



PRIORITY SECTOR
Culture, Civil Society, Good
Governance and Fundamental
Rights and Freedoms

Programme area n°15 Civil Society

OBJECTIVE

Civil society and active citizenship strengthened and vulnerable groups empowered

AREAS OF SUPPORT

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

SUGGESTED MEASURES

- > Advocacy, awareness-raising and outreach to citizens
- > Watchdog and monitoring, including following up on recommendations of international monitoring bodies
- > Citizen activism, volunteering and civic participation
- > Participation in policy and decision-making processes, including promoting an enabling environment for civil society
- > Support for freedom of expression, investigative journalism and media
- > Countering hate speech, including support to networks working with hate crime victims
- > Promoting LGBTI rights and anti-discrimination activities
- > Capacity building of the civil society sector, including sustainability, networking and accountability of NGOs
- > Partnerships between NGOs, public and private sector entities
- > Civic education and training
- > Research and analysis to inform policy-making
- > Social innovation and social enterprise development
- > Intercultural dialogue, including platforms for minority/majority interactions
- > Inter-generational cooperation
- > Awareness-raising and capacity building on environmental issues including climate change and adaptation
- > Access to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters in accordance with the Aarhus Convention

RELEVANCE OF SUPPORT

Support from the EEA and Norway Grants to civil society reflects a firm recognition of the sector's role as a fundamental building block of democratic governance, human rights and social cohesion across Europe. The civil society programmes reflect the current challenges facing Europe against the backdrop of the economic crisis. In line with the objectives of the EU's cohesion policy, particular emphasis is given to combating discrimination, to promoting inclusion, and to harnessing the potential of social entrepreneurship in the fight against social exclusion. Support to young people at risk of social exclusion, and young people from marginalised communities, is mainstreamed across the programme area.

Civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), mobilise participation in civic life, and play a key role in promoting active citizen engagement in decision-making at local, national and European levels. In the context of reduced national and international support to the sector, the EEA and Norway Grants play a critical role in building the capacity of the sector.

NGOs tackle social problems arising from inequality and discrimination. They contribute to the activation and empowerment of disadvantaged people and minority groups, such as Roma, by helping them overcome barriers to participation and ensure that their voices are heard.

Radicalisation, violent extremism, and the rise of populist forces demand a comprehensive and multi-sectoral response. Civil society support to inclusion, democracy and participation plays a role in addressing the easy dissemination of hateful views online, and can reinforce broad efforts to counter extremist narratives and prevent escalation leading to violence.

NGOs provide innovative solutions and services that help vulnerable people overcome barriers to participation in socio-economic life. The Europe 2020 strategy emphasises civil society organisations as agents of innovation, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Civil society organisations supported by the EEA and Norway Grants often work closely with public authorities and stakeholders. Partnerships between NGOs and public administrations, particularly at local level, can contribute to better access to services, accountability and good governance.

The programme area takes account of challenges identified in the Secretary General of the Council of Europe report "State of democracy, human rights and rule of law in Europe" (April 2014). Knowledge-sharing, exchange of experience and project partnerships are promoted through bilateral cooperation.

PROGRAMME AREA SPECIFICS

- > At least a third of the re-granting amount shall be allocated to democracy and human rights relevant projects
- > All programmes shall include youth inclusion
- > Protection of the environment and climate change shall only be supported as part of measures to promote civic participation, advocacy, social innovation and active citizenship
- > Provision of welfare and basic services shall only be supported as part of wider actions addressing awareness-raising, advocacy, empowerment and reform initiatives
- > At least 15% of the re-granting amount shall contribute to capacity development and sustainability of civil society including non-governmental organisations (NGOs)