

Active Citizens Fund in Lithuania

(Summary of the Concept Note, 2019)

Challenges and needs to be addressed

The NGO Fund Feasibility study (2017)¹ concludes that **Lithuanian civil society is relatively weak**: citizens' engagement in civic activities keeps decreasing, participation of citizens and CSOs in public policy is low and financial support or capacity building measures aimed at strengthening civil society are not effective. Even though national strategic documents² acknowledge the importance of citizens' participation in policy making processes and service delivery, the lack of resources, capacities and sustainability of the civil society sector create a **big gap between policy and practice**.

The sector comprises mostly smaller organizations with few or no employees³. Insufficient and decreasing state and municipal funding has led to low organisational activity; at least half of all registered organisations are not active. Particularly **smaller CSOs tend to operate on an ad-hoc basis**.⁴

CSOs' capacities to develop strategies for implementation of their missions and increasing impact remain very low. CSOs, especially local and smaller organizations, lack capacity to develop project applications that would suffice for funding and require significant project management support. Larger CSOs **lack strategic thinking and project development capacities** and continue to rely on funding mostly from governmental sources instead of tapping into larger foreign donor programs.

Democracy and civic participation

Civic engagement in CSOs and in civic activities remains relatively stable, yet very low: around 27% engagement was recorded in 2016. The number of volunteers has slightly increased in recent years, reaching 13% of the population in 2017.⁵ The volunteering rate is even low for young people.⁶

One contributing factor is the generally poor quality of **civic education** in Lithuanian schools: although civic education is a part of the general curriculum, the quality of delivery varies between educational institutions.

Lithuanian CSOs report **numerous challenges impeding their advocacy and watchdog work**, e.g. little interest in collaboration among CSOs, reluctance of public authorities to engage CSOs in public policy decision making, efforts to exert political influence over organizations as well as lack of CSO resources for advocacy and monitoring.⁷

Human rights and equal treatment

The protection and promotion of human rights are not highly prioritized by the government and national funding for human rights related issues is almost non-existent.⁸

There is a lack of **compliance with international conventions**⁹ and several recent improvements only mask the continuous neglect of ensuring international human rights standards for the vulnerable groups such as

¹ Feasibility study carried out by NGO Law institute in cooperation with consortium of 11 CSOs led by Open Lithuanian Foundation (FO leading partner)

² National Progress Strategy „Lithuania 2030“, Law on Development of Non-Governmental Organizations

³ A survey carried out by Transparency International Lithuania revealed that 40% of the surveyed organisations had annual budgets of less than EUR 3000, while only 7% of organisations reported having annual budgets exceeding EUR 30,000 (Transparency International Lithuania, 2016).

⁴ Idem

⁵ Economic consultations&research, 2017

⁶ Analysis of Municipal Youth Action Plans Implementation Monitoring carried out by the Department of Youth Affairs in 2016, https://jrd.lt/informacija-dirbantiems-su-jaunimu/informacija-apie-jaunima/apzvalgos/jpsp__aktualus_i_jrdlt.pdf

⁷ EU Russia Civil Society Forum, 2017

⁸ CREDA Consulting LTD, 2015

⁹ e.g., chapter 8 of the European Human Rights Convention, regarding recognition of unmarried de facto partnerships and their rights is not respected as a law passed in 2017 defining the foundation of a family as a union between a man and a woman, raising concerns about

people with disabilities, LGBTI+ persons, ethnic minorities (especially Roma), migrant workers and refugees.¹⁰

Numerous media, law enforcement, education and healthcare institutions contribute to the reproduction of **derogatory and restrictive stereotypes about various social groups**¹¹. Often, positive steps in combating discrimination in Lithuania are accompanied by **controversial government decisions undermining human rights and consolidating discriminatory attitudes**¹².

There is no effective government policy in place to counter violence against women despite a prevalence of such violence in Lithuanian society: the results of a 2014 survey by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) showed that from the age of 15, 31% of women in Lithuania experienced physical and/or sexual violence, 8% of women have been stalked and 35% experienced sexual harassment.¹³ Lithuania signed the **Istanbul Convention on prevention of gender-based violence in June 2013, but has not yet ratified it. Violence against women continues to be under-reported and stigmatised**, with the cases reported representing only a fraction of the actual violence occurring.

Social justice and vulnerable groups

According to the OECD (2018), **inequality remains high with the risk of poverty** among one of the highest in Europe at 19.1 % (in 2016), with large regional disparities between the five main cities and rural areas.

Children (especially in jobless, single-parent or large family households) disabled persons, elderly and unemployed persons are among the most vulnerable to experience poverty. Moreover, homeless people, people with disabilities, people with dependency illnesses and the long-term unemployed are among the most vulnerable and socially excluded groups¹⁴.

Insufficient representation of the interests of vulnerable groups by CSOs and public institutions continues to be an issue.¹⁵ Even specialized institutions dealing with specific discriminatory backgrounds do not engage representatives from such groups or their involvement remains formal.

Lithuania is a relatively homogeneous country with a few larger groups of ethnic minorities. However ethnic minorities' groups are portrayed negatively in the most prominent Lithuanian online media.¹⁶

Addressing needs and challenges

The ACF program addresses the challenges and needs through five outcomes, covering all areas of support:

Increased citizen participation in civic activities (Outcome 1)

This outcome will be achieved through CSO projects addressing low civic engagement, low involvement of citizens in public policy making and non-efficient civic education.

The program will encourage citizens to address and consult public policy decisions, including those in the area of gender equality, environment and climate change. The creation and development of infrastructure for public dialogue, such as digital tools and platforms, will also be encouraged.

discrimination against single parents and same-sex couples with families; partners in same-sex partnerships are not recognized as "family members"; the Istanbul Convention is not ratified, etc.

¹⁰ Human Rights Monitoring Institute, 2018

¹¹ https://socmin.lrv.lt/uploads/socmin/documents/files/pdf/8783_diskriminaciniu_nuostatu_kaitos_ataskaita_2014.pdf

¹² Report on the situation of Human Rights in Lithuania, 2018, <https://hrmi.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2016-2017-Human-Rights-in-Lithuania.pdf>

¹³ European Agency for Fundamental Rights, Violence against women: an EU-wide survey – Main results, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2014

¹⁴ Statistics Lithuania

¹⁵ https://socmin.lrv.lt/uploads/socmin/documents/files/pdf/8783_diskriminaciniu_nuostatu_kaitos_ataskaita_2014.pdf

¹⁶ Ilkevičiūtė J., The Representation of Ethnic Minorities in the Internet Media during the Considerations of the Law on National Minorities, 2015, <https://etalpykla.lituanistikadb.lt/fedora/objects/LT-LDB-0001:J.04~2015~1476347535188/datastreams/DS.002.0.01.ARTIC/content?fbclid=IwAR2E6mocrVJr6l3nhPi01qSnG3h178Adc9JlxE1dXNMrQlxnMQC3ssZ16Y>

Strengthened civil society watchdog/advocacy role (Outcome 2)

Under this outcome, the programme will support CSO projects addressing citizens' and CSOs' engagement in and contribution to public policy decisions, promoting transparency and accountability of public institutions, as well as reinforcing CSOs' watchdog role; research, analysis and initiatives affecting decision-making processes.

The program will encourage CSOs to actively contribute to the development of national, regional and local public policies and ensure flexible responses to urgently emerging societal challenges, incidents or violation of fundamental rights.

Increased support for human rights (Outcome 3)

This outcome will be supported through CSO projects focused on human rights and equal treatment, especially to sustain positive developments in the human rights area and increase adherence to international human rights standards. The program will also support essential and vital human rights defending actions, including, but not limited to, advocacy/awareness raising campaigns supporting freedom of expression, promoting LGBTI+ rights, anti-discrimination activities, strategic litigation initiatives, research and analysis.

Vulnerable groups are empowered (Outcome 4)

This outcome will be achieved through CSO projects aimed at empowering vulnerable groups and CSOs representing them in advocating for their interests. CSOs will be expected to help empower vulnerable groups and focus on their participation in the decision-making processes and their access to e.g. information, the labor market, education and culture.

Specific attention will be devoted to training vulnerable individuals to advocate for themselves and their communities' needs.

Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society (Outcome 5)

This outcome will be supported through projects aimed at improving Lithuanian CSOs skills and competences, introducing higher standards of management and implementing up-to-date strategies contributing to their sustainability. Particular emphasis will be on aspects of financial sustainability, organizational development, communication, governance, impact sustainability and advocacy.

Country-specific concerns

The Program addresses the country-specific concerns as follows:

- **Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the civil society sector.** The capacities and sustainability of the civil society sector will be strengthened through the diversification of capacity building measures and their adaptation to the needs of target groups.
- **Improve outreach to under-served geographic areas and target groups.** Outreach to under-served geographical areas and target groups will be a very important part of the programme and will mainly be implemented through specific actions organized by the FO.
- **Include initiatives promoting inter-cultural integration with special emphasis on national minorities.** Partnerships involving national minorities' CSOs aimed at joint actions or initiatives will be encouraged across all the programme's areas of support.

Expected impact and the sustainability of the programme

The ACF program shall demonstrate the importance of the role of the civic sector in strengthening civil society, introduce long-lasting measures for better inter-sectorial dialogue and partnerships, promote better functioning public institutions and contribute to a healthier democracy. This shall be done through the engagement of citizens, CSOs' contribution to improvements of laws and public policies, the fostering of a human rights positive public discourse, and the introduction of new/enhancement of existing services to vulnerable groups.

It is expected that the ACF program will become the main financing source for watchdog, advocacy and human rights CSOs in Lithuania. It will also support activities and initiatives of CSOs promoting civic participation, active citizenship, awareness raising and empowerment of vulnerable groups, especially at the local level.