



# **Programme areas and funds for the EEA and Norway Grants 2021 – 2028**

**Iceland**   
**Liechtenstein** **Norway**  
**Norway grants** **grants**



Iceland

# Support by country 2021-2028



### 3 Donor States

15 Beneficiary States

### EEA Grants

€1.8 billion financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway

### Norway Grants

€1.46 billion financed by Norway

Estonia  
€71.8 million

Latvia  
€109.5 million

Lithuania  
€117.9 million

Poland  
€924.9 million

Czech Republic  
€225.2 million

Slovakia  
€130.7 million

Liechtenstein ●

Hungary  
€254.1 million

Romania  
€596.3 million

Slovenia  
€50.0 million

Croatia  
€133.1 million

Bulgaria  
€260.0 million

Portugal  
€126.3 million

Greece  
€159.3 million

Malta  
€11.2 million

Cyprus  
€17.6 million

The **EEA and Norway Grants** are Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway's contribution to reducing economic and social disparities in Europe and to strengthening bilateral relations with **15 Beneficiary States** in Northern, Central and Southern Europe.

This 'Blue Book' presents the **15 programme areas and three funds** of the EEA and Norway Grants 2021-2028. The **specific priorities in each Beneficiary State** will be set in the Memoranda of Understanding.

# Reduce

*economic and social*

# disparities

# Strengthen

# bilateral

# relations

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# EEA Grants and Norway Grants 2021-2028

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# The EEA and Norway Grants 2021-2028

**For more than two decades, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway have worked closely with partners in EU Member States to help reduce social and economic disparities and to strengthen bilateral cooperation through the EEA and Norway Grants.**

Twenty years after the 2004 enlargement of the EU, significant achievements can be seen in economic growth and reduced disparities within the European Economic Area. However, gaps in economic development and living standards persist. Climate change and geopolitical tension and conflict are impacting Europe. Continued efforts and cooperation are essential to further reduce disparities, safeguard a strong and democratic Europe, and promote inclusive and resilient societies.

To reduce social and economic disparities and to strengthen cooperation with 15 EU Member States (Beneficiary States), Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway (Donor States), together with the European Union, have agreed to continue the EEA and Norway Grants for a fourth period, 2021-2028, with a budget of €3.268 billion.

The amount is divided into the EEA Grants, with a budget of €1.805 billion, and the Norway Grants, with a budget of €1.463 billion. The EEA and Norway Grants 2021-2028 build on the successes of the 2014-2021 period, and will promote the following three overall thematic priorities:

- European green transition
- Democracy, rule of law and human rights
- Social inclusion and resilience

Digitalisation will be mainstreamed and form part of all relevant programme areas, serving as a key driver of social and economic development. While digitalisation offers clear benefits, it can also entail challenges for governments and societies related to sustainable energy use, data security, privacy, disinformation, crime, and social disconnection.

*Working together for a **green, democratic and resilient** Europe.*

The two funding mechanisms make available a financial contribution of €183 million (€100 million from the EEA Grants and €83 million from the Norway Grants) for projects related to challenges experienced as a result of the invasion of Ukraine. The projects should meet identified needs in the Beneficiary States and will be implemented across the programme areas and funds.

The Grants facilitate collaboration between stakeholders from the Donor and Beneficiary States, allowing them to address shared challenges and find joint solutions. To contribute to the overall objective of strengthening the relations between the Donor and Beneficiary States, the preparation and implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants 2021-2028 will be undertaken in partnership at both the programme and project levels.

The implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants 2021-2028 is governed by the Regulation on the EEA Financial Mechanism

2021-2028 and the Regulation on the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2021-2028 ('the Regulations'). The EEA and Norway Grants are based on the common values and

principles of: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

### **Common values**

All programmes and activities funded by the EEA and Norway Grants shall be consistent with respect for these values and principles and abstain from supporting operations that may fail to do so. Their implementation shall comply with the fundamental rights and obligations enshrined in relevant instruments and standards.

Transparency, accountability, and cost efficiency shall be applied throughout implementation, together with good governance, partnership and multi-level governance, sustainable development, gender equality and non-discrimination.

Gender equality is a core value in the implementation of the EEA and Norway Grants and will be integrated throughout all programme areas, both as a guiding principle and through targeted activities in relevant programmes.

The EEA and Norway Grants support Beneficiary States in fulfilling their human rights obligations in accordance with international human rights standards. To this end, the Grants will also support cooperation with International Partner Organisations and institutions.

### **The Blue Book**

This 'Blue Book' outlines the programme areas and funds for the EEA and Norway Grants 2021-2028. It describes the objectives and approaches for each programme area and fund and the areas eligible for support. All 15 programme areas and the three funds contribute to at least one of the thematic priorities. The EEA and Norway Grants also contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Blue Book sets the framework for successful negotiations of the specific priorities and programmes in each Beneficiary State, to be agreed in the Memoranda of Understanding.

All programme areas and funds can be funded by both the EEA Grants and Norway Grants, except for the Fund for Social Dialogue and Decent Work, which is solely funded by the Norway Grants.

The description of each programme area and fund includes:

- Programme area/fund objective: the objective to which the projects funded must contribute.
- Rationale for the support: the background and relevance of the support.
- Areas of support: the thematic sub-components eligible for funding. Not all areas of support need to be included in each programme. Programme Operators and Fund Operators are encouraged to focus their programmes and choose areas of support accordingly.
- How the objectives will be addressed: methods and type of activities to be supported to reach the objective.
- Key actors and beneficiaries: the key actors, beneficiaries, and target groups/areas.
- Programme area/fund specifics: binding conditions for each programme or fund.

A draft of the Blue Book was subject to public consultation from 13 September to 18 October 2024. Around 1200 responses were received from across all the Donor and Beneficiary States, third countries and international organisations, and these have contributed to this final version

of the Blue Book 2021-2028. A summary of the results of the consultation is available here on [www.eeagrants.org](http://www.eeagrants.org).

### **Partners in the EEA and Norway Grants 2021- 2028**

- The National Focal Point (NFP) is the main partner in each Beneficiary State. It has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and for ensuring that all programmes contribute to the objectives of the Grants.
- A Programme Operator (PO) is responsible for preparing and implementing the individual programme and for selecting and contracting projects funded.
- A Donor Programme Partner (DPP) is a public entity from a Donor State advising and participating in the preparation and/ or implementation of a programme. Its contribution is agreed upon between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- An International Partner Organisation (IPO) is an international organisation or an institution designated by the EEA Financial Mechanism Committee (FMC)/Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) and involved in the implementation of the EEA

and Norway Grants 2021-2028.

- The Donor States have delegated decision-making powers to the FMC with respect to the EEA Grants, and the NMFA for the Norway Grants. The Financial Mechanism Office (FMO) serves as the secretariat for both the EEA and Norway Grants.

### **Programme development and implementation**

- Based on the Blue Book, the Donor States enter into negotiations on MoUs with each Beneficiary State. The MoUs are drawn up for the EEA Grants and for the Norway Grants separately, identifying the programme areas and programmes to be funded. The aim is to tailor the support to each country based on its needs, aims, and capacity, as well as the bilateral interests shared by the Donors and the Beneficiary State.
- The MoU describes the management arrangements, including that of the Programme Operators, and the cooperation with the Donor Partners and IPOs. Programme development in each Beneficiary State formally starts once the



respective MoUs have been signed.

- Programmes are developed in line with the MoUs and the Blue Book. The Programme Operator develops a short concept note in cooperation with the Donor Programme Partners, IPO(s) and the FMO. The concept note defines the scope and planned results of each programme. The EEA and Norway Grants apply results-based management, seeking to ensure that the programmes and funds achieve their intended objective. The concept note is submitted to the Donor States through the NFP.
- Based on the concept note and the assessment of the Donor States, a programme agreement is signed between the Donor State and the Beneficiary States. The programme agreement sets out the terms and conditions for the implementation of the programme and the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved.
- A programme may combine a number of programme areas. A project must contribute to only one programme area objective.
- The objectives of the

programmes and of the EEA and Norway Grants are achieved through projects and bilateral initiatives. Projects are generally selected through competitive procedures but can also be pre-defined in the MoUs or in the programme agreements. Once the programme agreement is signed, the Programme/Fund Operator launches one or more open calls for proposals, selects projects in cooperation with a Selection Committee and signs project contracts with the project promoters.

# 1. Green Transition

## Programme area objective

Acceleration of the green transition towards a more sustainable society.

## Rationale for the support

The triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss demands an acceleration of the green transition. This programme area supports the transition towards climate neutrality in 2050 through the implementation of the EU's Green Deal and its legal obligations.

The green transition gives Europe an opportunity to build resilience. Societies must adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. Further efforts are needed to ensure access to affordable, reliable and clean energy. Energy use must become more efficient, and it is crucial to secure a more sustainable supply of raw materials to scale up clean technologies.

Pollution and unsustainable consumption lead to environmental degradation that damages ecosystems and increases biodiversity loss. To strengthen resilience across sectors, the resource-intensive linear economy must evolve into a resource-efficient circular economy. Efforts are needed to protect and restore nature, increase the use of renewable natural resources, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems.



Some groups and areas suffer disproportionately from the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. The geographical dimension of ensuring a just green transition must therefore be addressed.

The green transition can have significant impacts on individuals and societies. Equality and non-discrimination are cross-cutting principles that shall be addressed throughout the programme area.

## Areas of support

- Clean energy transition.
- Air, water, and soil pollution.
- Energy security.
- Energy poverty.
- Sustainable and smart mobility.
- Circular economy.
- Industrial carbon management.
- Natural sinks for absorbing carbon.
- Climate change adaptation.
- Biodiversity and ecosystems.
- Green governance.



## **How the objective will be addressed**

The programme area aims to strengthen all levels of government to enable the implementation of, and compliance with, the EU's Green Deal. This may include regulatory processes, management systems, and the use of digital solutions, as well as access to and sharing of data. Knowledge sharing, awareness raising, anti-disinformation campaigns, and capacity building will contribute to achieving the programme area objective.

The programme area supports the application of nature-based solutions, low-carbon technologies, and environmentally friendly practices. The funding is suitable both for smaller infrastructure projects and projects that facilitate larger investments. This may include consequence analyses, feasibility studies or testing of new concepts, and pilots. The funding may cover areas where the private sector sees limited potential benefits from investments.

The scope of each programme will be defined by selecting areas of support. Unless otherwise agreed, and to avoid

a complex programme design, the scope will be limited to a restricted number of areas of support.

## **Key actors and beneficiaries**

Citizens, the public sector and the private sector must mobilise and work together to address the programme area objective. Public institutions, all levels of government, and private entities are the main implementing actors. Civil society organisations, entities from the Donor States, research institutions, and international organisations are valuable partners. The supported measures will benefit the general public.

The programme area will promote social inclusion, gender equality and youth empowerment. It will target the people that are most affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

## **Programme area specifics**

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).

# 2. Green Business and Innovation



## Programme area objective

Green value creation and competitiveness.

### Rationale for the support

This programme area contributes to the EU's climate goals in line with the European Green Deal and the EU Industrial Policy.

A green and competitive private sector is key to achieving the transition to a low-carbon, circular, and climate-resilient economy, as well as to reaching the EU's goal to be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

The European Green Deal is Europe's growth strategy. Private enterprises must innovate net-zero technology and shift to resource-efficient circular practices and clean energy sources. They should seize green market opportunities for growth and adapt their business models to meet stricter environmental rules and standards. Seizing green market opportunities is essential for gaining a competitive edge, and companies that succeed will have an advantage in the net-zero economy.

The private sector has the potential to drive the green and digital transitions of the economy by developing and bringing innovative solutions to the market. However, the level of innovation varies across Europe.

Private enterprises in contexts with low levels of innovation are more at risk of falling behind in the green and digital transitions. They are also less successful in accessing EU funding. Enhancing their competitiveness will attract private investments, create better jobs, and drive sustainable economic growth.

While it is primarily the responsibility of private enterprises to exploit market opportunities in the green transition, public funding is needed to stimulate and accelerate the transition, as it reduces risks and may release private capital.

It is crucial to promote gender balance in the green economy and support female entrepreneurs in participating in the green and digital transitions.





## Areas of support

- Development and placing on the market of green or blue technologies, products, processes, and services.
- Investments in and application of green or blue technologies, products, processes, and services.
- Promotion of start-ups and female entrepreneurs in the blue or green economy.
- Improving business skills and fostering entrepreneurial mindsets.

## How the objective will be addressed

This programme area shall contribute to harnessing the growth potential that derives from the European Green Deal for land-based and maritime enterprises to promote a sustainable green and blue economy.

The programme area will foster value creation through environmentally sustainable practices. It will contribute to mitigating and adapting to climate change and to ensuring a transition to a resource-efficient circular economy.

To promote enabling and emerging technologies, private enterprises will be supported to develop innovative technology,

products, services, and processes, and to prepare for placing these innovations on the market. Investments in and applications of innovative technologies and solutions will also be supported.

Start-ups and female entrepreneurs will be supported in participating in the green and blue economy, including through mentoring and capacity building.

Improving private enterprises' knowledge, skills, and capacity will also be a priority. This may include support to innovation ecosystems, including business cluster cooperation, incubator and accelerator services, stronger sustainability management and reporting for businesses, and other activities that can increase innovation and sustainable growth in the business sector. Feasibility studies, market analysis to prepare new investments, and upscaling are also included. It is also an aim to contribute to sustainable value chains.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Private enterprises are the key actors and beneficiaries of this programme area.

## Programme area specifics

- The programme area shall allocate at least 60% of funding to small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (as defined by the EU), and large enterprises with less than 25% public ownership, shall be the main recipients of support under this programme area.
- When necessary to fulfil the programme objectives, also non-commercial and not-for-profit organisations (including clusters and business associations) and public entities can apply for support for 'soft measure' activities.
- Measures to promote digitalisation and gender equality shall be included in all programmes.
- Projects with bilateral partnerships shall be given priority.

# 3. Research and Innovation



## Programme area objective

Enhanced excellence in research and research-based innovation, strengthening the foundations for the green and digital transitions, democracy, rule of law, human rights, social inclusion and resilience.

## Rationale for the support

Research and innovation strengthen value creation and competitiveness, and build knowledge and capacity to solve societal challenges and support democratic values and principles. Research and innovation have a key role to play in addressing systemic and lasting challenges that put a strain on citizens and communities in Europe. Examples include climate change and environmental degradation, security threats, health issues and well-being, changes in working life and the labour market, rapid technological change, and disinformation.

Research and innovation are key to strengthening the understanding of these complex societal challenges and to helping address them by developing innovative responses to further the green transition and enhance resilience, social cohesion, inclusive growth, green jobs, democracy and active citizen participation, and the well-being of citizens in Europe. The support contributes to addressing the gap in research and development in Europe.

## Areas of support

- Cooperation on research and research-based innovation.
- Informing evidence-based policymaking on societal challenges.
- Engaging citizens in science.
- Overcoming barriers for the career progression of women and early-stage researchers.
- Strengthening the research and innovation ecosystem, such as research administration, communication of research, and open science.

## How the objective will be addressed

The programme area will build research and innovation capacity in the Beneficiary States, increasing their participation in the EU framework programme for research and innovation, for example by fostering synergies and complementarities with the framework programme and the EU Missions. The programme area will contribute to the aim of a single market for research, innovation and technology in Europe (the European Research Area).

The programme area will support basic research and applied research focusing on the green transition, climate,



energy and the environment; the digital transition, including cybersecurity; a competitive and sustainable economy; health; and resilient, socially inclusive and democratic societies.

Research within the social sciences and humanities, as well as cooperation across disciplines and sectors, is encouraged. The programme area will foster the integration of research, education and innovation.

Support for researchers' careers, especially women and young researchers, will take heed of the new Charter for Researchers.

The engagement of citizens, including NGOs, in research and research-related activities will be encouraged to increase the impact of research and innovation. This will strengthen the understanding of democracy, building on scientific knowledge. By contributing to evidence-based decision-making and policy development, the programme area will benefit policymakers, stakeholders, and society at large.

Emphasis will be placed on strengthening the research and innovation ecosystem,

for example by supporting advances towards open science, fostering FAIR data practices to enhance the transparency and reusability of data, safeguarding scientific activities against misuse, and enhancing the skills of research administrators.

Safeguarding fundamental principles and values in research and innovation, such as research ethics and integrity, academic freedom, and open science, in line with the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe and the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research, is crucial. This encompasses ethical and human rights dimensions of new technology, including artificial intelligence.

### **Key actors and beneficiaries**

Researchers in research organisations and companies are key actors in achieving the programme area objective. The engagement of citizens, non-governmental organisations, public authorities and policymakers is also vital. The public at large is the end beneficiary.

### **Programme area specifics**

- Partnerships between Donor State and Beneficiary State entities are mandatory in all research projects unless otherwise stipulated in the programme agreement.
- The project selection and management under the programme area will be aligned with the principles of the EU framework programme for research and innovation as far as possible. This includes provisions on gender equality, non-discrimination and open science.
- The minimum duration of all research projects will be 36 months unless otherwise stipulated in the programme agreement.



# 4. Education, Training and Youth Employment



## Programme area objective

Enhanced quality, access and relevance of education and training for the green and digital transitions, human rights, democracy and youth employment.

## Rationale for the support

Quality education and training are fundamental to the well-being of individuals and their personal development and lay the ground for active citizenship and democratic culture. Lifelong access to education and training supports the employability and professional development of individuals. Access to education, training and apprenticeship adapted to young people's needs is key to a successful transition from school to work.

Quality education, training, reskilling and upskilling are crucial to achieving the green and digital transitions, remedying labour shortages, bridging the skills gap, and addressing the ongoing transformation of jobs due to technological development. Quality education and training fuel research, innovation, and social and economic development, as well as competitiveness.

## Areas of support

- Innovative approaches in formal and non-formal education and training.
- Capacity building to enhance youth employability.
- Professional development of teachers, educators, trainers, school leaders and administrative staff in education.





## How the objective will be addressed

The programme area aims to strengthen the knowledge, skills and attitudes learners need to participate in the green transition, promoting increased understanding of global societal challenges and their interconnectedness.

Enhanced digital capacity will be supported, as well as the strengthening of transversal skills that enhance civic competences and democratic participation such as creativity, critical thinking, media, and digital literacy. Empowering learners to build a universal culture of human rights and equipping them with skills to combat disinformation will be emphasised.

Emphasis will also be placed on increased cooperation with the labour market to enhance the relevance of education and training and support youth employability.

The programme area will build the capacity of teachers, trainers, school leaders and administrative staff at all levels of education.

Programmes may address both formal and non-formal education and training and

may include interventions at institutional as well as national levels. Cross-sectorial collaboration is encouraged.

Rather than addressing the areas of support broadly, each programme will focus on specific challenges or gaps to make an impact on institutional capacity and learning communities in the Donor and Beneficiary States.

An important aim is to strengthen the participation of the Donor and Beneficiary States in the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport and in the European Education Area, as well as to achieve synergies with European funding.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Key actors are educational institutions, school providers and institutions involved in decision-making and public policy, at all levels, addressing both formal and non-formal education, training and youth employment.

Partnerships with industry and organisations, both in the private and public sectors, including international organisations, civil society organisations, and non-

governmental organisations, are encouraged. The end beneficiaries are pupils, students, teachers, and other staff at all levels of education and training, as well as enterprises and employees. Specific attention will be given to persons in vulnerable situations.

## Programme area specifics

- Partnerships between Donor State entities and Beneficiary State entities are mandatory in all projects, unless otherwise stipulated in the programme agreement.
- All programmes shall promote inclusion and diversity, including gender equality.
- The practice of financing and management under the programme area will be aligned with the principles of the EU framework programme for education, training, youth and sport as far as possible.
- Student and staff mobility and exchanges may be embedded in institutional cooperation projects. Individual mobility outside the context of institutional cooperation will not be supported.

# 5. Culture

## Programme area objective

Increased participation, sustainability and diversity in arts, culture and cultural heritage.

### Rationale for the support

Culture is a global public good that has an intrinsic value and drives sustainable development and social cohesion. Arts and culture are important parts of the democratic infrastructure as venues for freedom of expression and critical reflection, fostering dialogue, and respect for diversity. Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is a valuable source of knowledge and resilience. It also serves as a resource for the vitality and shared prosperity of local communities.

Broad participation in cultural life enhances social cohesion and contributes to informed, engaged and democratic societies. Such societies are more resistant to threats from disinformation, hate speech and extremism. Inequalities in cultural participation and restrictions on artistic expression undermine these benefits and need to be addressed.

Increasing threats from climate change call for adaptation measures and for the safeguarding of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. At the same time, culture and cultural heritage can be drivers of the green transition by



raising awareness, increasing knowledge and contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

With the right skills in place, the digital transition offers new prospects in accessibility and outreach, and serves to strengthen the management and revitalisation of cultural heritage.

Culture and cultural heritage offer a wide scope of opportunities for bilateral cooperation.

### Areas of support

- Cultural and artistic creation and cooperation, capacity building, outreach and exchange, with specific regard to cultural diversity.
- Sustainable restoration, revitalisation, and management of cultural heritage.



## How the objective will be addressed

The programme area will promote the freedom of cultural expression through artistic and cultural creation, exchange and mobility. To increase participation, this will be coupled with support for outreach, capacity building and community engagement, including through cultural education.

The programme area will support measures that ensure human rights, cultural diversity, and the participation and cultural self-expression of women, minorities, and persons in vulnerable situations and from disadvantaged areas.

The programme area will support the green and digital transitions of the arts and culture sector through capacity building and networking, as well as through joint cultural programming.

To create conditions for socially, economically and environmentally sustainable cultural heritage management, this programme area will support capacity building, research, monitoring and risk analysis.

Support for the restoration, revitalisation and reuse of

cultural heritage monuments, sites and environments will include climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

To improve access to cultural heritage, the programme area will support documentation and accessible presentation, outreach, awareness raising and training, including in traditional craftsmanship, making use of digital technologies.

Revitalisation of cultural heritage will contribute to sustainable development through enhanced skills and knowledge, and by generating local revenue. A participatory approach will ensure relevance and that benefits are shared across the community.

To ensure outreach and inclusive and active participation, and to help pool competences needed to respond to challenges, the programme area will encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships across sectors and disciplines, involving, among others, the education sector.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Public and private entities and academic institutions in

the field of arts, culture, and cultural heritage, independent cultural actors, and civil society organisations are the main implementing actors.

The end beneficiaries are the general public, with a focus on people with limited access to culture, minorities, and persons in vulnerable situations.

## Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.
- All programmes shall allocate funds to strengthen the independent cultural sector.



# 6. Local Development, Good Governance and Inclusion



## Programme area objective

More resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

### Rationale for the support

Shifts in the global economy, climate change, the green and digital transitions, migration patterns, pressure on democracy, and demographic trends are major interdependent challenges impacting European communities.

European regions are gradually catching up, but many still struggle and are ill-equipped to reap the benefits of the green and digital transitions. Investments and innovation are increasingly concentrated in metropolitan areas, and the economic downturn has exacerbated existing economic, social, and territorial disparities. More than a fifth of the population in the EU is considered at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with women, immigrants, refugees, Roma, and other disadvantaged groups disproportionately affected.

Local and regional actors manage approximately half of European public investments, including the largest share of climate action. Sustainable local and regional development is hence the cornerstone of national socio-economic development, building resilience, diversity, prosperity, and democracy in a green and digital Europe.

### Areas of support

- Local investments in the green transition, climate action, environmental sustainability, resilience, social development and inclusion, employment, and the digital transition.
- Local institutional development and public governance.
- Local democracy, local and community media, information integrity, and open local government.
- Socio-economic inclusion promoting equality, non-discrimination, diversity, and active participation of disadvantaged communities.
- Networking and policy exchanges between municipalities, and with civil society and the central government.



## How the objective will be addressed

Integrated, territorial, socio-economic development premised on local democracy, gender equality and human rights is key to achieving the programme area objective. Good governance should prescribe the necessary political and institutional processes and support improvements in public administration governance arrangements and capacity for policy design, implementation, and evaluation practices.

Capacity building of local authorities and stakeholders is highlighted, improving governance mechanisms, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, intermunicipal territorial cooperation, community-led local development, inclusion, integration, effective local democracy, and place-based approaches.

The objective is for local and regional authorities to better exploit their potential, aligning local development with EU objectives, aligning national and local priorities, and ensuring that investments are used to respond to citizens' needs.

Focus is placed on holistic multi-sectoral methods supporting structural change, piloting novel approaches, enhancing existing initiatives and services, and improving access to, and use of, other sources of funding.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Local and regional authorities are crucial to achieving the programme area objective. The principle of partnership is the cornerstone, building on multi-level governance and ensuring the involvement of other key actors such as local communities, national authorities, civil society, economic and social partners, and academia.

Special emphasis is placed on disadvantaged areas and groups.

Donor partners and international organisations can be valuable partners.

## Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.
- All programmes shall include capacity building to support good governance at the local level.
- A gender perspective shall be integrated into the design and implementation of all programmes.

# 7. Roma Inclusion and Empowerment



## Programme area objective

Enhanced inclusion and empowerment of Roma.

### Rationale for the support

Roma are Europe's largest and most discriminated minority. Roma populations are disproportionately affected by structural and systemic racism and human rights violations. This further exacerbates their social and economic marginalisation.

The EU Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030 focuses on principles of equality, inclusion and participation. It addresses socio-economic inclusion in the areas of education, employment, health and housing. EU Member States have developed national Roma strategic frameworks as well as anti-racism action plans. The programme area can support and complement the implementation of these national strategies and action plans.

### Areas of support

- Combating antigypsyism and all forms of discrimination.
- Integrated measures at local level targeting social service provision and innovative pilot projects.
- Capacity building for Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations, particularly at the grassroots level.
- Empowerment of Roma, in particular Roma women, children, and youth.
- Data collection, analysis, monitoring and evaluation for use in policymaking.

### How the objective will be addressed

This programme area will apply a human rights-based approach, including participatory approaches that involve Roma in all stages of the programme cycle. All measures should uphold international and European human rights standards and the EU's 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion.

Actively tackling antigypsyism is key to overcoming discrimination and marginalisation of Roma. This can be done through promoting inclusive public institutions and policies, Roma identity, culture, history, and language. Working





with majority populations is key to changing attitudes, combatting stereotypes and hate speech, and targeting public institutions. Roma-led initiatives are particularly encouraged. An intersectional approach should be applied, taking into consideration that Roma might experience multiple forms of discrimination at once based on ethnicity together with, for example age, class, gender and sexual orientation.

Integrated approaches to social inclusion should holistically interconnect education and training, employment, housing, health, and non-discrimination. Innovative pilot projects that can be upscaled and replicated, for example in access to housing and addressing the negative impacts of environmental issues on Roma, are encouraged. Measures should promote, where possible, desegregation and prevent reinforcement of segregation. Geographical targeting of support to municipalities and regions with marginalised Roma communities should be considered.

Empowerment of Roma can be addressed through life skills development, building confidence to advocate for

rights and play an active part in community-based initiatives, as well as through positive role models. In particular for the empowerment of Roma youth, focus should be placed on building up the next generation of Roma leaders.

Interventions may also address environmental justice and the intersection between public health and safety concerns linked to environmental and climate change impacts, and the social exclusion faced by Roma.

### **Key actors and beneficiaries**

Regional and local authorities and Roma and pro-Roma civil society are key actors. Partnerships with public authorities and local action groups are encouraged. Non-Roma and majority populations should also be targeted.

International organisations with competence in Roma inclusion and empowerment can be useful partners.

Roma and Roma communities are the primary end beneficiaries.

### **Programme area specifics**

- A participatory approach shall be applied throughout the programme cycle. This includes consultation with key Roma and pro-Roma stakeholders in the development of programmes and calls.
- All programmes shall include capacity building measures for Roma civil society organisations.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

# 8. Public Health


## Programme area objective

More resilient and inclusive public health systems.

### Rationale for the support

Well-functioning public health systems are a precondition for economic and social cohesion. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of national health systems and exacerbated existing structural challenges. It underscored the urgent need to address health security gaps and strengthen preparedness for health emergencies. Despite unparalleled EU financial support in the health area, including through the European Health Union and the EU4Health Programme 2021-2027, many health systems still struggle to provide sustainable healthcare, and inequalities in life expectancy and the burden of diseases remain. Widening regional disparities in access to healthcare exist both within and between countries, and gender inequalities in health persist.

Health inequality is shown to reduce economic and social productivity and lead to higher healthcare and welfare costs. COVID-19 triggered a significant increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression, especially among children and youth, calling for more integrated and innovative approaches to policy and service delivery. Furthermore, a spike in antibiotic use during the pandemic



has accelerated the already alarming levels of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Finally, climate change and economic challenges continue to affect the social determinants of health and overall healthcare funding. This has a negative impact on the resilience of health systems, health equity, and outcomes.

### Areas of support

- Public health systems development, including health emergency preparedness, community-based healthcare, and access to primary healthcare.
- Antimicrobial resistance (AMR).
- Mental health and the promotion of mental well-being and healthy lifestyles, with a focus on children and youth.
- Women's health, including through promoting universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, and responses to domestic and gender-based violence.
- Capacity building and patient involvement with a focus on strengthening patient rights.





### **How the objective will be addressed**

A human rights-based approach to health is central to achieving the programme area objective and should guide all health programming. This approach provides a set of clear principles for designing and assessing policy and health service delivery. It targets discriminatory practices and unjust power relations at the core of unequal health outcomes. In this context, integrating a gender perspective into the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes is important to promote equality.

As the principal agents of structural change, government agencies, public health institutions, hospitals, and local authorities are key to achieving the programme area objective.

### **Key actors and beneficiaries**

Patients' associations, civil society, academia, and organisations of healthcare professionals are important partners, with Donor partners providing specialised support in programme and project development and implementation. Coordination and cooperation with international organisations can add value to the activities supported.

Health programmes will benefit diverse groups of people, placing special emphasis on disadvantaged areas and groups, including women and girls, children and youth, LGBTIQ+ persons, and Roma.

### **Programme area specifics**

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.
- All programmes must include projects addressing women's health.

# 9. Disaster Prevention and Preparedness

## Programme area objective

Improved disaster resilience.

### Rationale for the support

Most European countries are vulnerable to disasters arising from climate change, urbanisation, demographic pressure, intensive land use, or infrastructure being located in areas that are prone to flooding, droughts, heatwaves, fire, or earthquakes. They are also becoming susceptible to emerging risks related to the accelerated introduction of new technologies, the green transition, geopolitical tension and conflict, and the consequences of war in Europe. Socially deprived and densely populated areas are particularly at risk, with women and girls and disadvantaged groups disproportionately affected.

The programme area aims to increase the capacities of Beneficiary States in analysing emerging vulnerabilities and hazards, enhancing disaster prevention, promoting risk awareness, upgrading civil preparedness, and strengthening crisis management anticipation and adaptation mechanisms.



It will contribute to improving disaster resilience in line with national strategies, EU Disaster Resilience Goals and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), as well as international standards established by intergovernmental organisations.

### Areas of support

- Risk and vulnerability competence and capacity building at national, regional or local level.
- Prevention of risks and vulnerabilities, including in relation to new technologies and the green transition.
- Disaster resilience in all sectors and at all levels of society.
- Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) safety and security.
- International and cross-border cooperation, learning and development, including effective risk management implementation.
- Gender- and youth-sensitive disaster risk management.



## How the objective will be addressed

Investments in disaster risk reduction and mitigation are more cost-effective than post-disaster rebuilding and recovery efforts. Implementation of international standards and guidelines on disaster risk governance that facilitate efficient risk reduction measures should be supported.

Taking a whole-of-society perspective, the programme area focuses on enhancing risk governance, and contingency planning. This will be achieved by improving the understanding of disaster risks and hazards, including lack of information integrity; investing in disaster risk reduction; capacity building and training for strengthened civil protection; sustainable safety; and security measures. This includes investment in innovative tools and technology such as multi-hazard early warning systems, cyber security, and defence against hybrid threats. Other civil protection measures can also be supported.

As disaster impacts often reflect and reinforce gender inequality, the programme area should include support to gender- and youth-inclusive approaches for better disaster risk management. It should also support efficient coordination between authorities at every level and the sharing of good practices, including the use of international networks.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

The most relevant actors are all levels of government, including decision makers, emergency response and planning authorities, and law enforcement. Other relevant actors are civil society organisations, international organisations, local communities, educational and research institutions, and the private sector.

Communities and groups in vulnerable situations who are most exposed to disasters will also benefit.

## Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

# 10. Domestic and Gender-Based Violence

## Programme area objective

Prevention and combatting of domestic and gender-based violence in line with international and European human rights standards.

### Rationale for the support

Domestic and gender-based violence is widespread throughout Europe and remains under-reported. The 2024 EU survey on gender-based violence conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and Eurostat shows that one in three women in the EU have experienced violence at home, at work, in public or online.

The violence can be of an economic, psychological, physical, or sexual nature. It may also be technology facilitated. All people can experience the harms of such violence, with women and girls the most impacted. Too frequently, the violence leads to loss of life.

Prevention will save lives and reduce trauma and other impacts of violence, and will promote social and economic progress.

The Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) serve as a reference and guideline for the EEA and Norway Grants' efforts



in this area. The EU Directive on gender-based violence (Directive (EU) 2024/1385) is also relevant.

### Areas of support

- Prevention.
- Protection.
- Prosecution.
- Coordinated policies.





### How the objective will be addressed

Comprehensive and coordinated policies across sectors are needed to effectively prevent and combat domestic and gender-based violence. Strengthening capacity, building knowledge and understanding, advocacy, and awareness raising are important means to this end.

The safety, rights and needs of victims must be at the heart of all efforts. Victims from marginalised or socially excluded communities may need tailored measures to have equal access to protection, support and justice. This calls for an intersectional approach.

Addressing root causes is key to stopping the use of violence. Challenging stereotypes and engaging men and boys enhance prevention efforts. Offering services to perpetrators of violence or persons at risk of using violence is especially important.

Protection and support of victims who have experienced violence is a critical area to address. Effective coordination and cooperation at local level is particularly important to provide safety and to help victims of violence to recover,

for example by providing 'one-stop-shop' services.

Gender-sensitive and victim-centred investigations and judicial proceedings to secure the prosecution of perpetrators will be supported.

Policy coordination will contribute to a common understanding of the violence and its root causes and increase the likelihood of reaching common policy goals and measures. Mechanisms designated to coordinate, implement, monitor, and evaluate national policies, including data collection and research and international cooperation, are important tools for ensuring progress.

### Key actors and beneficiaries

Public entities at national and local levels are the main stakeholders. International and civil society organisations are vital partners.

The main beneficiaries will be women and children in vulnerable situations, including those who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Perpetrators of violence may also benefit.

### Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and/or an International Partner Organisation and Beneficiary States.
- All programmes shall include cooperation with civil society organisations.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

# 11. Access to Justice



## Programme area objective

Increased access to an independent, accountable, and efficient justice system of high quality in line with international and European human rights standards.

## Rationale for the support

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law create an environment in which countries can promote sustainable development, protect individuals from discrimination, and ensure equal access to justice for all. The majority of people will experience legal and justice needs over the course of their lifetime. Backlogs of cases in the judiciaries can take years to remove, reducing the accessibility and quality of justice. Ensuring people-centred justice is key to strengthening the rule of law, increasing people's confidence and trust in the judicial system, and safeguarding a sound business and investment environment.

The European Convention on Human Rights Article 6 provides the main elements of a fair and resilient justice system. The independence, accountability, quality, and efficiency of the judiciaries in European countries are crucial pillars in ensuring the rule of law is upheld and the balance of powers and stability maintained. High-quality and timely dispute resolution ensures that the justice system works for the benefit of citizens and businesses alike.

Development of digital technologies has the potential

to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system, making it more accessible. It is crucial that this modernisation is in line with human rights standards.

## Areas of support

- Independence and accountability of the court system.
- Quality and efficiency of the court system, including judge craft and leadership in the judiciary.
- Equal access to justice, including a child-friendly and gender-sensitive court system.



## How the objective will be addressed

The resilience of the court system depends on the independence and accountability of the courts. The programme area will focus on introducing measures for the protection of judges from inappropriate internal and external pressure, increased transparency, and improved public awareness of the role of the judiciary and the consequences of undermining its independence.

The fairness of the court system depends on the quality and efficiency of the courts and equal access to justice for all, both in criminal and civil cases. This programme area will invest in capacity building of judges and court staff as a prerequisite for ensuring quality, timely planning, and efficient case management. This will lead to increased judge craft and strengthened leadership and court management in the judiciary, fostering proactive judges and thereby positively impacting the quality and efficiency of the courts. Efforts to improve administrative efficiency should include proper data collection and analysis, time management, concentrated hearings, summary proceedings,

digitalisation, alternative dispute resolution and alternative sanctions.

To further strengthen the fairness of the court system, the programme area will support: gender-sensitive court systems performing their duties without bias and prejudice; child-friendly justice, also based on the Barnahus model, to ensure the best interest of the child and improve child protection, including through their meaningful participation in judicial proceedings; and access to justice systems for persons in vulnerable situations, including child victims, victims of domestic and gender-based violence, and Roma women and girls.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Courts, including judges and court staff, prosecution and other relevant public entities, are the main actors in bringing about the desired change. International organisations, educational and research institutions, and civil society organisations are valued partners in supporting the changes.

Improved court systems will benefit all citizens. Targeted actions will benefit persons in vulnerable situations.

## Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.



# 12. Correctional Services



## Programme area objective

Improved correctional services in line with international and European human rights standards.

### Rationale for the support

Many prisons in Europe suffer from overcrowding, and quality standards across prisons vary. Improvements are needed in terms of both the material conditions in prisons and the quality of the service provision. Many offenders released from prison face challenges hindering their full integration into society. Social reintegration is a key feature of successful crime prevention strategies. This includes the development of interventions designed to break the cycle of release and reoffending.

Minimum standards of detention conditions and systems across Europe are required to protect the human rights of prisoners, strengthen mutual trust between Member States, and facilitate mutual recognition of judgments and judicial decisions.

The prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment is enshrined in the 1984 Convention against Torture, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the 1987 European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These instruments require that detainees are held

in conditions compatible with respect for human dignity. Based on case law of the European Court of Human Rights, specific standards have been developed, such as the European Prison Rules.

The reports of the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) provide concrete and detailed recommendations to each Member State.

### Areas of support

- Prison conditions and treatment of prisoners and persons serving sentences in society.
- Alternative sanctions to imprisonment.
- Rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.
- Support to prisoners in vulnerable situations, including women and juveniles and minors.
- Education, training and support for prison and probation services staff, including management.





## How the objective will be addressed

This programme area will invest in capacity building of prison and probation services staff focusing on ethics, values, and security culture as well as on rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. A holistic approach to safety and security culture should be encouraged, focusing on the implementation of dynamic security in balance with static and organisational security. The programme area supports improvements in legislative frameworks as well as strategy and policy developments in the field of prison and probation. Activities to strengthen National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) can be supported.

Sanctions alternative to imprisonment should be identified in close cooperation with the judiciary in the Beneficiary States. The strengthening of legal and operational instruments that will facilitate the use of alternative sanctions should be encouraged, aiming to reduce the prison populations, fostering rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, and strengthening the seamless cooperation between prison and probation services. When relevant, training for prison and

probation staff in the use of alternative sanctions should be offered.

Vulnerable groups in prison, such as women, juveniles and minors, physically and mentally ill persons, persons with substance addictions, LGBTIQ+ persons, and non-nationals, suffer disproportionately compared with other prisoners. The programme area will support the provision of health services, including mental healthcare in prison. By facilitating the use of technological solutions, the programme area can increase the availability of such services and strengthen rehabilitation effectiveness. Interventions related to substance abuse and anger management, including for domestic and gender-based violence offenders, are also supported.

The funding for infrastructure, equipment and soft measures should be allocated to pilot prisons/projects.

Improvements in the infrastructure may also be supported. The size, scale and maturity of infrastructure projects shall be carefully assessed before agreement is given.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Prison and probation services and other relevant public entities are the main actors. International organisations, educational and research institutions, and civil society organisations are valued partners in supporting the changes.

Prison and probation services staff and prisoners, including women and juvenile offenders, will benefit from improved correctional services in line with international human rights.

## Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

# 13. Serious and Organised Crime



## Programme area objective

Preventing and combatting of serious and organised crime in line with international and European human rights standards.

### Rationale for the support

Serious and organised crime remains a key threat to the safety of people living in Europe. It undermines communities, causes substantial financial damage, and weakens the rule of law. Organised crime groups are often simultaneously involved in several criminal activities. Corruption remains a challenge for many countries, undermining central principles of the rule of law and trust in public institutions.

States have an obligation to prevent and combat hate crime, ensuring that all citizens enjoy the same human rights, and that society as a whole is protected. Law enforcement agencies must therefore proactively take measures to effectively prevent and combat hate crime and to ensure justice for all victims.

Another serious crime that has particularly harmful impacts on fundamental rights, individuals, communities, and society at large is domestic and gender-based violence. In extreme cases, it leads to loss of life. Gender-based violence remains widespread in Europe.

Criminal proceedings are often not designed for children. Barnahus is a multi-disciplinary and interagency model

developed to ensure that child victims of violence and sexual exploitation and abuse are not subjected to unnecessary stress in connection with examinations by law enforcement agencies. The Barnahus model also ensures that the children receive proper and coordinated support.

### Areas of support

- Prevent and combat selected forms of serious and organised crime, such as illegal drugs, environmental crimes, cybercrimes, trafficking in human beings, migrant smuggling, sexual exploitation and abuse of children.
- Methods and tools for investigation of serious and organised crime, including digital competence and capacity.
- Address economic crimes, including corruption and money laundering.
- Prevent and combat hate crimes as defined by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
- Prevent and combat domestic and gender-based violence.
- Child-friendly justice and Barnahus cooperation, based on the model defined by the Barnahus Network.



## How the objective will be addressed

Serious and organised crimes are often transnational, requiring close cooperation between law enforcement agencies in different countries to enable effective investigation and prosecution, including recovery of criminal assets. This includes enhancing digital forensics and financial investigations capacities to prevent illicit financial flows.

Collecting evidence via policing methods and digital and technological tools is an integral part of criminal investigations. It can take many forms, such as (digital) forensic examinations and interviews of victims, perpetrators, and witnesses. Strengthening the digital capacity can also contribute to enhanced detection and prevention of organised crime.

Common and high-quality examinations and methodologies will increase the mutual trust in the evidence shared between countries, facilitating the use of one country's evidence in another country's courts.

Capacity-building activities in the investigative process help to uphold the rule of law and respect for human

rights. Cooperation with international organisations supports law enforcement agencies in performing their duties in line with human rights and international standards. Cooperation with civil society organisations supports the efforts of the police to protect and serve the public, especially related to the prevention of crime.

Gender-sensitive and child-centred responses related to prevention and investigation, and a victim-centred approach to prosecution, allow for biases in institutions and structures to be countered. It is also important to increase the reporting of hate crimes and domestic and gender-based violence to the police.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Public entities at national and local levels are the main stakeholders. These include police and prosecution, courts, law enforcement agencies outside the police, and other relevant state actors.

International organisations and civil society organisations are valued partners that bring experience and expertise.

The end beneficiaries are victims of serious and organised crime, communities, and persons in vulnerable situations.

## Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.



# 14. Asylum, Migration and Integration



## Programme area objective

Well-functioning national systems for asylum, migration, and integration in line with international and European human rights standards.

### Rationale for the support

Over the past years, Europe has faced several events with major repercussions for migration, asylum, and integration. The war in Ukraine caused the largest displacement of people in Europe since the Second World War, especially women and children. The continued pressure on the routes across the Mediterranean and the Western Balkans adds to the challenge of increased migratory flows.

A well-functioning asylum, migration and integration system complying with human rights standards provides certainty, clarity and decent conditions for people arriving in Europe, and allows the public to trust that migration is managed in a humane and effective way.

Beneficiaries of international protection often face barriers to accessing employment, education, healthcare, housing, and social services. Integration based on non-discrimination, equal opportunities, rights and duties fosters social cohesion and a dynamic economy that works for all.

The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol are the key legal instruments defining

'refugees', their rights, and the legal obligations of states. The European Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) set the common minimum standards concerning migration and asylum processes in the EU. A comprehensive migration and asylum system requires a well-functioning integration policy. The EU has developed the Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 to support the Member States in this field.

### Areas of support

- National systems for asylum, migration, and integration, including ensuring they are child- and gender-sensitive.
- Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees exercising their rights, with a special focus on unaccompanied children and other vulnerable groups.
- Operationalisation of national strategies and policies for integration.

### How the objective will be addressed

The areas of support provide for a comprehensive approach to the asylum and migration chain. Strengthened capacities through digitalisation and smart ways of working will improve the quality and efficiency of the



asylum chain, ensuring access to procedures and enabling migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to exercise their rights. Provisions for guardianship for unaccompanied children and legal assistance should be supported.

Support to strategic and contingency planning will prepare systems for unpredictable influxes of applications.

The programme area supports the various stages of integration, i.e. reception and early integration for refugees and asylum seekers as well as long-term integration for refugees granted permanent or temporary residency. Appropriate housing and services in the early stages are basic rights, but also support further integration. Quality interpretation services and integration measures will also support migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in exercising their rights. Facilitating access to health services, education, and employment will reduce the risk of social exclusion. Countering misinformation, disinformation and hate speech directed towards asylum seeker and refugee groups will foster an inclusive environment.

The programme area provides support to facilitate the return of people with rejected asylum claims. Development of strategies related to return policies may be explored and developed.

The programme area will also enable the exchange of knowledge and best practices, either bilaterally or multilaterally, on ways to improve national asylum, migration, and integration systems.

The programme area will strengthen the cooperation between national and local authorities and civil society organisations.

### **Key actors and beneficiaries**

Public entities at national and local levels are the main stakeholders in bringing about the desired change.

Civil society and international organisations play an important role in this programme area. Civil society organisations can bring experience and advise on the law and policy development process. Furthermore, they bring valuable capacities in ensuring implementation in line with international law and national policies. Educational

and research institutions can also be drivers for change.

Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees will benefit, with unaccompanied children and other persons in vulnerable situations as the main beneficiaries.

### **Programme area specifics**

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Priority shall be given to projects that support the rights of unaccompanied children and other migrants in vulnerable situations, asylum seekers and refugees.
- Cooperation with civil society organisations shall be explored during programme development.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) in projects may only be supported alongside capacity building, training, and networking (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be identified in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

# 15. Institutional Cooperation and Capacity Building



## Programme area objective

Strengthened institutional cooperation and increased quality of public services policies and regulations.

## Rationale for the support

Robust, transparent, and more efficient and effective public administrations are crucial for resilient and democratic societies.

Institutional capacity building and human resource development are among the principal tools for improving effective service provision and the protection and promotion of human rights by public services. Fostering digital citizenship and tackling information manipulation can also be supported.

Cooperation between Donor State and Beneficiary State institutions aims to contribute to the development of sound, efficient, inclusive and responsive administrations, with the structures, human resources and management skills needed to implement their designated tasks to a high standard. Support for these institutions, and the enhancement of their capacities and response to societal needs is crucial to citizens' trust. In this regard, cooperation and the exchange of knowledge between Donor and Beneficiary States is of mutual benefit.

## Areas of support

- Institutional capacity and human resources development in public institutions.
- Strengthened cooperation between public institutions in the Donor and Beneficiary States and/or with International Partner Organisations.
- Accessibility and quality of public services.
- Governance tools for inclusive and gender- and youth-sensitive decision-making.
- Improving capabilities for effective delivery of public services and infrastructure programmes.



### **How the objective will be addressed**

This programme area will contribute to improved quality of services, policies and regulations through capacity building, exchange and skills development.

It will support initiatives of local, regional and national level public institutions, including initiatives to strengthen cooperation between these institutions. Mechanisms for interaction between academia, civil society and private sectors, public authorities, ombuds institutions, national human rights institutions, equality bodies and parliaments can also be supported to maintain evidence-based policymaking.

The programme area will facilitate the exchange of experiences and learning between partners in the Donor and Beneficiary States. It will provide networks, exchange of knowledge, and dissemination of best practices.

### **Key actors and beneficiaries**

Public entities are the main actors in bringing about the desired change at national, regional, and local levels.

Donor State institutions and international organisations will be key partners.

The end beneficiaries will be the general public through improved government systems, strengthened services, and improved civil servants' skills.

### **Programme area specifics**

- Partnerships between Donor State entities and/or International Partner Organisations and Beneficiary State entities are mandatory in all projects.







# The EEA and Norway Grants funds

The following three funds have been established within the EEA and Norway Grants 2021-2028:

- Fund for Civil Society
- Fund for Capacity Building and Cooperation with International Partner Organisations and Institutions
- Fund for Social Dialogue and Decent Work (only Norway Grants)

These three funds will contribute to the objectives and thematic priorities of the EEA and Norway Grants. All three funds will be managed by the Donor States and will not be part of the MoU negotiations.

The Fund for Civil Society amounts to almost €327 million and is distributed across the Beneficiary States following a distribution key defined by the EU. A specified percentage will be allocated to transnational initiatives. An independent Fund Operator, selected through an open procedure and directly contracted by the Donors, will be responsible for managing the Fund at country level.

The Fund for Capacity Building and Cooperation with International Organisations and Institutions amounts to €65 million. The cooperation includes: strategic advice to Donor and Beneficiary States; advice on programme design, implementation, and monitoring; participation in projects at national level, individually or with partners; and transnational projects including strategic cooperation in conferences, events, and study visits. The fund will be managed by the FMO.

The Fund for Social Dialogue and Decent Work, established solely under the Norway Grants, amounts to almost €15 million. The Fund will be made available to actors in all 13 Beneficiary States receiving Norway Grants. An independent Fund Operator, selected through an open procedure, and directly contracted by the FMO, will manage the fund. The three funds are further described in the following pages.

# Civil Society Fund



## Programme area objective

A vibrant and resilient civil society protecting and promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

### Rationale for the support

A healthy democracy relies on a vibrant and resilient civil society that gives a voice to citizens and holds governments accountable. Civil society organisations play a vital role in protecting and promoting democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, as well as in countering discrimination. They contribute to reducing social and economic disparities by fostering informed public debate, taking part in policymaking, building social trust, and strengthening the participation of all, including minorities and groups that are marginalised, in democratic processes and civic activities. For the European green transition, civil society can advocate for systemic change.

Civil society organisations may lack the capacity to fulfil their role effectively. Additionally, civil society in Europe faces increasing challenges, such as restrictive regulatory environments, limited access to resources, intimidation and harassment, and obstacles to participation in decision-making. The digital transformation of civic space offers unprecedented opportunities but also poses challenges to civil society. These challenges threaten the ability of civil society to fulfil its

mission. Civil society's role and engagement of citizens remain critical in protecting the values of the EU and citizen participation as enshrined in Articles 2 and 11 of the Treaty of the EU and in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

### Areas of support

- Democratic values, civic engagement, information integrity and media literacy.
- Civil society participation in democratic processes.
- Human rights, anti-discrimination, and social justice.
- Gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights.
- Climate action, environmental protection, and a just green transition.
- Organisational development and an enabling environment for civil society.



## How the objective will be addressed

The objective of the fund will be achieved by supporting civil society organisations involved in advocacy, monitoring, strategic litigation, civic education, and citizen engagement, training and capacity building, as well as research and analysis to inform policy making. The supported activities will contribute to the areas of support and to connected themes such as a stronger rule of law culture, reduced disinformation and hate speech, healthier information spaces, access to information, media pluralism and stronger independent media, a more participatory local democracy, good governance, and an inclusive approach to policy development.

The fund will place a strong focus on developing the capacities and resilience of civil society organisations and the sector. Civil society organisations and other civic actors will be equipped with new skills to engage volunteers, diversify funding, connect with target groups, enhance their transparency and accountability, and communicate in complex operating environments. In

addition, the fund will support civil society in defending civic space, ensuring an enabling environment for civil society and advocating for better legislation and practices for civic participation.

Independent Fund Operators in each Beneficiary State will manage the programmes and ensure they remain accessible and respond to national needs. A transnational component will foster European-level learning and networking of civil society organisations.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Civil society organisations in the Beneficiary States, working at the grassroots, local, national, or regional levels, are the main actors in achieving the fund's objective. Social movements, informal groups, local community leaders, and human rights defenders are some of the most important partners for civil society organisations and may facilitate the engagement of specific target groups.

Public sector entities, private companies, and entities from the Donor States can also contribute to civil society activities through partnerships with civil society organisations.

European networks and think tanks may provide support for advocacy initiatives and knowledge exchange that strengthens civil society.

In addition to supporting civil society organisations directly, the fund will benefit diverse target groups, including women, youth, minorities, groups that are marginalised, LGBTIQ+ people, migrants and refugees, and Roma people.

## Fund specifics

- All programmes shall include measures to reach out to under-served geographic areas and target groups that are marginalised.
- The provision of social services can only be supported if these services are necessary for enhancing advocacy, community participation, and/or civic engagement.
- At least 20% of the re-granting amount shall contribute to organisational development and an enabling environment for civil society.

# Fund for Capacity Building and Cooperation with International Partner Organisations and Institutions

## Programme area objective

Strengthened capacity and cooperation in the Beneficiary States and across the region to promote democracy, the rule of law, human rights, social inclusion, resilience and the European green transition.

## Rationale for the support

International organisations and institutions are crucial for promoting and upholding the fundamental values of European cooperation.

They can provide support to follow up on key areas to foster resilient and strong democracies in cooperation with Beneficiary States, and regionally by working with established networks.

Beneficiary States may benefit from input in the preparation, outreach, implementation and monitoring of programmes within the EEA and Norway Grants.

International Partner Organisations and institutions may contribute to improving the results of programmes and activities and ensuring their alignment with international and European standards, including EU law and policy.

## Areas of support

- Democracy, rule of law and human rights.
- Good governance.
- Access to justice.
- Green governance.
- Civic engagement and information integrity, including media literacy and safe journalism.
- Human rights in the digital sphere and AI.
- Gender-based violence and violence against women.
- Hate speech and hate crime.
- Social inclusion, equality, and non-discrimination.
- Roma.
- LGBTIQ+.
- Strengthening national human rights institutions, equality bodies and ombuds institutions.
- Education for democracy/ civic education.
- Cultural expression and historic narratives.
- Free media/safe journalism.
- Minority rights and history.





## How the objective will be addressed

The Fund will aim to contribute to the thematic priorities of promoting democracy, rule of law, and human rights; social inclusion and resilience; and the European green transition, with a particular focus on the first-mentioned priority.

This Fund provides a flexible tool for Beneficiary States to benefit from International Partner Organisations' input at the national, programme and project levels.

Beneficiary States will be invited to take part in transnational initiatives, based on voluntary participation. Through transnational cooperation facilitated by the International Partner Organisations, the Donor and Beneficiary States will benefit from knowledge sharing and peer learning.

Cooperation can take various forms, including strategic advice to Donor and Beneficiary States, participation in programmes and projects under nationally managed programmes, designing and implementing pre-defined national or transnational projects, and initiatives in the form of a conference, study or survey.

National human rights implementation can be strengthened through support in adhering to judgments from the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice. It can also be strengthened through support to domestic mechanisms for good governance and human rights protection.

Good governance can be promoted through more efficient and green public governance systems, inclusive policymaking, fighting corruption and economic crime, strengthening public procurement, and protecting civic space.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

The key actors will be International Partner Organisations or institutions established by them, including among others, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. The Donor States can choose to designate additional actors.

Beneficiary States can benefit from contributions at the national, programme and project level or through transnational initiatives, ultimately improving the outcomes for their end beneficiaries.

# Fund for Social Dialogue and Decent Work (Norway Grants)



## Programme area objective

Strengthened social dialogue between workers' organisations, employers' organisations and public authorities and the promotion of decent work.

## Rationale for the support

Every worker has the right to working conditions that respect their health, safety, and dignity, and that are in line with international and EU human rights standards. Fair and just working conditions are also key drivers of social and economic resilience, inclusive growth, and competitiveness.

The International Labour Organization emphasises four pillars of 'decent work': job creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue. Despite its fundamental role, many people in Europe do not have access to decent work. Unemployment and skills mismatch, poor working conditions, discrimination, and the lack of social protection remain a challenge, with workers in vulnerable situations being the most affected.

Social dialogue is an efficient tool to achieve decent work and to find consensus-based solutions in response to the changing world of work and social disruption stemming from crises and transitions. The EU urges the need to reinforce social dialogue and strengthen social partners, meaning workers' and employers' organisations, given their important role in policymaking

and law-making at the national and EU level. This includes efforts to reverse the decline in collective agreements coverage and trade union density, which have diminished significantly in EU Member States.

The European Pillar of Social Rights sets the priorities for EU action for fair working conditions, equality, and inclusion in the labour market, underlining the importance of involving social partners and workers. Newer forms of work and digitalisation bring new opportunities for both employers and workers, but also challenges for decent work and social dialogue. Several groups of workers and the self-employed remain underrepresented in collective agreements and social dialogue.

## Areas of support

- Strengthening social dialogue structures, practices, capacities, and policies.
- Promoting decent work, including the prevention and combatting of social dumping and undeclared work.



## How the objective will be addressed

Well-functioning social dialogue requires the involvement of strong, independent, and representative social partners, as well as public authorities. In several European countries, social partners lack the capacity and conditions to engage in social dialogue effectively. The Fund is therefore dedicated to supporting institutional capacity building and training, as well as bipartite and tripartite social dialogue.

Establishing decent work for all involves enhancing fair and safe working conditions and creating better jobs. Support will be given to projects increasing decent work arrangements and the quality of jobs. This will include training of labour inspectorates and other regulatory authorities to enforce legislation, as well as capacity building and awareness raising among social partners and workers on the benefits of decent work. In addressing decent work, cooperation between public authorities, social partners and civil society organisations will be supported.

Today's labour market challenges also require

transnational cooperation, such as in response to social dumping and undeclared work, as well as on the integration of migrants and refugees. By collaborating across borders, resources and expertise can be pooled and impacts strengthened.

Gender equality and non-discrimination are cross-cutting principles that shall be addressed throughout the Fund.

## Key actors and beneficiaries

Social partners and public authorities are the primary actors and beneficiaries. International organisations, including organisations for workers and employers, social enterprises, and educational and research institutions are relevant partners. Civil society organisations representing workers in vulnerable situations can play an important role in contributing to decent work for these groups, and help create a bridge between these workers, employers, social partners and public authorities.

Workers in particular need of improved conditions for decent work are the main beneficiaries of the programme area. A specific

focus will be given to groups of workers underrepresented in social dialogue and workers vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and mistreatment in the labour market.

Bilateral cooperation plays an important role in the Fund, through the close involvement of Norwegian social partners, public authorities, and civil society organisations in the exchange of knowledge and experience.

## Fund specifics

- Projects with bilateral partnerships shall be given priority.
- Transnational cooperation shall be supported.



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



GOVERNMENT  
PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN



Government of Iceland  
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