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INSTITUTUM VIRTUTES CIVILIS

FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

"Resilient CSOs + Responsible Budgeting = Accelerated Associated Agreement implementation"

2023 - 2025

Grant Call Guidelines

The project is funded by the European Union and co-funded Friedrich Ebert Foundation

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1. Background

Independent Analytical Center Expert-Grup, as lead partner, in consortium with the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), Institutum Virtutes Civilis (IVC) and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Foundation are implementing the EU-grant project "Resilient CSOs + Responsible Budgeting = Accelerated AA implementation". The total budget of the project is EUR 1.1 million and it is financing by the European Commission and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Foundation. The implementation period of the project is January 2023 – June 2025.

The project is built on the experience, materials and lessons learned from the previous EU-funded project Bugetul Meu" ("Inform, Empower, Act") implemented by Expert-Grup and IPRE during 2019-2022, which aimed at enhancing the budgetary transparency and participation of local CSOs in budgetary processes.

The general objective of the project is to build and consolidate capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to support the implementation of the conditionalities attached to Moldova's accession process to the EU and the Association Agreement (AA), at national and local level.

Specific objectives:

1. Improve capacity, ensure resilience and enhance participation of CSOs in the budgetary monitoring and advocacy at central and local level, with a priority focus on budgets analysis in the context of AA implementation and Moldova's accession process to the EU.
2. Enhance capacity and involvement of the three CSOs' platforms (i) Moldovan National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (ii) the EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform and (iii) the Domestic Advisory Group on Trade and Sustainable Development, to provide cohesive support for the implementation of the AA and the conditionalities attached to Moldova's accession process in the EU.

The main activities of the project are:

- Delivering a complex capacity building programme for the selected CSOs on budget monitoring, aiming at enhancing their participation in budget expenditure monitoring and advocacy at central and local levels;
- Drafting and publishing 30 expenditure monitoring reports by the selected CSOs, covering topics on certain projects and policies at local and central level, related to the Europeanization agenda;
- Conducting visibility and advocacy events on budget monitoring at the local and central level;
- Ensuring a well-functioning joint secretariat for the coordination of the three above mentioned CSOs platforms, aiming at ensuring that their members act in cohesion with regard to the implementation of the AA and Europeanization agenda;
- Training members of the 3 CSOs platforms in key competences linked to the AA;
- Launching an awareness raising and information campaign among CSOs on the importance of civic engagement in advancing the AA and Europeanization agenda;

- Launching an advocacy campaign on national and on European level, aiming at informing the domestic and international audience, about the state of play with the Europeanization reforms agenda.

Target groups and final beneficiaries of the project:

For the implementation of the specific object 1 of the project, the target group are 15 community based CSOs from 5 development regions of the country: North, Centre, South, TAU Gagauz-yeri and Transnistria, that will benefit from capacity building and will be provided grants to conduct budget monitoring and advocacy activities. It is planned that 45 members of the selected CSOs (3 people per CSO) will be trained to receive expertise and be capable to engage constructively in the budgetary processes: analysing the local and state budgets, monitoring the budgetary planning and execution, with a special emphasis on monitoring budgets in the context of AA implementation, Europeanization agenda and use of the EU assistance.

For the implementation of the specific object 2 of the project, target group are the three platforms of CSOs: Moldovan National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, the EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform and the Domestic Advisory Group on Trade and Sustainable Development, whose capacity will be improved and be supported financially. It is planned that about 75 CSOs that are the most active members of the mentioned platforms, will be selected to receive training on organizational management and development, fundraising, financial reporting, policy advocacy and other key aspects for a successful development of CSOs.

Ultimately, relying on the outcomes of the project, the beneficiary of this project will be the entire population of the country, including the Transnistrian region, who will benefit from accelerated implementation of the AA and the advancement of the Europeanization process.

2. Who can apply?

CSOs officially registered in the Republic of Moldova and activating in the regions. Preference will be given to CSOs that are well established at the local/region level and have capacities and experience for implementing the activities envisaged in the project.

Political parties, religious associations, individuals, businesses and business associations are not eligible for this assignment.

3. Typology of the financial support

Based on a competitive process, will be selected 15 CSOs from the 5 development regions: North, Center, South, ATU Gagauzia and Transnistria (3 CSOs per region). Each selected CSO will benefit from financial support in the form of grant in the amount of up to EUR 20,000, allocated throughout the duration of the project to ensure the financing of the planned activities. Particularly, it will include: salary costs, relevant administrative costs and bank charges.

4. Objectives of granting

The overall objective of the granting scheme is to ensure financial support for beneficiary CSOs in implementation of the project activities at local/region level. The grantees will follow five key objectives**:**

i. monitoring the local budgets and budgetary allocations from the central level and development partners, with a special emphasis on local and regional infrastructure projects, social services, public services and other relevant projects related to the AA and Europeanization agenda;

ii. monitoring, together with the central project team, the budgetary expenditures at the central level for projects and policies related to the Europeanization agenda, with a special emphasis on the following topics: justice sector and anti-corruption reform; labour and employment policies; social services; energy efficiency and renewable energy; pubic services; and human-rights, including gender equality;

iii. participation, together with the central project team, in the dissemination and visibility activities at the local level; providing logistical support in organizing all activities and events at the local level;

iv. becoming local resource-centres, capable of mobilizing other CSOs and civic activists at the local level for participatory budgeting and budgetary monitoring activities;

v. participation in the activities of the CSOs platforms (mentioned above) by providing local/regional insights into position notes, events and advocacy activities of platforms.

5. Project description and eligible activities

Each selected CSOs will benefit of a preparatory phase for the project. Thus, they will participate in a training organized by the central project team. The training aims to strengthen the capacities of the selected CSOs on the budget monitoring dimension, ensuring at the same time a better understanding of the correlation between the budget processes and the Europeanization agenda. After the preparation stage, the selected CSOs will be responsible for developing monitoring reports and carrying out visibility activities to presents the results of the reports.

Preparatory phase – participating in a 5-day training

Each selected CSO will delegate 3 representatives from the organization to attend the training. Training will take place in Chisinau and will last 5 days. The training will include 5 separate modules (1 day per module), namely:

1. main concepts about civic participation in the budgetary process at the central and local level; understanding the budgetary figures and opportunities for advocacy at the central and local level; conducting expenditure tracking activities; and civic-led communication and advocacy, based on findings of budgetary monitoring and expenditure tracking activities;
2. assessing the correlation between the budgetary process and the Europeanization agenda, understanding the gaps and opportunities, identification of policy advocacy priorities;
3. conducting expenditure tracking activities in social and human rights areas (public services, social services, employment policies, human rights and gender policies etc.);
4. conducting expenditure tracking activities in the justice sector;
5. conducting expenditure tracking activities in economic areas (public investments, economic subsidies, job creation and export promotion activities etc.).

Implementation stage

- Each CSO will be responsible for drafting 2 budget expenditure monitoring analysis: one at the local level and one at the central level. The topics will focus on certain projects and policies related to the Europeanization agenda, and will be selected by the CSOs, taking into account their best knowledge of the local context and priorities, in close coordination with the central project team experts. The methodology and implementation approach will be in line with the capacity building trainings. Throughout the process of report development, the local CSOs will engage actively with the central project team, who will provide practical guidance and mentorship in order to ensure the necessary quality, relevance and impact of these reports.
- Each CSOs will conduct visibility and advocacy activities to promote the results of the independent budget expenditure tracking reports they developed. The visibility and advocacy activities will include 2 public round tables (one at the central and one at the local level).
- CSOs will engage in networking activities, ensuring an exchange of experience and lessons learned among CSOs and, especially, between local (small) CSOs and central (well-established) CSOs.

In this context, the activities/actions eligible for funding must be closely related to the objectives and results of the project, and will contain the following activities:

- Participation in the training program offered within the preparatory stage of the project;
- Carrying out the budget monitoring analyses, one at the local and central level, in the context of the Europeanization agenda and the Association Agreement;
- Carrying out visibility activities, advocacy, knowledge exchange activities, networking, organizing focus groups and other events to achieve the project's objectives;
- Activities related to the implementation of visibility and communication plan of the project;
- Administrative costs related to project implementation.

6. Timeline of key activities

The activities will be implemented according to the following tentative milestones calendar:

- Participating in a 5-day general training organized by the central project team: by the end of August 2023;
- Drafting the independent budget expenditure tracking reports: September 2023 – December 2024;
- Conducting the visibility and awareness activities: September 2023 – December 2024;
- Engaging in networking activities, ensuring the exchange of experience and lessons learned among CSOs – through the end of project.

7. Criteria for determining the final amount of the grant contract

The final value of the grant contract will be established depending on the de facto costs borne by the grant beneficiaries. The total amount of the grant for each individual beneficiary cannot exceed EUR 20,000.

8. Ineligible costs to be covered by the grant

- any costs that are not related to the project objectives and outputs;

- debts and debt service charges (interest);
- provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- costs declared by the beneficiary and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union or other donor grant;
- purchases of land or buildings, refurbishments or reconstruction of buildings or offices;
- currency exchange losses;
- credits to third parties;
- salary cost of the personnel of national administrations;
- negative interest charged by banks or other financial institutions;
- costs to attend international conferences, seminars or workshops not related to project objectives.

9. Submission of the application

A complete application will include the following documents:

- a short motivation letter, explaining the reasons of participating in this competition and indicating the objectives and results that will be achieved following the use of the grant. Also, in the letter will be indicated the region where the organization intends to operate (North, Central, South, Transnistria, Gagauzia).
- a short description of the organization (1-2 pages);
- a proposed budget for project activities;
- the list of relevant project references (no limit);
- certificate of registration (excerpt from the State Register of Legal Entities issued no later than 12 months prior to the application submission date will be requested in case of contract signature);
- the activity report of the organization for the most recent year;
- the charter of the organization;
- financial reports for the last 3 years (balance sheets, profit and loss statement, etc.);
- the most recent audit report of the financial statements of the organization (if available).

The application should be presented in the Romanian language.

Paper based applications will be rejected.

10. Evaluation process

The selection of the beneficiary CSOs will be made based on the evaluation of the applications received within the announced time frame. Applications received after the announced deadline will not be considered. The evaluation will be carried out by the evaluation committee made up of representatives or persons appointed by the project partners (Expert-Group, IPRE, IVC, FES). The secretariat of the evaluation committee will be provided by the Expert-Group. The estimated deadline for the evaluation is 30 days after the announced deadline for submitting applications. The result of the evaluation process will be published on the Expert-Group website and each selected beneficiary (for each of the 5 regions) will be informed individually

1st Stage - Administrative checks

At this stage, the following aspects will be checked:

- if the deadline has been met;
- if all required documents were presented;

Responsible for the collecting information for this stage is Expert Grup, which will present results to the evaluation committee. Evaluation committee will take decision regarding the rejection of the applicants that did not meet the administrative requirements.

2nd Stage - Evaluation according to qualification criteria (yes/no)

Applications that meet the administrative requirements will be evaluated by the evaluation committee according to the following qualification criteria:

- the organization is legally registered on the territory of the Republic of Moldova;
- the organisation has at least 3 years of experience in implementing projects and activities aimed at monitoring central/local budgets, mobilizing local communities and working with local public authorities;

3rd Stage - Quality evaluation

Candidates who pass the qualification stage will be divided into 5 groups, according to 5 regions (North, Central, South, Transnistria, Gagauzia as defined in the Regional Development Law no. 438 / 2006), and the evaluation will be carried out for each region separately.

Candidates will be evaluated by the evaluation committee according to the following criteria:

Criteria	**Max points**
Organisation's managerial capacity and experience, inclusively previous experience in implementing grants funded by the EU or other development partners	20
Organisation's experience with similar activities foreseen by this project	20
Professional capacity of key staff (3 key persons)	20
Understanding of the assignment and motivation to participate	20
The ability to interact with local public authorities, to mobilize local communities, including representatives of vulnerable groups	20
Total	**100**

The evaluation commission may request from the applicant certain clarifications regarding the content of the submitted documents only when the information provided is unclear and thus prevents an objective evaluation.

All applications that have accumulated scores higher than 60 points will be ranked in descending order (for each region, so there will be 5 lists). The CSO that receives the highest score for each region will be invited to discuss and sign the grant contract. If, for various reasons, the contract will not be signed by the winner within 5 days of sending the contract (by email) for signing, the evaluation committee may invite the next organization from the list to sign the contract.

11. Contact points

Inquires regarding this application can be sent to ecaterina@expert-grup.org and iulia@expert-grup.org with the following subject "CSO Selection". In order to ensure a fair approach to all applicants, all questions should be raised in writing form to the e-mails mentioned above. Expert-Grup will place all the questions and answers received, as well as other relevant information on the website www.expert-grup.org, in the news section). Therefore, we recommend that you check the website periodically to be informed about all updates relevant to the project. All information related to the completion of the application procedure will be periodically published on www.expert-grup.org and on Expert-Grup on social networks.