

# CONCORD

COLLECTIVE POWER. EUROPEAN ACTION. GLOBAL EQUALITY.

**2027** **CONCORD'S  
STRATEGY  
onwards**

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**RISING TO  
THE OCCASION  
TOGETHER**

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**June 2026**

# ABOUT CONCORD

CONCORD is the European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation. We are made up of 58 member organisations representing more than 2600 NGOs and are supported by millions of citizens across Europe.

We are the main interlocutor with the EU institutions on sustainable development policy and international cooperation. We are a member-led organisation which means that the members give the strategic direction of the Confederation.

More at: [concordeurope.org](http://concordeurope.org)

## WHAT DO WE DO TO ACHIEVE TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE?



**Engage**



**Challenge**



**Innovate**



**Evolve**

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## WHO WE ARE

**26**

**National  
Platforms**

**25**

**Networks**

**07**

**Associate  
Members**

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Publisher: CONCORD – Rue de l'industrie 10 – 1000 Brussels, Belgium

# CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. CONTEXT</b>	<b>5</b>
What does this mean for CONCORD?	6
<b>3. WHO WE ARE</b>	<b>8</b>
CONCORD's VISION	8
CONCORD's PURPOSE	8
CONCORD's VALUES	8
<b>4. OUR GOALS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4.1 DRIVING CHANGE</b>	<b>10</b>
Strategic Goal 1	10
<b>4.2 STRENGTHENING OUR COLLECTIVE POWER</b>	<b>14</b>
Strategic Goal 2	14
<b>4.3 A NETWORK FIT FOR THE FUTURE</b>	<b>16</b>
Strategic Goal 3	16
<b>5. IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>ANNEX 1 – THEORY OF CHANGE</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>ANNEX 2 – FIT FOR PURPOSE PRACTICES</b>	<b>23</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

CONCORD's strategy for 2027 onwards represents both a continuum and an acceleration of the pace of change which CONCORD introduced in its previous strategy. It is a continuum because we will work on many of the same themes; it is an acceleration – or indeed a break with the past – because we recognise that we must change in order to remain relevant and impactful given the prevailing external context. We will face the uncertainties together; we will draw on the huge community that we have forged over the years; we will share our knowledge and experiences in a spirit of solidarity; and we will shape and co-create our future with hope. Most particularly, we intend to resist attacks on civil society and turn challenges into opportunities for positive change.

CONCORD will, together, rise to the occasion. As an umbrella platform at European level, CONCORD combines knowledge, expertise and experience with huge outreach. That gives us immense collective power.

However, we cannot be complacent. The urgency for change is real and it is high time to move from words to actions.

**“The urgency for change is real and it is high time to move from words to actions.”**

## 2. CONTEXT

The increasingly important role the 11 BRICS, and other countries, play in world affairs has led to a more multipolar world. Some refer to this as 'greater fragmentation'; others see it as a move away from decisions predominantly made by "Global North" countries and the institutions they have historically controlled. This has led to different viewpoints and interests surging in international fora. In conjunction with the greater multipolarity, the so-called rules-based order is being challenged and undermined on various fronts, causing greater volatility in both political and economic spheres.

The worldwide spread of populism and nationalism has led to greater isolationism and protectionism. The more nationalistic approach to foreign and economic policy-making by many countries in recent years has led to the reemergence of 'spheres of influence'. The rise of China – underestimated for so long – combined with the current style of policy-making in the U.S. is game-changing. We are likely to see the two major world powers entrenched in a competition with considerable repercussions for the EU and the rest of the world – be they economic, political, security, technological or other.

From an EU perspective, these trends bring an additional complexity: partner countries can benefit from the growing multipolarity, since there are more 'offers' on the table from which to choose. They are less 'bound' to the EU, whether this be in siding with the EU in multilateral fora, or in accepting EU aid on the EU's terms.

rowing populism and nationalism have increasingly caused governments in Europe and the US to prioritise the perceived interests of their own country, and to seek to demonstrate the value of foreign policy, international trade and international cooperation at home. In such a world, alliances are both transitory and transactional. That has major consequences for international cooperation and immediate knock-on effects for the issues that CONCORD holds dear, such as addressing inequalities, tackling climate change and promoting human rights and democracy.

The self-interested approach to policy-making is reflected in the EU's emphasis on "geoeconomics", competition and security (energy, food, defence, etc.). While foreign and economic policy goals influence many decisions taken by the EU, it is only more recently that the funding dedicated to international cooperation has been so clearly appropriated

for the purposes of furthering a Member State's own national interests, or those of the EU. This in part explains the growing reliance on involving European multinationals and Development Finance Institutions in international cooperation, and the return to the era of Public-Private Partnerships. Simultaneously, we are witnessing a significant drop in EU Member State budgets dedicated to human development, climate change and reducing inequalities, as well as a worrying trend to reduce their support for civil society.

Democratic mechanisms are being undermined, and we are witnessing the rise of the disinformation society. Truth and evidence-based policy-making now seem to play a lesser part in decision-making than furthering national interests. Civic space is increasingly obstructed – or even closed – around the world; and from CONCORD's perspective, the growing attacks in Europe on civil society are a major concern.

Armed conflicts abound, with various states backing one or other side and stoking (or provoking) conflict. The economic cost of violence worldwide is measured in trillions of euro. But multilateral fora, such as the UN or the EU, seem powerless to address the conflicts. Of particular note for the European context, Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine is testing Europe's determination and showing that the EU is neither ready for this kind of challenge and nor able to make decisions effectively and swiftly.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CONCORD?

CONCORD believes in the EU as a force for good in the world, upholding democracy and the rule of law, while collaborating in multilateral fora to address global challenges. We will continue to work with the EU to enhance its positive role in the world, while also striving to reorient international cooperation towards collaboration and building mutually beneficial partnerships.

CONCORD's strategy reflects our recognition that just as Europe is changing, we need to adapt what we work on, the way we work and our business model in order to perform our invaluable role in society. We will do our utmost to continue playing that role despite the cuts in funding and the shrinking space which undermine civil society. We will continue to defend communities whose rights are not being realised, to offer policy advice to governments based on our experience, and to support systemic change to address the root causes of injustice and inequality. We will use the current challenges as an opportunity to modernise, transform and revitalise the Confederation.

CONCORD will work ever harder to provide a space for learning and exchange where everyone is welcome, and as a knowledge broker to bring together different perspectives and offer alternative solutions to policy-makers. Ahead of us we have an opportunity to make a step change in our ways of engaging and transforming our sector so as to achieve the sustainable, democratic world we seek. We will resist – and will unite with others to resist – the rolling back of democracy that we are currently

witnessing. We will combine our expertise, skills and knowledge, the uniqueness and diversity of our membership, our footprint across Europe as well as our reach beyond Europe to ensure the ongoing relevance and impact of our network. We will leverage our reputation, credibility and collective identity to strengthen our network and our civic space and create opportunities for engagement. CONCORD will draw on the feminist principles of solidarity, sharing, caring and collaboration to grow stronger together and transform crisis into opportunity.

**These ambitions translate into a focus on three areas:**

- 1. Driving change;**
- 2. Strengthening and harnessing our collective power;**
- 3. Supporting a network fit for the future.**

**→ This strategy is about how we will  
Rise to the Occasion; Together**

# 3. WHO WE ARE

CONCORD is the European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation.

CONCORD is made up of National Platforms – which are comprised of the national organisations working on international cooperation – as well as transnational networks and international NGOs, collectively called Networks. Together we make up approximately 2,600 NGOs and cover a broad range of areas of expertise. We come together in CONCORD, where we are supported by a Secretariat.

## CONCORD'S VISION

[ Equal, just and inclusive societies in a sustainable world ]

## CONCORD'S PURPOSE

[ To engage with decision-makers in Europe, foster a vibrant civil society and forge synergies and alliances across the world so as to transform systems and power structures and build equitable and inclusive societies in a sustainable world. ]

## CONCORD'S VALUES

The values we identify with and wish to embody determine the organisational culture we will embrace – our beliefs, our behaviours and our standards. They will guide what we do and how we do it.

**SOLIDARITY:** we promote solidarity between people and countries both in Europe and across the world. We work together to support each other within the

CONCORD Confederation, just as we work to support people in other parts of the world to realise their rights and sustainable development.

**NON-DISCRIMINATION:** we adhere to the human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality. To this end, we ensure that our internal processes are fair, accessible and promote diversity and inclusion; in our external work we promote an intersectional, people-centred approach so as to offer equal opportunities to everyone.

**COLLABORATION:** we believe in the power of meaningful partnership and of working together to fight for our common causes. We collaborate closely both within our network, ensuring participatory processes, as well as with civil society colleagues and other stakeholders in Europe and beyond, in the aim of achieving just and equitable societies in a sustainable world.

**INTEGRITY:** we recognise the importance of applying strong moral and ethical principles to and in our work. To this end, we maintain the highest standards of conduct and seek feedback so that we can continually learn and improve what we do, building trust and mutual respect.

**RESPECT:** we place a special emphasis on ensuring that we treat our colleagues, our partners and other stakeholders with whom we engage as we ourselves wish to be treated. To this end, we regularly revisit our ways of working and place emphasis on mutual learning and co-creation.

**→ We will adopt these values internally, just as we will apply them externally. We acknowledge that they are mutually reinforcing and interdependent.**

# 4. OUR GOALS

This strategy will serve as our compass, setting the direction for the coming years by establishing the guiding parameters and overarching objectives of our work together. As such, it intentionally embeds and leaves room for agility and flexibility in our modus operandi. No goal stands in isolation of the others. On the contrary, they are interdependent and we will actively create and build on the synergies between them.

This strategy – in keeping with the evolving external environment – is framed as a process of change. It also recognises and depends on the important work carried out at national level and the enhanced involvement of the senior leadership across CONCORD.

We firmly believe that a vibrant civil society is vital, both in and of itself but also to solving many of the issues we currently face. This belief underpins all the work we will do over the coming years.

## 4.1 DRIVING CHANGE

### STRATEGIC GOAL 1

We will take a dynamic approach to making the EU's international cooperation more people-centred.

We will continue to work on our three main themes for as long as they remain relevant:

1) addressing the multiple root causes of inequalities; 2) promoting a vibrant civil society for resilient and healthy societies; and 3) examining EU international cooperation to ascertain whether funding is aligned with commitments. These topics are crucial to supporting the well-being of all people and leaving no one behind.

However, CONCORD will work differently to achieve our goals in a constrained environment. Our tactics will be adjusted and we will experiment with new approaches. In this way, we will become more agile, visible and impactful.

### WHAT DO WE ENVISAGE?

→ We will act as a knowledge broker –

CONCORD's relevance will come from shaping debates and decisions, not just implementing activities. It is for this reason that CONCORD intends to assume even more fully the mantle of convenor, conversation-starter, bridge-builder and network-weaver (as per Goal 2). We will reach out to a wide variety of stakeholders within and beyond our sector, building on work started under the previous strategy. In doing so we will seek to amplify the voices of impacted communities and bring their perspectives to the EU.

→ We will pay greater attention to the importance of EU Member States and the work of our National Platforms.

International cooperation policy is influenced by national level decision-making, the Member States exercise co-decision-making authority in EU budgetary matters with the

European Parliament, and the shape of the EU institutions – especially the European Parliament – reflects national politics. The importance of the Member States in shaping the EU and the issues it prioritises is therefore considerable. CONCORD will work in a more aligned and coordinated manner to better reflect this. We will ensure that our positions are developed with input from the national level and are disseminated widely at national level. National Platforms will be supported in their roles through joint tools and learning moments.

We will also aim to reach a wider public with our messaging, in large part thanks to the involvement of our National Platforms, which are crucial in reaching out to people in EU Member States. Politicians are, for obvious reasons, influenced by voters' concerns and demands. CONCORD will need to tap in to this, while influencing how the public views international cooperation and the values underpinning it. To do so, we will work on how we frame our messages, bringing the concerns of the public more clearly to the fore, and we will test a variety of techniques and tools to support our outreach.

→ **We will recalibrate our communications for the new reality, developing winning narratives and hope-based stories.**

Strategic communication is vital to drive change. The need to communicate meaningfully, ethically and powerfully about our issues has never been more urgent. In order to defend civic space and broaden support for justice and equality the world over, we will engage new audiences and

speak to them in ways that resonate. We will develop and test new, hope-based narratives rooted firmly in our values. In a time of global turbulence and deepening anxiety, our communications must not only counter fear and division, but inspire confidence, solidarity and collective action.

We will work closely with our civil society allies and partners<sup>1</sup> around the world to convey complex policies as real-life human impact. Through our communications and the continued development of our storytelling capacities, we will show how decisions made at EU level shape the daily realities of local communities. This will help us to connect meaningfully with our target audiences and how they approach all aspects of international cooperation. We will work together to ensure that CONCORD becomes a leader in sharing stories that embrace equality, solidarity and justice in international partnerships. We will connect our communications with those of social and youth movements and women's rights organisations.

## **WHAT WILL WE WORK ON?**

### **Addressing structural and systemic inequalities**

The well-being of people and planet underpin everything we stand for and therefore everything we work on. However, inequalities between people and countries continue their inexorable rise, whether economic, social, political or environmental. They are constantly aggravated by crises and by systemic and structural failures. CONCORD will therefore continue to work for equality, with a particular focus on human development and the economic sphere. We will

<sup>1</sup> "Allies" are organisations based in Europe; "partners" are based outside of Europe. This distinction is internal to CONCORD. The 'partner countries' referred to in the strategy are the EU's partner countries.

use our skills in systems thinking to reinvigorate our efforts to persuade policy-makers that the economy should be reoriented to serve people and planet rather than the other way around and will highlight the weaknesses of the neoliberal capitalist system, while offering alternatives both within and beyond the current economic paradigm.

Gender equality will be particularly important as we firmly believe that the discrimination and injustices girls and women face are not only unacceptable and detrimental to society as a whole, but act as a break on progress. We will urge the EU, and every Member State, to promote gender equality without equivocation and across all relevant sectors in their external action.

Together, we will continue to set the agenda in the EU on inequalities, with CONCORD focusing on the EU's role in the international arena and supporting the EU to implement its commitments to leave no one behind.

### **Promoting democracy, civic space and the involvement of CSOs**

We can safely say that if civil society collapses, no other part of this strategy matters. CONCORD will therefore, over the coming years, redouble its efforts to safeguard civic space and our collective ability to act in Europe. Many ingredients are necessary for civil society to be able to do its invaluable work. However, respect for the freedoms to associate, assemble and express one's views, irrespective of where one's funding comes from, are fundamental. CONCORD will therefore focus on civic space and democracy within Europe, in addition to supporting colleagues around the world to engage in EU processes. This is a relatively new departure for CONCORD, despite our recent engagement in the EU Strategy for Civil Society

and our contributions to the Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan.

Our aim is to prevent further democratic backsliding and to increase our outreach to stakeholders to raise awareness of the importance of democratic values and practices and the dangers of authoritarian creep. Citizen engagement and support is also crucial to challenge and change inequitable structures and systems and to achieve global justice. Our work to reframe narratives and to employ differentiated engagement techniques will be vital for our success. As part of our efforts to strengthen democratic resilience and public engagement, Global Citizenship Education (GCE) will be important in fostering critical thinking, civic awareness and shared values among European citizens. GCE will inform our work on narrative change and societal resilience, supporting the National Platforms and Networks in engaging broader constituencies across Europe.

CONCORD will work in alliance with others to achieve our objectives in this domain since the larger the community the more chance we will have of success. CONCORD will begin with pilot actions and grow our efforts over time and according to need.

We will continue to support EU decision-making processes in international cooperation to improve transparency, inclusivity and participation, focusing on local civil society involvement as well as our own.

### **Prioritising people in EU funding and financing**

Owing to current trends in the international cooperation portfolio and the use of the budget to support EU interests, CONCORD will work to demonstrate that supporting human

development and civil society contributes to shared global prosperity and stability, while supporting conflict-affected and fragile states is critical to reducing the turbulence in the world.

CONCORD will continue to engage with the Global Gateway initiative, including through EU Platforms as appropriate, and any subsequent initiatives, in order to promote a greater emphasis on creating positive, lasting impact for people in the EU's partner countries through investments in human development and sustainable livelihoods. We will ensure synergies with our work on inequalities and building a sustainable economy and bring a systemic angle to this work. We will continue to focus on the important role of sustainable and inclusive businesses in contributing to progress in partner countries.

We will engage with a broader set of stakeholders to better understand and shape the EU's funding policies and practices and will bring stories and evidence from the countries concerned, by working with our partners around the world.

We will also support and collaborate with civil society actors in partner countries so that they are able to engage in and shape the programming cycle. And despite our recognition that the role and financing of INGOs must evolve, we will maintain our calls for adequate budget allocations for civil society given its fundamental role in society, combining this with a focus on accessibility for local and smaller organisations in partner countries.

### **Foreign and security policy**

In view of the growing importance of international cooperation in EU foreign economic policy, and the use of the Global Europe budget, we

will broaden our engagement to build on and strengthen our expertise around foreign and security policy from an international cooperation and partnership perspective. This is of particular relevance for many of our National Platforms, which will be key to this shift. Similarly, a greater focus on the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood region, given its weight in foreign policy considerations and budget usage, will be needed.

The EU's emphasis on competition and security is likely to remain, given the increasing instability in the world, and will influence its foreign policy. The EU is also likely to continue directing its ODA to where it is most useful in soft power terms to support foreign policy and security aims. CONCORD will therefore need to ensure that we are able influence those EU policies, making them people-centred and ensuring that the EU applies feminist principles to its relations with other countries. We will also bring a policy coherence for sustainable development lens to these EU policies, including in our work on the Global Gateway which is an integral part of the EU's foreign economic policy.

We will work to ensure that the EU stands firm in international fora, upholding human rights conventions and international law as well as EU values and principles in the positions it defends. The importance of keeping a focus on supporting human development in partner countries – which in turn contributes to improving prosperity, stability and peace – will remain central to CONCORD's work. We will therefore endeavour to shape the EU's narratives about progress. We will build alliances with other civil society actors working in the field to bring synergies to our joint work.

## WHAT WILL WE ACHIEVE?

- **CONCORD will have engaged with stakeholders at all levels to shape the EU agenda and the EU's approach to international cooperation.**
- **CONCORD will have contributed to safeguarding and opening up civic space.**
- **CONCORD will have changed our approach to driving change, with greater reliance on the national level and strategic communications.**

## 4.2 STRENGTHENING OUR COLLECTIVE POWER

### STRATEGIC GOAL 2

**We will actively boost capacity and connectedness within our network, reinforce resilience and intentionally engage with allies and partners to strengthen and harness our collective power.**

This Goal comprises two main ambitions. Firstly, to strengthen ever more our community and create a greater community feeling of sharing and caring. This includes sharing skills, knowledge and resources across the Confederation. Secondly, we aim to strengthen our network by engaging with more, and more varied, allies and partners. We will grow our network of partners around the world to be more representative in geographic scope, including in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood region. Boosting collaboration between organisations and networks in Europe will be increasingly important in order to safeguard civic space and sustain our impact. Member-led engagement

and dedicated resources for EU-related work will be a sine qua non for success. It will only be by working consistently together on a small range of issues that we will enhance our collective strength and have meaningful impact in the current climate.

## WHAT DO WE ENVISAGE?

- **We will develop mappings and open up opportunities according to need to share skills, knowledge and experience.**

The Secretariat will gather feedback from members on where additional knowledge would be beneficial. One example is the fast-paced development of AI, whether about the risks one should be aware of, such as spreading disinformation, or its potentially positive benefits in our daily work. Other examples relate to our other goals, such as futures thinking, preparedness or changing funding models. The Secretariat will identify needs across the Confederation and will seek to respond to them in a timely and budget-conscious manner, whether via strategic level brainstorming, training or operational tools. The Secretariat will prioritise building on our diverse membership and the expertise within our network, including the huge potential of exchanges between National Platforms and Networks which will be ever more important in this strategy. However, for CONCORD to offer value for its members going forward, all members will need to act in a spirit of solidarity with each other. Furthermore, members should henceforth consider pooling resources and opening up opportunities to each other, sharing experiences and promoting cross-fertilisation of ideas. To this end, CONCORD will develop more accessible information-sharing and communication tools to facilitate such exchanges.

National Platforms have distinct needs and roles within the Confederation. Their interactions with their governments are key to making change at EU level. By providing them with tailored resources, dedicated spaces, and opportunities for targeted collaboration, their capacity to act, engage and connect will be enhanced.

→ **We will respond to early warning signals and risk assessments from members.** We could develop a self-assessment survey for members facing increased scrutiny and anti-rights targeting, which could contribute to better preparedness support allowing us to shift from reactive to proactive preparedness. We will assess the degree to which CONCORD responds as a network on a case-by-case basis, but at the very least we will develop a resource library to offer potential avenues for action. We will also explore the options of developing solidarity mechanisms and identifying opportunities for pooling resources.

→ **We will develop crisis communications packages** with narrative framing and safe media engagement protocols within our communications community which can serve the whole Confederation. We will work with other organisations and networks in Europe to avoid reinventing the wheel and ensure we include best practices and lessons learnt.

→ **We will reinforce the resilience of our Confederation** by focusing more on protecting morale and collective agency, including by being honest about our fears, potential burnout and trade-offs we face. We will create a safe space to speak openly about these issues as well as the political limits and moral costs. We can also explore the following options:

- Creating a mentor or buddy system – for individuals or organisations depending on the situation – to share ideas on coping with extra stress or a repressive environment, identifying and addressing burnout, etc.
- Engaging in collective care – this implies looking out for each other and burden-sharing.

→ **We will engage in radical imagination** to reconnect to our purpose, look beyond survival and support ourselves as agents of change.

→ **CONCORD will act as a network-weaver.** Our collective power rests on forging a strong sense of community and intra-Confederation collaboration, as well as our ability to reach out to many other organisations, networks and movements. There are therefore both internal and external angles to strengthening our collective power.

Internally, we will better tap in to the huge diversity of the CONCORD family. Each member has their own unique value added, and together our strength is considerable. We will need to make use the wide range of experiences, evidence and stories that are available in our network, thanks to our broad thematic expertise and extensive geographic reach, in raising awareness and engaging at national and EU levels.

CONCORD recognises that we are part of the international fabric of civil society and that we must better link our agendas, focusing on what unites us, both in Europe and across the world. We will therefore create strategic alliances with other networks working on both internal and external EU affairs over the coming years to

further the causes we believe in and to create strength in numbers. We will better protect civic space in Europe by aligning with like-minded organisations in other sectors.

We also have much to learn from the experiences of civil society organisations around the world who have had to operate in a severely restricted space. We will open up safe spaces for them to share their advice and experiences with the Confederation. We will, furthermore, continue to work closely with civil society organisations in EU partner countries on our thematic areas, whether through existing or new fora. We will pursue our aims to open up more spaces for them to bring their lived experiences to the EU and to contribute to EU processes, to amplify their voices and to co-create our messaging with them.

- **CONCORD will act as a bridge-builder.** If we are to adjust to the shifting paradigm of EU international cooperation, we will need to build bridges to other actors. CONCORD will not try to develop expertise in numerous new topics; rather, by building bridges to others we will contribute to creating a more complete picture for everyone. For example, we will engage more with the private sector across the main pillars of the EU Global Gateway initiative, including sustainable and inclusive businesses from around the world which are not yet firmly part of the Global Gateway model. We would also reach out to important players such as partner country EU representations, diaspora networks, research institutes, and think tanks.
- **We will seek new members** to strengthen our efforts to challenge the status quo and to open up civil society space. We will be open to strategically important organisations whose membership would bring added value. We

will also take steps to reach out to accession countries, via our National Platforms in the region, to support their civil society where possible, explore synergies and ascertain interest in joining the Confederation.

## WHAT WILL WE ACHIEVE?

- **CONCORD's skills and knowledge across the Confederation will have been enhanced.**
- **CONCORD will have ensured that it is better prepared in the changing environment.**
- **CONCORD members and the Confederation will feel stronger and more resilient as a result of our joint actions.**
- **CONCORD will be better connected and have strengthened its collective power with other actors, allies and partners.**

## 4.3 A NETWORK FIT FOR THE FUTURE

### STRATEGIC GOAL 3

**We will reimagine our role and anticipate and adapt to change, ensuring relevance and impact in a rapidly evolving external context.**

There are two aspects to this Strategic Goal, both of which are key to ensuring that CONCORD becomes fit for the future, while also contributing to the future of the sector as a whole. Firstly, we must adapt and reimagine how we operate in light of the current external context and possible future scenarios. Secondly, we must ensure that we live up to the ethical and moral standards we claim to adhere to, such as shifting power to the local level.

## BEING FIT FOR THE FUTURE

Since our work and the fundamental role of civil society remain as valuable as ever, we must adapt to ensure that we are able to protect and open up civic space and to support human development and the fight against inequalities in the aim of making the world more equal, just and sustainable. CONCORD will therefore seek to adapt our ways of working, including how we work with partners and allies (linked to Goal 2) and to become ever more agile, while being a safe space for members to discuss the evolving role of the INGO.

## WHAT DO WE ENVISAGE?

- **We will take a more thorough approach to futures thinking, scenario planning, risk assessment and identifying strategic solutions, or alternatives.** It will be critical to improve our ability to anticipate and adjust to change and to increase our agility over the coming years. In order to better prepare for all eventualities, we will invest in imagining future scenarios and addressing key risk areas for civil society, by identifying dominant trends and how they might develop over time, developing credible pathways and solutions.
- **We will test and adopt new approaches and methodologies** to guide and support us to focus on longer-term outcomes. Such approaches include systems dynamics and systems thinking as well as causal layered analysis to help construct future scenarios and better link short-, medium- and long-term change. We will explore power dynamics to better understand our own potential leverage. These tools will help us to identify strategic objectives and those activities which will lead towards systemic change.

- **We will continue our journey of unlearning and rethinking.** Employing techniques such as radical imagination as a strategic tool will enable us to think beyond the narrow futures imposed by funding, urgency, and reacting to unforeseen or inauspicious events. We will challenge in-built assumptions; rethink accepted modus operandi and evolve the role of the Confederation. This will complement and support processes to shift power to our colleagues in the majority world.
- **We will implement our updated Fit for Purpose Practices** (Annex 2). These ways of working will support CONCORD to remain relevant and impactful in engaging with stakeholders at all levels and in reaching out to wider audiences to exchange views, while creating new opportunities for collaboration and strengthening our community.
- **We will expand our convening role.** In a renewed spirit of curiosity and on the basis that it is less important to have all the answers than to ask the right questions, we will reach out to a wider variety of stakeholders, including diaspora groups, allies and partners, research institutions, think tanks, the private sector, the media, social movements etc., to bring together diverse opinions in order to better understand the challenges from different perspectives and to offer new ideas and solutions to the EU. By reinforcing our convening role, we will become more agile, thought-provoking and better connected.
- **We will create a thought leadership group composed of the leaders of member organisations.** Bringing senior level strategic thinking more effectively into the heart of the Confederation will support our efforts to adopt an agenda-setting mindset, to re-

envision our future and reimagine our role, and to better engage with policy-makers on the global challenges they face including the reorientation of international cooperation.

- **We will diversify our funding.** In implementing CONCORD's financial strategy, we will seek greater diversification of funding, as well as exploring more adapted ways of resourcing networks, such as pooling resources (not limited to financial resources) and developing income-generating models. We will work more in consortia, creating temporary, outcomes-focused alliances that can adapt quickly to changing circumstances. We will learn from each other and open up opportunities to each other.

## REIMAGINING THE SECTOR

Many CONCORD members are reflecting on the role of their organisations in bringing about global justice, equality and sustainability in light of recent funding cuts and based on the wishes of partners in the majority world. We fully recognise that CONCORD does not represent the whole sector, and that each organisation will determine its own path. Nonetheless, given the strength of our community and the potential for exchange and learning between members, CONCORD will support efforts to reimagine and to contribute to change in our sector.

## WHAT DO WE ENVISAGE?

- **CONCORD will create learning spaces and opportunities** for direct dialogue, informal exchange and leadership participation. Key to our transformation is a willingness to rethink what international cooperation is – and is not – and what our role should be. We will create safe spaces to reflect on how we should

respond to a context driven by domestic interests and transactional approaches, how to embed feminist principles in our work, and how to support others when 'aid' is becoming a questioned notion. In line with the principles of locally led development and putting local communities at the centre of our work, INGOs are likely to need to reinvent themselves as amplifiers and facilitators, rather than predominantly being implementers. CONCORD can support members' thinking through its convening, bridge-building and networking roles.

- **CONCORD will also reflect on our own role in the current system.** As a long-standing, important dialogue partner we have inevitably become part of the system. We will examine where we might be unintentionally supporting aspects of the system which should in fact be questioned; this will be particularly relevant in our efforts to 'Shift the Power', to reimagine international cooperation, to work on narratives, power distribution and resourcing.
- **CONCORD will implement its Pledge to Shift Power** to our colleagues in the majority world. We are committed to strengthening equitable partnerships, including greater co-creation and shared leadership with partners in the majority world. We will bring in external perspectives from our partners, allies and other actors to guide us. The more diverse the voices we include, the greater the learning opportunities. We will follow the principles of radical collaboration, whereby we acknowledge power, build on differences and seek to produce outcomes that neither could have achieved alone. In this vein, CONCORD should also consider how we can support proposals from partners. One example is the future of – or follow-up to – the 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development, which remains very important to EU partner countries. Lastly, our pledge will guide not only how we operate, but also how we speak about issues. We will redouble our efforts to re-examine and reframe our narratives, working with our partners to ensure authentic storytelling.

## **WHAT WILL WE ACHIEVE?**

- **CONCORD will have improved our agility and will be better placed to adjust to the changing context.**
- **CONCORD will have taken up the challenge to reimagine international cooperation, our role and the contribution we can make.**
- **CONCORD will have made changes in our modus operandi, including a more diversified and sustainable funding model.**
- **CONCORD will have implemented our Shift the Power pledge in our joint work.**

# 5. IMPLEMENTATION

The scope of the strategy is broad and ambitious; it intends to support us in navigating change. The various initiatives will therefore be phased in over the years, while also evolving to meet the needs of the time. Agility will be crucial.

We will engage in our customary annual planning through which we will define a small number of core SMART<sup>2</sup> objectives. While we will endeavour to keep a long-term vision and systemic approach, the operationalisation of the strategy will be informed by EU processes, priorities, plans and opportunities for engagement. We will build coalitions to achieve our objectives, going beyond the usual suspects.

Since this aims to be a longer-term strategy, without a defined end date, we will periodically evaluate its relevance, review what we work on together and adapt our focus accordingly. Such a review will be in addition to our annual monitoring and evaluation.

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<sup>2</sup> Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

# 6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The scope of the strategy is broad and ambitious; it intends to support us in navigating change. The various initiatives will therefore be phased in over the years, while also evolving to meet the needs of the time. Agility will be crucial.

We will engage in our customary annual planning through which we will define a small number of core SMART<sup>3</sup> objectives. While we will endeavour to keep a long-term vision and systemic approach, the operationalisation of the strategy will be informed by EU processes, priorities, plans and opportunities for engagement. We will build coalitions to achieve our objectives, going beyond the usual suspects.

Since this aims to be a longer-term strategy, without a defined end date, we will periodically evaluate its relevance, review what we work on together and adapt our focus accordingly. Such a review will be in addition to our annual monitoring and evaluation.

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<sup>3</sup> Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

# ANNEX 1

## THEORY OF CHANGE



# ANNEX 2

## FIT FOR PURPOSE

### PRACTICES: Engage, Challenge, Influence, Evolve

CONCORD's vision and purpose will guide and shape the work of the Confederation. The aims presented in the strategy are threefold: to be relevant and impactful in engaging with stakeholders at all levels to further our vision; to strengthen the ability and freedom of civil society everywhere to perform its invaluable role in societies; and to contribute to the rethinking our sector is undergoing in order to be fit for purpose in a rapidly changing context.

To this end, CONCORD will prioritise four fundamental ways of working from 2027 - our Fit for Purpose Practices.

**ENGAGE:** CONCORD believes that a considerable added value that it can offer in the coming period is that of a convenor, bringing together different voices to start (or continue) conversations about the knotty problems we grapple with in Europe. This will support us in developing and sharing our views, in learning, and in crafting our messages, but also in generating more shared wisdom. We will therefore engage with a wider range of stakeholders to bring together different perspectives and stimulate exchanges of views. We will also engage more meaningfully with our allies and partners around the world, practising radical collaboration and shifting power.

**CHALLENGE:** We will challenge ourselves to align with the times in all aspects of our work. The funding cuts and the shrinking civic space caught up with us suddenly, and we now need to adapt our mindsets, our ways of working, our models, our sources of funding. We also need to ensure that we are responding adequately to the calls from our partners to support locally led development and decolonisation. So the role we play must be beneficial both to the causes we espouse as well as to the people we wish to stand with and by.

**INFLUENCE:** CONCORD's soul lies in our joint ability to influence and bring about change in the European policy and programming context in line with our values. However, this is increasingly difficult in a situation of shrinking civic space and democratic backsliding. We will therefore redouble our efforts to think and plan strategically, long-term and systemically and to leverage power dynamics in order to drive change across our policy areas, but most particularly in fighting for and opening up civic space. We will combine this with engaging with a broader range of stakeholders.

**EVOLVE:** It is clear that the NGO sector needs to evolve, both in order to respond to the external environment, but also to be fit for purpose and impactful. CONCORD will act as a support

network for and with all members in this process. We will focus on opening up opportunities, forging connections across sectors and disciplines and providing moments for learning and exchange –whether through sharing of lived experience, skills and knowledge or through creating or sharing platforms and tools. We will experiment more ambitiously and learn from these efforts to constantly improve, seeking feedback from within our circles as well as from allies and partners. We will experiment in how we convey our messages to try to reach wider audiences and to connect meaningfully with the various stakeholders with whom we engage. In this way, we will become stronger, more resilient, and ever relevant.

These four Fit for Purpose Practices are embedded in our three strategic goals.

**CONCORD**

COLLECTIVE POWER. EUROPEAN ACTION. GLOBAL EQUALITY.