

*To help international donors better understand how and where to invest for sustainable results, we conducted a study of the state of Russian civil society in 2024, focusing on its key challenges, needs, and opportunities. The research draws on 115 in-depth interviews, a digital ethnographic study of 12 online communities, an AI-assisted quantitative analysis of 6,500 online communities, and foresight analysis with 23 experts.*

*The main challenges include political pressure, lack of resources, and communication difficulties among activists both inside Russia and abroad. Any collective activity not under state control is viewed as a threat by the repressive apparatus, forcing civil society to retreat into closed, decentralized structures.*

*Due to widespread emigration, many activist groups have had to rebuild their teams, change organizational forms, and restructure their strategies and practices. At the same time, there has been a boom in grassroots initiatives, particularly non-metropolitan regions, indicating a growing public demand for solidarity-based action. Many operate without legal registration or websites to stay “under the radar,” do not appear at conferences, and lack stable funding. These initiatives must expend considerable effort to keep up with constantly changing legislation and avoid attracting the attention of security forces. Thanks to innovative solutions in finance and digital security, activists continue to exchange knowledge and adapt to new risks.*

*Our study also documents the key achievements of Russian civil society: it has remained active despite ongoing pressure, managed to restructure itself into more decentralized forms, strengthened human rights defense mechanisms, reinforced legal resistance to mobilization, and advanced collective rights protection. At the international level, dialogue with Ukrainian civil society continues, and amid the constraints of emigration, activists are seeking new forms of cooperation across borders.*

*Our study also finds that activist groups have complex and evolving relationships with the state. While funding for NGOs is becoming increasingly state-centered—forcing some groups to cooperate with the government or shift toward less contentious causes—other organizations have responded by exploring alternative resources like crowdfunding, private donations, and commercialization of services. The departure of activists due to burnout and emigration has created a staffing crisis in the social sector, but it has also led to new educational programs and horizontal self-organization.*

*The authorities aim to divide society, destroy horizontal ties, and impose narratives of xenophobia and violence. In this context, the success of activist organizations today can be best gauged by their collaborations and the engagement of new participants. Overcoming atomization and maintaining solidarity have become pivotal tasks for sustaining and developing the sector.*