

EEA and Norway Grants: Active Citizens Fund

Romania

Summary Report from the Stakeholder Consultation

On **July 3, 2018 in Bucharest (Marshall Garden Hotel)**, a stakeholder consultation was organized to gather civil society stakeholders in Romania to:

- introduce the Active Citizens Fund in Romania under the EEA Grants funded by Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein¹.
- provide feedback to the design of the Active Citizens Fund in Romania.²
- discuss the main challenges in civil society in Romania of relevance to the programme and how to address these challenges through the fund.

The stakeholder consultation was jointly organized by the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO) - the Brussels based secretariat of the EEA and Norway Grants - and the Fund Operator for the Active Citizens Fund in Romania, a consortium of the Civil Society Development Foundation, Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation, Resource Center for Roma Communities, PACT Foundation and Frivillighet Norge (The Association of NGOs in Norway)³.

It should also be mentioned that this workshop was preceded by an online consultation, carried out from 13/06/2018 to 29/06/2018 (see "Observations and Feedback" below).

PARTICIPANTS

The consultation gathered 38 **representatives of Romanian non-governmental organizations**, working in the areas of support of the Active Citizens Fund. The majority of the participants represented networks/platform/coalitions of NGOs with members from all over the country, with diverse experience of operations (organizations that have long and relatively short timeline of operations), with different size according to their annual budget and personnel hired, working with diverse target groups (e.g. vulnerable groups, people with disabilities, Roma and other minorities as applicable, youth, volunteers). Small NGOs, working in remote areas were present, as well as other donors working on capacity building

¹ For more information about the fund and its objectives, see Annex 2 Invitation and Annex 4 Discussion Paper.

² For more information about the fund and its objectives, see Annex 2 Invitation and Annex 4 Discussion Paper.

³ Selected by the donors through an open and competitive tender process.

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and sustainability of the civil society sector. For more details on the participation, see Annex 3 (List of participants and organisers).

AGENDA AND PROCEEDINGS

An agenda for the meeting is provided in Annex 1. The participants received a **Discussion Paper** together with the invitation from the Fund Operator (see Annex 4). The Paper provided a brief overview of the Active Citizens Fund and outlined the Fund Operator's proposal regarding the main challenges to be addressed within the scope of the Active Citizens Fund. The Discussion Paper also invited the stakeholders to reflect on some open questions regarding issues at stake in the civil society sector and possible ways to address them through the upcoming programme.

The meeting was held in English and facilitated by the FMO with support from the Fund Operator through a mixture of group work and plenary sessions. The parallel group sessions were facilitated in English, while the discussions in the group work took place either in English or local language.

The meeting was opened by H.E Lise Nicoline Kleven Grevstad – Norwegian Ambassador to Romania, who underlined the importance of the civil society organizations work, the results achieved during the previous NGOs Funds, and the major role of the EEA and Norway grants in supporting civil society in Romania. The FMO and the FO briefly introduced the Active Citizens Fund, the consortium organisations and workshop participants, the outcomes and challenges in Romania identified by the FO as relevant for the fund, as well as the purpose of the meeting. Brief questions and answer sessions followed each intervention, giving the audience the chance to ask questions about the fund and the purpose of the meeting.

Participants were invited to break out into parallel working group sessions: in the first part of the meeting they split into two groups per Programme Outcome for the first three Outcomes, while in the second part, the fourth Outcome - Capacity building of the civil society (organisations and sector) was addressed by all participants, split in 6 groups. The groups discussed the proposals made by the Consortium, identified challenges/obstacles as needed, and propose possible ways to address them. The main findings were presented in plenary by the rapporteurs designated by each group, and the participants, FMO and FO representatives had the opportunity to ask questions and comment.

In addition, one cross-cutting concern, namely Youth Inclusion, was also brought to the participants' attention and taken into consideration during the sessions. For the session related to Outcome 4 capacity building of the CSO and the civil society sector, the work groups were invited to identify as well specific needs / particularities of the small / remote CSOs, large / central CSOs and CSO Sector.

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All proposals were written down (in English), for future reference in the planning process which is to lead up to the creation of the new programme. As presented below, significant issues were discussed throughout the day.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS RAISED IN THE CONSULTATION

Outcome 1: Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness

There were 15 participants (representing small grassroots NGOs working on community development, networks of community organizations, community foundations, local action groups, NGOs working with civic groups, watchdog NGOs, environmental NGOs, NGOs working on CSO capacity building) organized in two parallel working groups under the Outcome 1.

Participants reiterated the challenges identified in the Discussion Paper and pointed out specific issues related to population, authorities and media. As concerns the population, participants mentioned population lack of information on civic rights (especially outside big cities), low level of awareness and understanding of democratic values, gaps in civic participation between rural and urban areas, lack of functional participatory mechanisms, changes in society (migration of young and adults, demographic decline, increase of extremism, commune mentality “I cannot change anything”, fear in rural areas to have a voice, etc.) affecting the solidarity and leading to social division as concerns the rule of law & democracy theme, limited youth participation (to vote, to involve as volunteers), lack of quality leaders (including at communities level). As related to the authorities, it was mentioned the lack of quality of politics and special of decision makers, authorities’ lack of transparency at national and local levels, limited enforcement of environmental law, etc. Manipulation in mass media (with a large coverage of the population) and lack of investigative journalism were also mentioned as challenges. When it came to identify measures, participants in the Outcome 1 groups were more focused on activities dealing with CSOs capacity building and how the CSO sector could preserve its role and status (which were reflected in the specific section of this reports). One possible reason for this focus could be the fact that in the same day there were discussed and voted in the Economic and Social Council important amendments to the Government ordinance no. 26/2000 regarding the association and foundations, which could affect the functioning of the NGOs.

As solutions, participants mentioned investment in people through **civic education**, but going beyond information and transmission of knowledge, to communication for change, youth being reiterated as an important target group. They reiterated the need for NGOs to **brand democracy** (“making democracy cool!”), meaning to adapt the message to the diverse target groups, to make the information more attractive to population, more related to its needs, as well as to use the PR and new technologies in this endeavour.

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Fostering civic engagement and small/local initiatives by supporting citizen initiative groups, is another measure which will also help rebalance the rural-urban gap. **Supporting NGOs watchdog / monitoring / think-thank**, was considered a very important strategy of Programme. In this respect, participants agreed that is very important for NGOs to both **build constituency** (by boosting outreach, finding new allies in communities, as well as among business and public authorities, going out of the comfort zone, finding a balance between producing and selling content/to trigger change, support the process of integrating seniors in the active life of communities/society including bridges between young and 'old' generations) and **develop public/private partnership** (for example in providing educational programmes, development of decision-making mechanisms on local issues that would include NGOs and companies, etc.). Another measure was to **encourage/support long term strategic planning at all levels**, based on cross-sectoral cooperation and "secure" political buy-in to long-term strategies (model approaches at local/regional/national level).

Build leadership at different levels for different sector/ community group by promoting leadership "school" (long term programmes, coaching, materials, role models) was another important measure agreed under the Outcome 1, but also mentioned by participants under other Outcomes (especially in relation to youth and communities).

Outcome 2 Increased support for human rights

A number of 13 participants (representatives of networks/coalitions/federations and CSOs working on development, human rights, anti-discrimination, Roma, LGBT, migrants and refugees, gender equality, gender based violence, media organization) were organized in organized in two parallel working groups under the Outcome 2.

Participants discussed several challenges adding nuances/particularities to the gaps identified in the Discussion paper, such as: lack of funds for long term support for litigations and human rights initiatives; threats from illiberal politicians and conservative groups using human rights language against human rights; citizens lack of understanding and interest on human rights; human rights is disconnected to social inclusion and NGO service providers lack capacity to address human rights issues and advocate for their beneficiaries; vulnerable/underserved groups usually do not know that their rights are violated and/or lack capacity to get organized and fight for their rights; lack of understanding and involvement of authorities in human rights issues (such as reproductive health). Burn out of professionals and the need for NGOs increased capacity were emphasised by the participants.

Information and research on human rights issues was highlighted as an important action (mapping actors, identifying initiatives/strategies that works, human rights ignored; research/ reports on human rights in general, but also on specific topics such as reproductive health, gender, migrants, etc.).

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As strategic measures, the participants confirmed and underlined the importance of **long term funding (4 - 5 years) for human rights watchdog, advocacy and litigation** (strategic and case litigation) projects aimed at mainstreamed change. Also, it was mentioned the necessity to consolidate a **resource hub for NGOs on human rights** (sharing resources, centralizing resources, building partnership for existing resource, facilitation dialog with government and other public institutions), as well as to support professional development and resilience of NGOs and their workers (including burnout)

Changing attitudes through human rights education, public awareness and outreach was agreed as a strategic measure with a focus on the educational sector (including undergraduate, graduate and professional curricula) and politicians/public authorities. This should shape a human rights culture in Romania, attract more people in human rights work (with a focus on young people) and increase solidarity within and with vulnerable & discriminated groups. These groups should be supported to get organized for their rights, while integrated and coordinated services (legal, health, social, psychological) should be provided and developed to be later mainstreamed.

Cooperation with local/national authorities for development of public policies and law enforcement was considered crucial. **NGOs advocacy and monitoring activities** should be supported (for example on financing national strategies, externalizing social services towards NGOs, gender equality strategy, systemic approach involving collaboration of relevant ministries in building public policy that affect human rights, etc.). Participants underlined that the capacity of service providers to advocate for and with their clients should be developed and partnerships between service providers and advocacy NGOs supported. Issues of vulnerable groups should also be included in the areas of interests of activists "waves". Another important aspect was to ensure an **European touch for NGOs advocacy effort** for human rights, including by joining European networks.

Outcome 3 Vulnerable groups are empowered

The two parallel working groups addressing Outcome 3 were attended by a total of 13 representatives of networks/coalitions on education, children rights/protection, people with disabilities, people with rare disorders, social service providers, young NEET rights, other donors (UNICEF, Orange Foundation, Romanian Social Development Fund).

Participants agreed that **empowering vulnerable groups** to advocate for themselves is a strategic measure for the ACF, both at individual and community levels. This can include training, education, increase awareness on rights (access to rights, participation, social services), support for citizens (including vulnerable groups) in getting organized (i.e. civic groups), building pro-active attitudes (active citizenship), development of support networks at local level (community members, authorities, etc.).

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Participants mentioned as good practice some mini-grants programmes that were tested in several programmes at family (income generation) or community level. However, the financing rules of the programme cannot accommodate direct funding for such mini-grants.

Most NGOs provide social services without communicating with the authorities. Many NGOs Boards are reluctant to NGOs advocating for change towards authorities (i.e. Child's Ombudsman, sexual education, adoption). Therefore, a strategic direction of the ACF is to **support involvement of NGOs from different fields in advocating for policy change and coherent law enforcement at local & national level**. NGOs should build on existing institutional and policy framework and advocate for its coherence, integrated approach among different responsible local/national authorities/institutions, funding, allocation of qualified human resources especially for rural areas, etc. They should work in partnership, including with authorities, and build capacity at local level.

Participants emphasised the need to **support integrated services**. Moreover, a community development component needs to be added to actions that will focus on **developing services**: learning people to prioritize, have a voice and participate. Funds should allow for testing models, research of alternative public policies & advocacy.

Participants' highlighted two main groups that are most vulnerable/underserved: children and elderly. Proposed measures includes: **advocacy for children oriented public policies** (prioritising children as "disruptive" approach to poverty / vulnerability, ensuring access to early education and quality education, developing integrated approaches comprising education, health and social protection to support children, increasing/developing cooperation between stakeholders in order to put the children interest first) and **supporting active ageing** (activating elderly people in communities, involving them in voluntary activities, providing empowerment opportunities, awareness raising for transition from work to retirement) were .

The negative discourse related to vulnerable people and the costs associated to their assistance and support (sometimes propagated by the politicians) affects the solidarity in the Romanian society. Therefore it is important to address aspects related to **digital & media inclusion**, such as bridging media literacy, investing in critical thinking (with a focus on hate speech and fake news), monitoring and reacting to public discourse regarding vulnerable groups, reaching out easier to young people, changing mentality towards vulnerable groups (respect, focus on strengths, potential etc.) of several target groups (population, politicians, media, etc.). These aspects could be taken into consideration in complex projects related to empowering vulnerable groups, as well as part of the interventions under the Outcome 1 and Outcome 2.

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Norway **citizens fund**

Another measure is **income generation**, which, in the participants view, comprise job inclusion, support for adaptation to 4 (automation & future of jobs), job inclusion, as well as investment in jobs (as an added value), self-sustainability programmes and micro-grants.

Outcome 4 Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society (organisations and the sector)

All the 6 groups have worked in parallel and discussed capacity needs of the CSO organizations and the sector. FO presented five areas were the civil society organizations and the sector should increase capacity. Participants recognized the importance of these areas and added some of their own.

Participants agreed that CSOs **financial sustainability** should be improved and provided some examples on how to achieve this: by providing consultancy to NGOs on different areas related to sustainability, from developing new fundraising models and diversification of funding, alternative funding/subcontracting of services from the state, increasing the efficiency of social enterprises, etc.

Development of internal governance was recognized as a very important area, especially in relation to financial training & procedures, overcoming bureaucratic/ legal compliance issues (e.g. GDPR), efficient management (including human resources and volunteers management), coherence (mission), internalization of principles, transparency, as well as building leadership at different levels for different sector/community group by promoting leadership “school” (long term programmes). Development and implementation of quality standards, public (assumed) sets of ethics on how to do/ communicate (as a NGO) about a specific issue are aspects considered relevant at sector level.

Improving of NGOs communication and visibility was approached from different angles by participants, reflecting the importance of this capacity building area. In general, NGOs should improve capacities to use open source tools, content creation (video techniques, data visualisation, capture stories and share them with the public), develop large public campaigns, work with digital tools (e.g. social media, websites), adapt the message to any interested part (decision makers, vulnerable groups). To this end, large NGOs should develop partnerships with media / branding agencies, develop internal human resources for strategic communication, focus more on results, while small NGOs should collaborate with large organizations to develop their abilities to make their activity visible.

The need for CSO infrastructure development was agreed by the participants who pointed out to **supporting proficiency in non-profits management**. This would include **skills development** (in policy making, development of integrated services, impact assessment, research to inform activities and policies, human rights, developing micro grant schemes either entrepreneurship based or community & school based etc.), **NGOs capacity to use the new technologies to innovate the sector/services** (outreach, digital literacy for beneficiaries to learn about existing opportunities, look for a job, etc.), which was a specific area identified during consultations. There were mentioned **areas in which NGOs**

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activity that needs to be improved, such as **youth work** (capacity building in order to use youth workers in rural/small urban area), **community development** (working with local stakeholders,), **human rights** (working with teachers and students; creation / expansion of effective grassroots human rights professionals such as community organizers, paralegal, mediators etc). Some actions that should be supported included funding activities in areas mentioned above, trainings, study visits, mentoring and coaching between experienced and non-experienced NGOs, partnerships between small and large NGOs, identifying and sharing best practices, etc.

Supporting CSOs platforms/networks/coalitions long-term strategies and core funding for human rights CSOs was agreed by the participants as important measures to be taken by the Programme. This would support long term strategic planning with increased impact, allow for rapid interventions considering the legislative changing environment, human rights violation, etc. Participants also mentioned the need for an emergency fund, but the NGOs expectations related to direct funding based on request cannot be met due to the requirements of open calls. The need to support litigations was also emphasised (there are few pro-bono lawyers and there is a limited no of hours that can be provided pro-bono).

The need for **networking and partnership** within CSO sector and with public and private stakeholders was recognized as relevant under all the outcomes. Better understanding of the policy cycle, of how entrepreneurship/business/media thinks, would increase CSOs capacity to better communicate with them, advocate, attract supporters, funding, etc. Transfer of expertise between large and small/inexperienced CSOs, human rights and social services CSOs, advocacy and other CSOs was considered important to develop the CSO infrastructure in underserved areas (such as rural/small urban, human rights, advocacy, etc). Develop regional hubs/social labs to facilitate networking and sharing experiences with CSOs (peer learning), public authorities, business, community members, as well as development of resource platforms (online and offline) with information, pool of key experts, etc were also largely supported by the participants. **Networking at european and regional level** was considered important, participants mentioning the importance of the CSOs presence in European networks, as well as participation in european/regional networking events (such as the Civil Society Forum).

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OBSERVATIONS AND FEEDBACK

The stakeholder consultation provided the space for participants to interact, share ideas, debate and agree on main civil society concerns and expectations related to the Programme. The conclusions from the working groups broadly validated the challenges identified by the Consortium and the proposed outcomes. The inputs provided by the participants were very relevant, although some ideas were more related to project ideas, or ideal situations or actions that could be taken by the authorities.

The results of the evaluation form distributed to the participants at the end of the consultation show that 96.4% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that it was easy to provide their thoughts and inputs and their opinion was heard and taken into account during the consultation process, confirming that the consultation was well organized and facilitated. All the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the atmosphere in the room was one of openness, listening and respect, sharing ideas being the main preoccupation of the participants. The feed-back forms revealed that the participants understood the purpose of the consultation, that it was a meaningful participation to the process of establishing the strategic directions of the Active Citizen Fund. The feedback revealed the participants needs for more in depth meetings and discussions over some priority topics (such as CSO financial sustainability, good governance, transparency, etc.).

A web based survey was launched prior to the stakeholder consultation workshop to allow to all interested parties to provide inputs. The Discussion paper was shared and the CSOs were invited to provide written answers. A number of 117 responses were submitted and analysed, showing a high level of agreement with the challenges identified by the Consortium as well as the programme focus and modalities, as presented in the Discussion paper. The report of the web based survey was made available online on the Consortium partners' websites.

NEXT STEPS

By mid-November 2018, the FO and the FMO will work together to see how to best integrate the inputs from the consultation and the survey into the required programme documents that the FO will submit to the FMO and the donors – a results framework and a concept note. Once the programme implementation starts, the FO will publically announce re-granting opportunities (in terms of calls for proposals).

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Attachments to the summary report:

1. Agenda of the stakeholder consultation
2. Invitation letter
3. List of participants and organisers
4. Discussion Paper

Active Citizens Fund Romania.
Stakeholder Consultation 3rd July 2018.

Agenda

09:00 – 09:30:	Registration.
09:30 – 10:00:	Welcome & Introductions.
10:00 – 10:45:	Group Exercise – Review outcomes & challenges.
10:45 – 11:00:	Refreshments.
11:00 – 12:15:	Group Exercise – Identify programme activities.
12:15 – 13:15:	Plenary – report back from group exercise.
13:15 – 14:00:	Lunch.
14:00 – 15:15:	Group Exercise – identify capacity needs.
15:15 – 15:45:	Refreshments.
15:45 – 16:45:	Plenary – report back from group exercise.
16:45 – 17:00:	Closing & Next Steps.

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Active Citizens Fund in Romania
EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021
Invitation for the Stakeholders Consultation Workshop

The Financial Mechanism Office and the Consortium of the Civil Society Development Foundation, Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation, Resource Center for Roma Communities, PACT Foundation and Frivillighet Norge (The Association of NGOs in Norway) have the honor to invite you to **“The Stakeholders Consultation Workshop” concerning the Active Citizens Fund (ACF) in Romania.**

Funded by EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021, the Active Citizen Fund in Romania (with an allocation of Euro 46,000,000) has the objective: “Civil society and active citizenship strengthened and vulnerable groups empowered”.

The Workshop will take place on **July 3, 2018**, during **9:00 to 17:00**, at **Hotel Marshall Garden** (Calea Dorobantilor nr. 50B, Sector 1, Bucharest), Sala Panoramic 1. The participation is required for the whole duration of the Workshop to ensure the coherence of the consultation process. Please confirm your participation at the workshop [here](#), no later than 22nd June 2018.

The purpose of the Workshop is to analyze, together with stakeholders representing the areas covered by the ACF, the challenges identified at the level of civil society and NGOs in Romania, and ways to address them through the program.

On June 13, 2018, the Consortium made available to all organizations a Supporting Document for stakeholder consultation that outlined the main challenges identified at country level and expected program-level results, which can be consulted [HERE](#). We invite you to read this document in preparation of the participation to the Workshop. Also, organizations were invited to express their opinion through an [online survey](#) on the structure of the program and to propose ways to achieve the desired impact. The results of the online survey and the workshop debates will underpin the further development of the ACF program in Romania.

We would like to draw your attention on the fact that the objective of the stakeholder consultation workshop is not to present the concrete NGO project ideas; neither is it intended to be a space for consultations on funding opportunities within Active Citizens Fund.

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Logistical details: From organizational reasons, the participation is limited to 50 participants, respectively one participant from an invited organization. The working language is English. Coffee breaks and lunch are provided by the organizers. The transportation and accommodation costs are not covered.

For any information please contact Dalisa Strugariu at dalisa.strugariu@fdsc.ro, tel. 021 310 01 81.

Yours sincerely,

Active Citizens Fund in Romania
EEA AND NORWAY GRANTS 2014-2021
STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANISERS

NGOs

Anti-discrimination Coalition, Accept Association	Florin Buhuceanu
ActiveWatch Association	Mircea Toma
Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania – the Helsinki Committee (APADOR CH)	Georgiana Gheorghe
Association for Community Relations	Madalina Marcu
Association Traditions Education Culture Gaujani	Cornelia Enache
Breaking the Silence on Sexual Violence Network, ALEG Association	Irina Costache
Center for Legal Resources	Georgiana Iorgulescu
Citizens' Rights Protection Network , Resource Center for Public Participation CeRe	Oana Preda
Climate Change Action Network Romania, Foundation TERRA Milenium III	Lavinia Andrei
Coalition for Education Federation , C4C Communication for Community Association	Daniela Visoianu
Coalition for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees, The Romanian Association for Health Promotion	Luciana Elena Lazarescu
Community Foundations Federation	Ciprian Paius

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D.E.P.(Development-Evolution-Partnership) Association
Bumbesti-Jiu
Dizabnet Federation
Federation of Non-governmental Organisations for Social Services - FONSS
Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations Active on Child Protection - FONPC
Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Development in Romania - FOND, Society of contraceptive and sexual education
Future Impact Association Caracal
Gender Equality Coalition, Society for Feminist Analysis AnA
Initiative for a Clean Justice, Association Expert Forum
Media Organisations Convention, Center for Independent Journalism
National Alliance for Rare Diseases - ANBRaRo, Prader Willi Romania Association
National Federation of Local Action Groups - FNGAL
Natura2000 Romania Coalition, ProPark Foundation for Protected Areas
Network for Prevention and Combating Violence against Women , FILIA Center
NGOs Coalition for Young NEET Rights , Social Doers
Open Data Coalition, Association Funky Citizens
Orange Foundation
Roma Democrat Federation - FEDER
Romanian Angel Appeal Foundation
Romanian-American Foundation
RuralNet Network, Civitas Foundation for Civil Society - Cluj Napoca Branch
Save the Children Romania Organisation
SOS Children Villages Romania Association
The Princess Margareta of Romania Foundation
TransylvaNet , Mihai Eminescu Trust Foundation

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Michaela Turk

Fund operated by:



VOLUM Federation
 WWF Danube Carpathian Programme Romania

Anca Nastase
 Oana Mondoc

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

UNICEF Romania
 FRDS - Romanian Social Development Fund
 Ministry of Justice

Corina Popa
 Mihaela Peter
 Diana Popescu

OBSERVERS

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 Royal Norwegian Embassy
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Civil Society Development Foundation
Civil Society Development Foundation
Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation
Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation
Resource Center for Roma Communities
PACT Foundation
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Frivillighet NO (The Association of NGOs in Norway)

Iuliana Rada
Dalisa Strugariu
Laszlo Potozky
Csilla Daniel
Florin Moisa
Gabriela Stanciu
Madalina Ene
Guri Idsø Viken

ACTIVE CITIZENS FUND IN ROMANIA DISCUSSION PAPER FOR STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION EEA AND NORWAY GRANTS 2014-2021

1. THE EEA GRANTS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

Support to civil society is a key priority for the **EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021**¹, funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway in 15 EU Member States in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics. Ten percent of the total country allocations is set aside for a **programme for civil society** in each beneficiary state. The **Active Citizens Fund** is established under the priority sector ‘Culture, Civil Society, Good Governance and Fundamental Rights and Freedoms’, one of five priority sectors agreed between the donors and the European Union. The fund shall **contribute to the overall objectives of the EEA and Norway Grants, to reduce economic and social disparities, and to strengthen bilateral relations between the beneficiary and donor states.**

The **objective** of the Active Citizens Fund is: “Civil society and active citizenship strengthened and vulnerable groups empowered”. The fund shall seek to **develop the long-term sustainability and capacity of the civil society sector**, strengthening its role in **promoting democratic participation, active citizenship and human rights**. The following Areas of Support are eligible:

- Democracy, active citizenship, good governance and transparency
- Human rights and equal treatment through combating any discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity
- Social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups

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- Gender equality and gender-based violence (GBV)
- Environment and climate change

2. THE ACTIVE CITIZENS FUND IN ROMANIA

The allocation to the Active Citizens Fund (ACF) in Romania is EUR 46,000,000. **The Consortium between the Civil Society Development Foundation, Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation, Resource Center for Roma Communities, PACT Foundation and Frivillighet Norge (The Association of NGOs in Norway) have been appointed by the FMOⁱⁱ as Fund Operator in an open and competitive tender process and will be responsible for the development and implementation the fund.**

In light of the importance of feedback from the civil society stakeholders in shaping the ACF in Romania, this Discussion Paper outlines the main challenges identified in the country and invites stakeholders to reflect on ways to address these challenges to obtain impact through the fund.

3. PROGRAMME RELEVANCE AND JUSTIFICATION

The low level of citizens' political participation, the underdevelopment of the political culture, as well as weaknesses in governance are among the main issues related to democracy in Romania. They are reflected by the decreasing score of Romania in the [2017 Democracy Index](#) (ranked 64th, with a mark of 6.44 out of 10) corresponding to "flawed democracy"; the low participation ([39.49%](#) [in the 2016 parliamentary elections](#)) and high youth abstention (over 70% of 18-24 years old); the lack of interest in political engagement of nearly half of young people (2016 Ministry of Youth [research](#)); the slow improvement of citizens' involvement as volunteers in Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from 4% in 2010 to 7% in 2016, while only 29% of CSOs registered new members in 2015 ([2017 CSDF NGO sector research](#)). Civic and human rights education remains limited, as 72% of Romanians admit to be not well informed about their rights, while 80% consider that their civil rights are being infringed (national [survey](#)).

Several threats to environmental protection are not treated as a priority by government or by citizens: **environmental law enforcement is still insufficient** and **citizens' eco-consciousness is limited** - 47% consider that protecting the environment is important for them and only 36% consider that climate change is one of the most important environmental issues ([Eurobarometer](#) 2017).

Discrimination, hate speech and social exclusion largely affect Roma, persons with disabilities, women, LGBTI, etc., who continue to face **barriers in achieving their human rights**. [UN HR Council Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and HR](#), [CEDAW](#), [Amnesty International](#) point to negative stereotypes in the public space, limited information on rights and enforcing mechanisms, institutional discriminatory practices (such as police brutality and forced eviction towards Roma, precarious living conditions for

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people with disabilities in psychiatric institutions), gaps in policies and law enforcement, and need for improvement in the national independent institutions.

Various groups of women (Roma, migrant, rural, women with disabilities, older women) are disproportionately affected by poverty and exclusion, trafficking in persons, labour/sexual exploitation. In 2016, women represented 76% of domestic violence reports registered by the police, as well as 77.5% of victims of trafficking ([National Agency against Trafficking in Persons](#)). Thus, several challenges persist in relation to gender in Romania: **gender based violence (GBV)**, especially domestic violence, is widespread and sustained by gender role stereotypes; access to sexual and reproductive health and rights needs improvement; legislation needs to be strengthened to address all types of GBV (such as marital rape), encourage reporting of violence and protect victims (including access to shelters), as well as to ensure **gender equality**.

Major challenges remain in terms of progress reaching vulnerable groups largely affected by poverty and social exclusion (38.8% of the population, 49.2% of children and 44.3% of youth aged 18-29 years - [Eurostat](#), 2016). Over 50% of the Roma are in rural areas, face poor housing, poor access to public services, low community involvement, lack of employment opportunities ([2017 SOCIOROMAP research](#)). The persistent poverty and extensive inequalities have significant effects on the achievement of the **social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups**. There were identified several barriers such as: rural-urban gap in social services offer; underdevelopment of support services for specific needs (e.g. disabilities, addictions, etc.); limited involvement of local authorities, communities and vulnerable groups in implementing innovative solutions to reduce inequalities; focus of State support on cash benefits as opposed to active measures such as community services.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are well placed to support a shift towards an active civil society that challenges discriminatory social norms and pushes authorities to respect democracy and human rights. To this end, the **CSO sector needs to increase its capacity in several areas**: financial sustainability, communication and visibility in society, internal governance, limited infrastructure (in terms of number of CSOs and capacity) to cover **key under-served areas**, such as rural/small urban communities, youth, civic activity and environmental advocacy.

To strengthen the civil society and active citizenship and empower vulnerable groups, the ACF will build on the positive learning and achievements of the previous NGO Fund 2009-2014 to ensure continuity and wider impact.

Under the **Outcome 1 Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness**, ACF focus will be to build on the 2017 momentum, when massive anti-corruption street protests took place nation-wide and also on the development of hundreds of civic groups, to which the previous NGO Fund contributed.

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Innovative ways to involve citizens in public decision-making processes and in holding public institutions/authorities accountable and transparent will be supported, including in the field of the environmental protection and climate change. CSOs will be supported to organize civic and human rights (HR) educational activities, awareness campaigns for the general public, and to involve citizens in advocacy campaigns. Building on the previous positive experience, the ACF will support coalitions/networks in all relevant fields of activity. Co-operation between experienced CSOs active in the civic area and CSOs specialized in other fields (i.e. environment and climate change, education, community development etc.) will be fostered to achieve results in citizens' activation, strengthening democracy, good governance, transparency, environment and climate change. This will also facilitate reaching out to under-served rural and small urban areas. Youth civic participation will be a priority.

Under the **Outcome 2 Increased support for human rights**, ACF focus will be to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and support positive changes in attitudes and practices related to **human rights (HR), including gender equality (GE) and gender based violence (GBV)**. HR CSOs will be supported and encouraged to involve media in awareness campaigns for the public on specific HR issues; citizens and non-HR CSOs will be enabled to report and challenge discrimination/hate speech in public space/HR violations; while discriminated citizens will be empowered.

Under the **Outcome 3 Vulnerable groups are empowered**, ACF envisages a multi-stakeholder approach: CSO will ensure connectivity between community members, business, decision-makers, public services staff and under-served vulnerable groups to enhance **social justice and inclusion of vulnerable groups**. CSOs will activate and empower vulnerable groups to know/claim their rights, to be proactive and access available services, demand the authorities to develop services, act for vulnerable peers, increase their resilience, coping mechanisms, skills and abilities to integrate (in education, employment, etc.), participate in community life and in public policy decisions. **Roma and youth inclusion will be a priority and benefit from a special financial allocation as they are the most affected by exclusion/inequalities.**

The ACF focus through the **Capacity Building Outcome 4** will be to support:

- **CSO infrastructure** (in terms of number and capacity of CSOs) **will be strengthened to better support outcomes in key under-served areas**, such as rural/small urban communities, youth, civic and human rights activity and environmental advocacy. ACF plans stronger outreach to regions with lower levels of activism or CSOs presence (i.e. North East, South) and extended access for grassroots and **under-served small/inexperienced CSOs predominantly in rural or small urban areas**
- **Financial sustainability of CSOs will be developed** as currently CSOs continue to be dependent on foreign and public funding.
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- **The relationship between civil society and public authorities will be further improved as this remains problematic in terms of transparency and mutual trust and CSOs will be supported to engage in policy work.** Institutional support for CSOs coalitions/platforms and human rights CSOs will be available through ACF.
- **Improved communications and visibility** is needed to ensure citizens' trust and support for CSOs and demonstrate CSOs value and contribution to society. This could also help increase interest in CSOs activities and spread information to potential target groups, who may be unaware of the opportunities presented by CSOs.

The above information, as well as the challenges to be addressed and the main target groups identified for each of the outcomes are presented below. Stakeholders are invited to evaluate the challenges and propose solutions (outputs). Input from the stakeholders will feed into the programme development.

4. PROGRAMME FOCUS

	Challenge/problem	Desired outcome	Direct target groups (intermediaries)	End beneficiaries	Proposed solutions (outputs)
1	Deficient education on democratic values and human rights, limited citizens' eco-consciousness, low civic participation, low trust in political institutions, underdevelopment of political culture, weaknesses in governance	Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness	Representatives of institutions & authorities at all levels, politicians, teachers, media, informal groups	Citizens, in particular citizens from rural/small urban areas, youth, volunteers, activists	OPEN FOR STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION
2	Discrimination, negative stereotypes in the public space, gaps in policies and law enforcement, low empowerment of vulnerable groups	Increased support for human rights	Representative of institutions & authorities at all levels, especially law enforcement and staff in institutions (teachers, health specialists, etc.), politicians, journalists, students, business, citizens, particularly from rural/small urban areas, community members, etc.	Children at risk, Roma, persons with disabilities, HIV/AIDS, women, domestic violence survivors, LGBTI, prisoners, refugees/migrants, etc.	
3	Large categories of population at risk of or affected by poverty, social	Vulnerable groups are	Representative of institutions & authorities at	People at risk of poverty or social	

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	exclusion and extensive inequalities due to 1) limitations in support service provision and 2) low empowerment of vulnerable groups	empowered	all levels (especially at local level), community members, business, academia, journalists, citizens from rural/small urban areas, community members, etc.	exclusion, living in marginalized areas, children and youth at risk, Roma, people with disabilities, elderly, addicted persons, refugees / migrants, etc.	
4	CSOs have limited financial sustainability, low visibility in society, weak internal governance (transparency, accountability, membership/volunteers retention, establishment of strategic direction capacity to generate young leaders etc.), limited CSO infrastructure (rural/small urban, youth, civic and HR activity, environmental advocacy)	Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society (organisations and the sector)	CSOs (in particular CSOs with lower capacity and sustainability, networks & coalitions, human rights CSOs, think tanks), citizens, business, media, institutions at all levels	CSOs (in particular, small CSOs), CSO experts, young leaders, informal groups	

5. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

- Challenges:** What are the main challenges that remain inadequately addressed by national or EU funding in your organisation's area of work?
- Proposed solutions:** What are the most appropriate solutions to address the identified challenges?
- Youth inclusion:** How can the programme engage young people as active citizens that contribute to address the identified challenges?
- Capacity building:** In your opinion, what are the main capacity deficits of civil society organisations and the civil society sector in Romania?

ⁱ For further information about the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021, see www.eeagrants.org

ⁱⁱ Financial Mechanism Office (FMO), the Brussels-based secretariat for the EEA and Norway Grants.

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