

THE MECHANISM OF SUPPORT FOR BILATERAL AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES ON COMPETENCES/EXPERIENCE/KNOWLEDGE/KNOW-HOW SHARING

Invitation to apply

1. THE OVERVIEW OF THE MECHANISM

The EEA Financial Mechanism 2014 – 2021 is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway with the aim to contribute to more equal Europe – both socially and economically – and to strengthen bilateral relations between Donor States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

In the context of the Active Citizens Fund the operational definition of ‘strengthened bilateral relations’ accentuates enhanced cooperation and improved mutual knowledge and understanding between the Donor States and Poland. Bilateral cooperation activities are also expected to make a positive contribution to the general objectives of the Active Citizens Fund Programme - namely ‘civil society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered’.

At the same time the Active Citizens Fund Program aims to promote regional exchange and networking, with particular emphasis on sharing knowledge and good practices in strengthening civil society in all the Beneficiary States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia).

The mechanism of support for bilateral and regional initiatives is aimed at supporting **know-how/experience exchange between entities from Poland and other Donor and Beneficiary States or Ukraine**, that can take the following forms:

- internship (a professional learning experience that offers meaningful, practical work related to a civil society organisation’s interest),
- job-shadowing (a professional learning experience that offers the observing of a person at work by someone who is interested in a similar career/position),
- other forms of know-how/experience exchange such as study trips, training (for both teams), mentoring etc.

Funding under the mechanism is available for NGOs that are established and registered in Poland and do take at least some of their statutory actions related to the goals of the ACF Programme outside of the city of Warsaw.

Applications must be submitted **in partnerships with at least one entity from the Donor States, Beneficiary States or Ukraine.**

The allocation for the mechanism is:

- 36 000 EUR from the fund for bilateral relations,
- 25 000 EUR from the fund for regional civil society initiatives.

Applications can be submitted **from April 4th, from 12.00 (noon) CET, until April 30th, 2024, 12.00 (noon) CET.**

1.1. COMPLIANCE WITH BILATERAL AND REGIONAL OUTCOMES, OUTPUTS AND INDICATORS

All proposals submitted under this mechanism must comply with the Active Citizens Fund Program's Outcome for - respectively - Bilateral Cooperation (in case of initiatives with partners from Donor States) or Regional civil society initiatives (in case of initiatives with partners from Beneficiary States), AND contribute to a selected output.

The relevant outputs and output indicators established for the Bilateral Outcome "Enhanced collaboration between beneficiary and donor state entities involved in the Program" are displayed in the table below:

Bilateral outcome	Indicators
Enhanced collaboration between beneficiary and donor state entities involved in the Program	Level of satisfaction with the partnership
	Share of cooperating organizations that apply knowledge acquired from bilateral partnership
	Share of participants in bilateral initiatives funded by the Active Citizens Fund bilateral fund reporting improved knowledge/methods/approaches
Partnerships between beneficiary and donor state entities supported	Number of projects involving cooperation with a donor project partner
Cooperation between beneficiary and donor state entities facilitated through the ACF bilateral fund	Number of bilateral cooperation initiatives funded by the Active Citizens Fund bilateral fund
	Number of individuals participating in bilateral activities funded by the Active Citizens Fund bilateral fund

The relevant output and output indicator established for the Regional civil society initiatives “Strengthened regional (cross-border) cooperation in the civil society sector” is displayed in the table below:

Regional civil society initiatives outcome	Indicators
Strengthened regional (cross-border) cooperation in the civil society sector	Number of new or developed initiatives jointly implemented by entities across borders

2. AIMS OF THE MECHANISM

- Enhancing and strengthening cooperation and improve mutual knowledge and understanding between CSOs from Donor and Beneficiary States;
- Practising learning mobility, with special focus on internships/job-shadowing initiatives;
- Creating opportunities to improve the existing and/or acquire new practical skills in the areas of the organization's performance;
- Exchanging available work experience among the specialists in the relevant field;
- Applying new, more advanced work organization methods in order to improve practical training, management or other needed skills.

3. PROVISIONS OF THE MECHANISM OF SUPPORT FOR BILATERAL AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES

3.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Funding under this mechanism is available for **NGOs that are established and registered in Poland, and do take at least some of their statutory actions related to the goals of the ACF Programme outside of the city of Warsaw.**

More specifically, eligible Applicants (under both Active Citizens Fund-National and Active Citizens Fund-Regional) **should meet the following requirements:**

- they are registered with the National Court Register (KRS), entered into the register of ordinary associations or the register of Rural Housewives Circles maintained by the President of the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARiMR);
- they are independent¹ of local, regional and central authorities, public entities, political

¹ An entity is defined as dependent when local, regional or central authorities, public entities, political parties and/or for-profit entities have the direct or indirect right to appoint at least half of that entity's governing or supervisory body. If public authorities or a public entity (e.g. theatre or university) or a for-profit entity (e.g. bank or company) enjoy the right to determine at least half of the composition of the given entity's governing or supervisory body, then that entity is considered to be dependent on said institutions, which precludes that entity from standing as applicant for a grant. If an entity associates only public authorities, public and/or for-profit entities, such an entity is dependent on those public and for-profit entities, which precludes that entity from standing as applicant for a grant. If most members of a given entity

- parties and for-profit entities;
- they do not seek to generate profit, and – if they pursue business activity – any profit made is allocated to the objects and aims listed in their memorandum of association;
 - they act for the common good, not only to the benefit of its members²;
 - they act for the public interest, are driven by democratic values, and respect human rights;
 - no application for declaring bankruptcy has been filed against the Applicant, the Applicant is not in liquidation or receivership, has not suspended activity and there are no similar proceedings pending against the Applicant;
 - they are not in arrears with public-law payments payable to the Tax Office (US) or Social Insurance Institution (ZUS);
 - no governing body member of the Applicant has been convicted of an intentional crime prosecuted by public indictment or a tax offence.

Applicants will confirm that they follow the above-mentioned requirements in their declarations of compliance. The Fund Operators of Active Citizens Fund-National and Active Citizens Fund-Regional shall have the power to suggest a rejection of an application if they establish that a given applicant does not follow those principles.

Applicants can have the following **legal form**:

- associations, including ordinary associations, acting as associations pursuant to the Associations Law Act of 7 April 1989 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. z 2020, poz. 2261, as amended)
- foundations, acting under the Act on Foundations of 6 April 1984 (references to the Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. z 2020 r. poz. 2167, as amended).
Foundations with a single-member management board and no supervisory body are not eligible for funding;
- unions of associations established under the Associations Law Act of 7 April 1989 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz.U. z 2020, poz. 2261);
- social cooperatives. A social cooperative is eligible for funding if it is composed only of natural persons³ and/or non-governmental organisations and/or church legal persons as defined in the Social Cooperatives Act of 27 April 2006 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. z 2020, poz. 2085);

represent public authorities, public and/or for-profit entities, this means that those representatives have the casting vote on the composition of that entity's governing and/or supervisory bodies. If an entity is identified as dependent on such entities, it cannot apply for a grant.

² Funding under this mechanism is not available for professional associations who aim solely to support and protect the interests of its members. Entities whose activity is limited to supporting only one entity, e.g. a specific school, university, theatre, are not eligible for funding.

³ Social cooperatives combined of church legal persons must meet the same criteria as the faith-based organizations applying for funding.

• non-profit companies (Polish joint stock and limited liability companies who do not seek profit, who allocate any and all of their profit to the implementation of the objectives listed in their memorandum of association, and who do not distribute profit between their shareholders and employees. These conditions must be specified in the company's founding documents: memorandum or articles of association). Moreover:

o a company is eligible for funding if its shareholders are only the following entities (one or more): associations, unions of associations, foundations, social cooperatives, rural housewives' circles, faith-based organisations, which belong to the group of entities eligible for funding,

o companies with only one organisation as its shareholder, and with a single-person management board, are not eligible for funding;

• rural housewives' circles established under the Rural Housewives Circles Act of 9 November 2018 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. of 2020, poz. 553, 932), acting as associations pursuant to the Associations Law Act of 7 April 1989 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. z 2020, poz. 2261) or acting as independent rural circles under the Act on Social and Professional Farmer Organisations of 8 October 1982 (references to Polish Journal of Laws: Dz. U. 2019, poz. 491). The grant cannot exceed the amount determined by the circle members as the highest liability amount which their entity can incur;

• faith-based organisations if they meet the principles identified above and if the funded activities do not directly or indirectly promote a religious doctrine, mission or proselytism related to the beliefs of a particular faith (beyond basic religious/cultural awareness raising), on condition that:

o the objectives listed in their memorandums of association include public benefit activity,

o they are registered with the National Court Register (KRS);

o they may incur liabilities on their own behalf.

The actions presented in the application must be compliant with the memorandum of association, bylaws and other documents detailing the mission, aims and methods of the Applicant. The Applicant's activity cannot consist in religious practices or leading a religious cult (including proselytising and spreading faith), political party activity or election campaigns. Moreover, funding cannot be allocated for business or for-profit activity. It is not permitted to collect fees from participants of the initiative, i.e. applicants may not charge a fee for tickets to events or sell publications realized under the initiative.

Applicants do not have to be grantees of the Active Citizens-Regional Fund Program.

3.2 ELIGIBLE PARTNERS

An application must obligatorily include a partnership with at least one entity from a Donor State, another Beneficiary State or Ukraine. Additional partnerships (including partners from Poland) are allowed, yet should be well justified within the description of the initiative.

The following entities can be Partners to an initiative:

- **non-governmental organisations, public and private entities, non-profit and for-profit entities** (excluding self-employed sole traders) based in:
 - **Poland,**
 - **Donor States** (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway),
 - **other Beneficiary States eligible for EEA and Norway Grants** (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia),
 - **Ukraine.**
- **international organisations⁴, their bodies and representations,**
- **informal groups from Poland,** on condition that they act for public good, are voluntary and non-discriminatory, and are independent of local, regional and national authorities, as well as other public authorities, political parties, religious institutions and for-profit entities; an informal group cannot be a direct recipient of the funding;

It is inadmissible to establish a partnership when:

- one of the entities is the founder/partner/shareholder of the other organisation;
- there are personal relations between the entities, i.e. the same persons sit on the governing and/or supervising bodies of both entities;
- the leader of the informal group (i.e. the potential partner) sits on the governing and/or supervisory body of that entity.

The involvement of Partners, their roles and tasks, must be confirmed in the application co-signed by the partner(s). Once funding for the initiative is awarded, a partnership agreement must be signed before the funding agreement is concluded. The partnership agreement should include provisions guaranteeing that for the purpose of settlement of the expenditures the partner(s) will submit debit notes in EUR to the Applicant, with a detailed itemisation of the costs incurred and including certified

⁴ International organizations are understood as intergovernmental organisations as defined by the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. They must thus be established by a treaty or other instrument governed by public international law. International non-governmental organizations (INGOs), as legal persons established by an instrument of internal law with a non-profit-making aim of international utility and carrying out their activities in at least two States, may be eligible initiative partners only if they are established as a legal person in the Donor States, Beneficiary States or Ukraine.

true copies of all financial documents signed by an authorised representative of the partner, as well as proofs of payments.

The Active Citizens Fund-Regional Operator, [the Norwegian Helsinki Committee](#) and [the Icelandic Human Rights Centre](#) could help facilitate contacts between Polish NGOs and potential partners established in the Donor States. Partnership databases by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (<https://ngonorway.org/partners/>) and the Icelandic Human Rights Centre (https://aktywniobywatele-regionalny.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/icelandic-ngo-database_2021.pdf) have been established to facilitate the search for potential partners.

More information on possible partnerships options are available on the Active Citizens Fund-Regional Programmes' websites: [bilateral cooperation](#) and [regional cooperation](#).

3.3 LIMITS ON THE NUMBER OF SUBMITTED AND IMPLEMENTED INITIATIVES

Under the mechanism each eligible entity may:

- submit one application as the Applicant,
- apply as Partner to any number of projects, on condition that it does not submit an application of its own.

3.4 DURATION AND PLACE

- **All activities under the initiative must be completed by September 30th, 2024.**
- In case of initiatives including internship/job-shadowing the practical learning mobility element of the initiative could last from 5 up to 10 working days for the visit in the hosting organisation.
- The activities within the initiative may take place **in Poland, in any of the Donor States** (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway), **in any of the Beneficiary States** of the EEA and Norway Grants (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) or **in Ukraine**.

3.5 FINANCIAL PROVISIONS OF THE MECHANISM

- The funding of the initiative can amount **up to 6 000 EUR for a bilateral initiative and 5000 EUR for a regional initiative.**
- Funding rate may constitute **up to 100% of eligible expenses.**
- Costs related to implementation of the initiative may be incurred from the date of announcement of the call results to the date of completion of the initiative, specified in the co-financing agreement, but no later than September 30th, 2024. The agreement shall set the final date of eligibility of costs. Costs incurred after that date are not eligible.

Eligible expenditures of initiatives are those actually incurred by the recipient of the funding or the initiative partner, which meet the following criteria:

- they are incurred between the first and final dates of eligibility of an initiative as specified in the funding agreement;
- they are connected with the subject of the funding agreement and they are indicated in the detailed budget of the initiative;
- they are proportionate and necessary for the implementation of the initiative;
- they are used for the sole purpose of achieving the objective of the initiative and its expected outcome(s), in a manner consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular through being recorded in the accounting records of the recipient of the funding and determined according to the applicable accounting standards and generally accepted accounting principles;
- they comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation.

Expenditures are considered to have been incurred when the cost has been invoiced, paid and the subject matter delivered (in case of goods) or performed (in case of services and works).

The following limitations apply to the following types of expenditures under the initiative funding:

- **direct costs for hosting-related purposes** allocated to a hosting organisation **in a Donor or Beneficiary State (including Poland)**. These costs could include costs related to hosting participant(s) of practical learning mobility, such as mentor(s) remuneration, interpretation, consumables and supplies, etc. These costs should be calculated on a basis of work days that participant(s) stay in hosting organisation and could amount up to:
 - 200 EUR per 1 work day per participant of a practical learning mobility initiative (f.i. internship/job-shadowing) when the hosting organisation is from one of the Donor States,
 - 100 EUR per work day per participant of a practical learning mobility initiative (f.i. internship/job-shadowing) when the hosting organisation is from one of the Beneficiary States (including Poland).

In case of the host organisation the hosting-related costs will need to be documented with timesheets/other relevant proofs of the work done for this purpose and proofs of payments, attached to the accounting (debit) note;

- **compensation for the work days spent in practical learning mobility proportional to the actual salary rates of the person participating in the initiative as an intern/visiting fellow** as specified in the employee's contract (travel days included). These costs could amount up to:
 - 100 EUR per 1 work day for a Beneficiary State representative,
- 200 EUR per 1 work day for a Donor State representative.

No indirect costs could be included in the initiative budget.

4. DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS AND APPLICATION EVALUATION TIMELINE

Initiative proposals (applications) can be submitted from April 4th, from 12.00 (noon) CET, until April 30th, 2024, 12.00 (noon) CET.

The evaluation of submitted applications will be carried out and the results of the decision to (not) award funding will be published by the Program Operator on the [Program's website](#) by May 15th, 2024.

5. APPLICATION AND EVALUATION

5.1 APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Application should be submitted via email by sending the application to the address ewa.stokluska@fed.org.pl.

Each application should consist of **an application form filled in English**, including initiative's description, expected results of its implementation, detailed plan for the competences/experience/know-how sharing component, and budget. The document should have a form of a scan with handwritten signatures or an electronic document (.pdf format) with electronic signatures of the persons legally representing the applicant and the partner(s).

If the Applicant makes one of the following errors when completing the form:

- incorrect data is entered into application fields A1 to A12 or B1 to B7,
- the Applicant or the Partner(s) fail(s) to sign the application form,

the Applicant may correct the Application within 3 (three) working days from receiving the Operator's e-mail notification about an error.

5.2 EVALUATION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURE

- Coherence between planned activities and expected results of the initiative and the Active Citizens Fund objectives,
- Adequacy of planned activities to achieve the expected results of the initiative,
- Expected impact of the initiative for all participating entities (involvement of both parties etc.),
- Quality of the competences/experience/knowledge/know-how sharing plan,
- Potential for adaptation of knowledge and experiences acquired during the initiative to further activities of the participating organization(s).

The Fund Operators will additionally take into account the balance between initiatives that support already established partnerships and new contacts between organisations from different states, especially those not experienced in international cooperation.

Applicants may not appeal evaluation results nor final decisions on awarding funding for initiatives.

NOTE: If the number of applications in the call exceeds the possibility of financing all submitted initiatives, priority for funding will be given to applications from organizations that have not previously received funding for a bilateral or regional initiative under the Active Citizens-Regional Fund Program or the Active Citizens-National Fund Program (in the event of obtaining the same number of rating points).

6. REPORTING AND PAYMENTS

After the whole procedure of accepting the initiative the Education for Democracy Foundation, on behalf of the ACF-Regional Fund Operator, will transfer **an advance payment in Polish currency (fixed exchange rate of EUR 1 = PLN 4,3) to cover the costs of the initiative**. The advance payment amount to 100% of the funding and is transferred to the PLN bank account of the Applicant.

The Applicant granted funding under this mechanism must submit the final report on the implementation of the initiative within fifteen (15) calendar days after all activities are completed, in accordance with implementation timeline specified in the funding agreement, but no later than on October 15th, 2024.

The following documents shall be provided together with the final report:

- copies of invoices and payment receipts, or bank statements proving the settlement of payments;
- copies of travel tickets, boarding passes;
- timesheets or documents from a suitable work time recording system together with a proof of payment and proof of the existence of an employment/work contract or a fee-based contract (redacted) with participant(s) of practical learning mobility (if applicable), if participant(s) is an employee;
- copy of volunteering agreement of participant(s) with sending organization, covering the period of practical learning mobility (if applicable), if participant(s) is a volunteer;
- timesheets or documents from a suitable work time recording system together with a proof of payment and proof of the existence of an employment/work contract or a fee-based contract with mentor(s) of practical learning mobility (if applicable).

Fund Operator reviews the final report on the implementation of the initiative and its annexes within thirty (30) calendar days after it has been submitted. In case of inconsistencies with the approved application the respective request for additional information and amendments is sent to the Applicant. The term for supplying the requested information and documents is five (5) work days.

After the report is approved by the Operator, the Applicant provides the Operator with a hard copy version of the accounting note summarizing the expenses incurred under the initiative, signed by persons authorized to represent the Applicant.

In case of major inconsistencies with the signed funding agreement Fund Operator has the right to

claim the partial or full refund of the grant paid to the applicant organisation for the implementation of the initiative. In case there is suspected fraudulent implementation or deliberate financial mismanagement of the funding, the Fund Operator may submit a claim to the court.

7. CONTACT FOR INQUIRIES

Should you have any questions about the mechanism and/or application procedure, please contact **Ewa Stokłuska** (ewa.stokluska@fed.org.pl, +48 720 801 013).