X		X		X
Dynamo international	Belgium	Brussels	X	X		X	X
Centre for intersectional justice	Germany	Berlin	X	X	X		
Sustainable change makers	Denmark	More cities	X				
DiEM25	none	none	X	X			X
Climate outreach	UK	Oxford	X	X	X		X
Škola dokorán – Wide Open School n. o.	Slovakia	Žiar nad Hronom			X		
Possible	UK	London		X	X		

	State	City	Publ.	Stud. and Or.	Prj.	Coop.	Other
European alternatives	More states	More cities	X	X	X		
WeMove Europe	Germany	Berlin		X			
Krytyka Polityczna	Poland	Warsaw	X				X
Overseas Progressive Pakistanis	The Netherlands	none	X	X		X	
Women's Right Foundation	Malta	La Valletta	X	X	X		X
Fenix Legal Aid	Greece	Lesvos	X	X		X	X
Réseau français d'éducation à la nature et à l'environnement	France	Montpellier	X		X		
Cobh zero waste	Ireland	Cobh	X				
Trash hero world	Switzerland	Inwil	X		X		
Solidarcité	Belgium	More cities			X		
Heliomare	The Netherlands	Wijk aan Zee			X		
Fundatia Parada	Romania	Bucharest		X	X		X
xart splitta	Germany	Berlin			X		
Glimpse	UK	London	X	X	X		

Appendix B. Donors and Projects

Donors	
Multicultural Centre Prague	EU Horizon 2020 Research
Associazione Europea per la Democrazia Locale	International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)
Solsoc	Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (Belgium)
Centre for feminist foreign policy	German Federal Foreign Office
Let's do it foundation	Archimedes Foundation
Partnership for Community Action and Transformation	Swiss' contribution to the enlarged EU
Tricontinental Centre	Région Wallonne (Belgium)
Quinoa	Bruxelles Environnement
Centre for Peace Studies	UNHCR
Initiative for Development and Cooperation	Municipalities of Zolikon and Lučani (Serbia)
HUMBOLDT- VIADRINA	World Bank Group

Donors	
Governance Platform	
Aditus foundation	EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme
Stand by me Lesvos	EU Erasmus+
Natur och Miljö	Swedish Cultural Fund
Go Green	Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (North Macedonia)
Diversity development group	Open Society Foundation
LOKALNA AKCIJSKA GRUPA ZAGORJE – SUTLA	EU Europe for Citizens
Tilia	Provincial Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Toruń
Mine Vaganti NGO	Fondazione con il Sud
European Platform for Rehabilitation	EU European Social Fund
Center for intersectional justice	Alexander von Humboldt Foundation
Škola dokorán – Wide Open School n. o.	Kahane Foundation
European alternatives	Schöpflin Foundation
Women's Right Foundation	Ministry for Education and Employment (Malta)

Donors

**Réseau français
d'éducation à la
nature et à
l'environnement**

Ministère de la
Transition écologique
(France)

Fundatia Parada

EU Erasmus+

xart splitta

Stiftung Deutsche
Klassenlotterie Berlin

Glimpse

Emerging Futures
Fund
