

Regional Civil Society Initiatives Plan for ACF Poland

Consultations

Together with the Active Citizens Fund – Regional (ACF – R), the Active Citizens Fund – National (“ACF – N” or the “Programme”) is dedicated to civil society organisations in Poland. In addition, the Programme provides Regional Civil Society Initiatives which are aimed at strengthening regional (between Beneficiary States) cooperation within the civil sector.

In order to increase the Plan’s potential and generate as many ideas and opinions from all of the Programme’s stakeholders, the following were consulted on the draft of the Regional Civil Society Initiatives Plan for ACF - National Poland (RCSIP):

- the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and the Icelandic Centre for Human Rights
- three representatives of the Financial Mechanism Office (FMO)
- the consortium managing the ACF – N in Poland (Fund Operator – FO)
- bilateral and regional cooperation coordinator of the ACF – R in Poland
- the team and Board of the consortium leader – Stefan Batory Foundation.

The document contains the feedback and suggestions given at the consultation meetings.

This RCSI has been heavily influenced by the COVID-19 outbreak and unstable situation when it comes to the security measures, travel planning and possibility of organising events other than online. For this reason, there are substitute ideas for all of the activities described, but also plans for cooperation need to be regularly updated.

Results and indicators

Thanks to the “Community in action” initiative, we have achieved the following indicators (under the result “Strengthening regional (transnational) cooperation within the civil sector”) :

Number of initiatives jointly implemented by entities across borders: 1 (out of 3 planned in the Programme), number of CSOs participating in regional cooperation: 26 (out of the 250 target). Number of participants in events funded by the Regional Civil Society Initiatives Fund: 187 (out of the 500 target). As the first regional partnerships have now started implementing their projects (and since 2 out of 4 calls of proposals were finalised), we could not carry out research to show progress in achieving the following result: minimum 50% of share of CSOs with improved knowledge from regional cooperation.

The target groups of the RCSI are:

- Project Promoters and Grant Applicants representing Polish civil society organisations
- civil society organizations (and other eligible entities) from the Beneficiary States and countries neighbouring Poland outside the EEA.

Strategic areas, measures and principles

Strategic areas:

Common and individual challenges and needs of the civic societies in Beneficiary States, such as the shrinking space for civic society and threats or pandemic circumstances show how important it is to harness the information, strength and creativity of the FOs and their underlying ACF programmes in order to strengthen and empower civil society both in their countries and in the region.

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For this reason, we will strive to ensure that regional cooperation is closely connected to the ongoing analysis and collective intuition of FOs. The Beneficiary States will seek synergies and complementarities between their activities both under regional and bilateral cooperation. Possible thematic areas noted so far as interesting and needed by more than one FO are:

- borderlands/ and cross-border cooperation;
- Belarus – supporting civil society organisations in Belarus and Belarussians who decided to move to the neighbouring Beneficiary States;
- advocacy processes at EU level using the know-how and expertise of all FOs and their motivation built by participating in the “community for action” initiative (e.g. EESC nomination procedures, Rights&Values EC programme, media ownership monitor);
- other issues connected to the ACF values and Programme priorities but also socio-political situation in Poland and in the region are: human rights, women’s rights and gender equality, empowerment, mobilisation of young people for participation in democracy, documenting and counteracting radicalisation, hate speech and fake news.

Measures:

- “Community for action” – initiative - started by FOs from Croatia, Poland and Romania in 2020 (based on the idea formulated at the meeting in 2019). The main aims of the initiative are:
 - to create a space for long-term reflection, trust, solidarity and care for human rights/civil society values, exchanging know-how,
 - empower civil society in ACF Beneficiary States,
 - create a pool of shared resources and jointly reflect on civil society development in the region.

The main activities of the initiative meetings of all FOs, which have been held monthly since July 2020. Each meeting is co-hosted by a different FO and the subject is based on the survey conducted in August 2020 (FOs submitted topics/challenges important for them and then voted for the most urgent/interesting for them – the order was determined by the vote counts). Apart from the lectures (delivered by invited experts), discussions and workshops on the main topic of each meeting, there is also a current affairs section which gives FOs the opportunity to share information about the socio-political situation in their countries. The topics of the meetings organised in 2020 were: capacity building activities in the ACF programmes (topic hosted by the ACF from Portugal), countering radicalisation/fundamentalisation of society and the civic sector (ACF Croatia), diversity of funding sources for the civic society sector (ACF Poland), and strategic litigation (ACF Romania).

Since there are still FOs who have ideas for the meetings and who wish to co-organise future meetings (already submitted subjects refer to initiatives responding to the pandemic situation or other challenges connected with ACF implementation) and other FOs who want to participate, the online meetings and common learning idea will definitely be continued. However, in order to provide initiative implementation of the best quality and to develop the cooperation and know-how influx, a strategic workshop has been planned for all FOs to decide together on the next steps.

- Research on nomination procedures for the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. The need for the research was identified at the “Community for action” meetings and was established and launched as a separate initiative. The research itself is aimed at identifying good practices and devising new policy solutions that could be scaled up at EU level for a more accessible, autonomic, fair, transparent and representative process of identifying the future civil society representatives in the 2025-2030 mandate. The initiator and organiser of the research is a coalition of these following organisations:
 - European Civic Forum,
 - Foundation for the Development of Civil Society (Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societatii Civile) – member of the FO from Romania,
 - Solidarity - Foundation for Human Rights and Solidarity (Solidarna - zaklada za ljudska prava i solidarnost) – member of the FO from Croatia,
 - CNVOS - Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs (Zavod center za informiranje, sodelovanje in razvoj nevladnih organizacij) from Slovenia,
 - Stefan Batory Foundation (Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego) – member of the FO from Poland,
 - Shipyard Foundation (Pracownia Badań i Innowacji Społecznych „Stocznia”) – member of the FO from Poland.The initiators of the research hope that it will help to reduce undue governmental interference in the EESC nomination process for civil society representatives and will help to make the EESC nomination process transparent, inclusive, accessible and fair in line with the EU standards and the best practices on civil society participation. The research is meant to be published in 2021.
- study visits for representatives of organisations from Poland to Beneficiary States and/or representatives of entities from Beneficiary States to Poland (if travel and group activities are not allowed, study tours will be organised online) - so far the idea is to organise together with the Lithuanian FO a meeting near the Polish-Lithuanian border for Polish and Lithuanian Project Promoters dealing in their countries with ethnic and national minority inclusion. Hopefully, the idea will attract interest among other FOs from neighbouring countries and a meeting on the border for Project Promoters will be organized with entities from other countries bordering Poland. Other possible themes for study tours have been presented in the strategic areas section:

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- borderland/border areas and dialogue beyond borders
 - Programme priority topics (dialogue beyond divisions, monitoring and evaluation, self-advocacy),
 - women rights/gender equality,
 - response to climate change at local and national level,
 - grassroots initiatives/activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic,
 - support for vulnerable groups,
 - multisectoral cooperation;
- Participation in meetings/ events with an FMO and/ or other ACF Operators – in order to be aware of other FOs’ activities/needs and current socio-political situation analyses
 - job-shadowing/internship (possibly 1 month) in organisations from Beneficiary States for Polish civil society organisations (with a possible option of organising this the other way round – for representatives of Beneficiary State organisations in Polish CSOs/Project Promoters) – idea to be discussed and carefully planned in order to organise it in a fair, accessible, participatory and diverse way (since there are limited slots for the internship/job shadowing, the FO will provide clear and transparent rules on who is eligible for this unique development opportunity). Possible themes for job-shadowing/internship have been presented in the “Strategic areas” section and will be based also on the participants’ needs and host entity’s capacity;
 - evaluation plan – regular surveys and other research tools aimed at collecting data, gathering feedback on achieving Programme Regional Civil Society Initiatives outputs and indicators, and providing a space for sharing suggestions and proposals for initiatives;
 - Regional Civil Society Initiatives promotion – diverse tools to deliver knowledge and at the same time encourage regional cooperation/improve implementation of bilateral cooperation:
 - regular Facebook posts (on regional and bilateral issues) available on the Programme’s Facebook profile: <https://www.facebook.com/funduszaktywniobywatele>. The posts contain information on the golden practices of civil society organisations’ initiatives from Beneficiary States or on important events for them, aimed at delivering knowledge and enhancing cooperation with entities from Beneficiary States in an accessible way;
 - cookbook (online and printed) with recipes for national dishes from both Donor and Beneficiary States and for good international cooperation between their civic society representatives – the cookbook initiative is aimed to promote international cooperation and to make it more attractive and accessible. In addition, the printed version will be sent to all CSOs and FOs who participated in the cookbook initiative (and shared their recipes for dishes and for good cooperation) as an incentive;
 - films/reportages on regional partnerships.

Principles

- collective management – the initiative “Community for action” is meant to be collectively managed in a participatory way in order to create a space of trust and common learning;
- all activities are possibly tailor-made for the current needs of civil society organisations/Project Promoters/Grant Applicants both in Poland and other Beneficiary States;
- participation in each event is carefully evaluated in order to gather feedback and measure the indicators but also to provide a safe space for interaction and suggesting change/initiatives;
- priority to participate in the events/activities organised by the FO will be given to those representatives of regional cooperation target groups who are less experienced in international cooperation and have less opportunity to participate in international capacity building activities in general;
- equality in the regional partnership – encouraging both parties to agree on two-way exchange and to find challenges/topics/needs in which each party can be both the giver and the receiver in order to create a space for common learning.
- quality of regional partnerships and exchange of knowledge/experience between them;
- support for organisations with little experience in regional/international cooperation;
- creating a network of organisations that learn from each other and support each other (within the "Community for action" initiative);
- all activities will be discussed and planned with the ACF – R in Poland in order to enable comprehension and to maximise the expected results.

Lessons learned so far

- The COVID-19 outbreak showed that nothing can ever be fully planned. For this reason, this RCSIP contains also “empty slots” for (grassroot) initiatives and activities that are submitted by Project Promoters or/and FO consortium member organisations or other FOs, or based on their needs that arise later in ACF – N implementation.

Overview of planned measures

Brief description of provisional bilateral cooperation activity	Implementing Entity	(Geographic) location of activities	Target group	Other partners, where relevant	Estimated budget
“Community for action” – initiative 2021-2024	Initiative’s initiators	online and then according to needs	FOs from Beneficiary States	According to needs	app. EUR 1000
research on nomination procedures for the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels 2021	Research initiators	online and then according to needs	FOs from Beneficiary States, EU agencies	According to needs	App. EUR 1000 euro
study visits 2021-2024	FOs engaged in cooperation	according to needs	Project Promoters from Beneficiary States	According to needs	App. EUR 100 000 euros
job-shadowing/internship 2021-2024	FOs engaged in cooperation	according to needs	Project Promoters from Beneficiary States	According to needs	App. EUR 50 000 euros

evaluation plan 2021-2024	FO	N/A	N/A	N/A	App. EUR 10 000
regional civil society initiatives promotion 2021-2024	FO	N/A	N/A	CSOs from both Donor and Beneficiary States	App. EUR 10 000
Participation in meetings/ events with FMO and/ or other ACF Operators 2021-2024	FOs engaged in cooperation	according to needs	CSOs from Beneficiary States	According to needs	App. EUR 10 000
regional initiative put forward by the FO Consortium/Project Promoters 2021-2024	FOs engaged in cooperation	according to needs	according to idea	According to needs	App. EUR 20 000 euro