

# EVALUATION REPORT

External evaluation Active Citizen Fund  
Programme Croatia

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background and evaluation scope

The Active Citizens Fund (ACF) Croatia Programme, funded by the EEA and Norway Grants, aims to strengthen civil society, promote active citizenship, and empower vulnerable groups in Croatia. Managed by a consortium of Community Foundation Slagalica, Foundation for Human Rights and Solidarity SOLIDARNA (SOLIDARNA), SMART – Association for the Development of Civil Society (SMART), and CNVOS - Center for Information, Cooperation and Development of Non-governmental Organizations from Slovenia, the program runs from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2024, with a budget of 9.1 million EUR. The ACF supports various civil society organisations (CSOs) through project calls, capacity building, technical assistance and promotion of bilateral activities and regional cooperation.

The external evaluation, conducted between December 2023 and June 2024, assesses the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the ACF Programme for Croatia. Objectives include reviewing the program's design and delivery, analysing its relevance to CSO needs, evaluating its effectiveness in achieving outcomes, and examining its efficiency in delivering results. Recommendations for future programming are also provided.

## Evaluation methodology

The evaluation utilised a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Key sources included program reports, online surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth stakeholder interviews. This comprehensive approach ensured a robust assessment of the program's achievements and areas for improvement.

## Key programme achievements

The ACF program substantially impacted the development of civil society in Croatia. By supporting advocacy, civic engagement, and regional cooperation, the program contributed to:

- **Enhanced Capacity:** Strengthened the organisational capacity and sustainability of CSOs, enabling them to serve their communities better and advocate for change. Survey data shows that 75.9% of respondents believe the ACF contributed significantly to increasing the capacities and sustainability of CSOs.
- **Policy Influence:** Increased the ability of CSOs to influence public policy and contribute to democratic processes.
- **Community Empowerment:** Empowered marginalised groups, including Roma communities, by providing them with the tools and support needed to participate in civic life and advocate for their rights.

External factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters posed significant challenges, but the program's adaptive measures ensured continued progress and impact.

## Data Highlights

- 87% of respondents felt the program's objectives matched their needs.
- 88% believe the ACF significantly strengthened civil society's advocacy and watchdog role.
- 82.8% saw significant contributions to increasing support for human rights, the rule of law, and good governance.
- 75.9% indicated significant contributions to increasing the capacities and sustainability of CSOs.
- 79.3% noted significant contributions to improving the inclusion of CSOs and target groups from less developed regions and local communities.
- 63.8% reported significant contributions to the empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma.

## Relevance

The ACF program was highly relevant to the needs of Croatian civil society. Its design was based on extensive stakeholder consultations and aligned with national priorities. Survey data revealed that 87% of respondents felt the program's objectives matched their needs. The program successfully engaged diverse target groups, including marginalised communities, enhancing their participation in civic processes and raising awareness of their rights.

## Effectiveness

The program effectively achieved its intended outcomes. Key achievements included:

- **Advocacy and Civic Engagement:** The ACF increased public awareness and policy influence through projects like "Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development," which empowered youth to advocate for sustainable policies. Survey data shows that 88% of respondents believe the ACF significantly strengthened civil society's advocacy and watchdog role.
- **Collaboration and Networking:** Strengthened cooperation among CSOs and between CSOs and public institutions, promoting a more cohesive civil society sector. 79.3% of respondents felt that the ACF contributed significantly to improving the inclusion of CSOs and target groups from less developed regions and local communities.
- **Knowledge Creation:** Generated significant knowledge and expertise on human rights and democratisation, fostering innovative solutions to societal challenges. This knowledge has been shared through publications, conferences, workshops, and other events.

Although there were initial challenges in reaching out to the Roma community, a particularly vulnerable group in Croatia, the program succeeded in breaking barriers through proactive efforts. A significant factor contributing to these challenges was the exclusion of Roma individuals from mainstream society and the civil sector, often due to their unregulated legal and social status, leaving many unaware of their rights or even how to access help. To this end, the FO team attempted to empower the Roma

community by recognising their specific communication and decision-making channels. They invested significant additional, tailored support to ensure the success of projects working with Roma individuals and organisations. Survey data reveals that 63.8% of respondents believe the ACF contributed significantly to the empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma. Notably, out of the 125 supported lead organisations, the program supported 18 organisations working specifically with the Roma community or led by Roma representatives. Some of these organisations had not one but multiple projects financed; some groups were funded for two or even three projects. Each of these organisations, consequently, enabled an extra spurt of activities. In total, 613 Roma individuals (self-declared) directly benefited from the program out of 23,800 beneficiaries overall. These figures, alongside the dedicated outreach and tailored support, highlight the program's success in reaching and supporting a substantial number of Roma individuals and organisations despite the initial difficulties encountered.

### **Efficiency**

The ACF program has largely succeeded in delivering its planned results economically and on time. The program demonstrated significant flexibility and responsiveness, with some areas identified for potential efficiency improvements. The focus groups' responses also emphasised the need for more straightforward procedures and better-defined roles and responsibilities within the consortium.

While the fast-paced implementation schedule further complicated efficiency, it was the only way to ensure the completion of large, sectoral, three-year projects within the acceptable timeframe. The consortium's commitment to continuous improvement and learning from the challenges is creditable. Encouraging adaptive management practices and simplifying administrative processes will further enhance efficiency.

These findings underscore the ACF program's effectiveness in achieving its goals and addressing the needs of Croatian civil society organisations while also highlighting areas for continued focus and improvement.

### **Recommendations**

1. **Maintain Flexibility and Responsiveness:** Continue adapting the program to evolving civil society needs through adaptive management. This approach balances flexibility with resource availability to prevent staff overextension.
2. **Streamline Administrative Processes:** Simplify administrative requirements to reduce the burden on grantees, particularly smaller organisations.
3. **Explore Diverse Funding Mechanisms:** Build on the success of varied funding mechanisms, including organisational grants, multi-year grants, flexible funding options such as lump sum grants, and capacity-building grants, to help organisations plan effectively and build resilience.
4. **Explore trust-based grant-making:** Explore the adoption of trust-based grant-making to enhance the impact and adaptability of funding for civil society organizations. This approach, informed by crisis conditions and philanthropic research, promotes flexibility, autonomy, and sustainability, especially in unstable

- contexts. Future programmatic efforts of the Active Citizens Fund should consider this model alongside strong financial trust, transparency, and accountability measures.
5. **Enhance Visibility and Communication:** Invest in visibility and communication efforts to raise awareness of the program's achievements and impact among the public and policymakers.
  6. **Tailor Capacity Building to Specific Needs:** Continue to offer more targeted capacity-building initiatives that address the specific needs of different CSOs, especially those working with vulnerable groups.
  7. **Strengthen Collaboration and Networking:** Foster collaboration and networking among CSOs, both within Croatia and with partners in donor states.
  8. **Refine Results Framework:** Focus more on qualitative outcomes and impacts rather than just quantitative outputs. Develop nuanced indicators to capture the program's long-term effects on civil society and democratic values.
  9. **Allocate Sufficient Resources for Program Implementation:** Ensure adequate funding for staffing and resources for effective program management, especially during peak periods. Invest in training, professional development, and technology to support efficient management.
  10. **Explore Technology Solutions:** Consider adopting online platforms or technological tools to facilitate communication, collaboration, and reporting.
  11. **Strengthen Focus on Underserved Groups:** Maintain focus on reaching marginalised and vulnerable groups, as they remain underserved by other funding programs.
  12. **Focus on Quality over Quantity:** Prioritize fewer but more strategic and impactful projects, enhancing monitoring and evaluation to assess long-term outcomes.
  13. **Enhance Sustainability:** Continue supporting organisational development, financial sustainability, and knowledge transfer to ensure that CSOs can maintain activities independently of program funding.
  14. **Strengthen Communication and Feedback:** Maintain and enhance communication channels between the consortium and grantees through regular surveys, feedback sessions, and online platforms.

## **Conclusion**

The ACF Croatia Programme has made significant strides in strengthening civil society, promoting human rights, and fostering democratic values. Its numerous achievements and positive feedback from stakeholders demonstrate its relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency.

By implementing the proposed recommendations, the ACF program can continue to build on its successes, address challenges, and enhance its support for civil society organisations in Croatia. The program's dedication to continuous improvement and learning from the experiences of its partners and grantees has been exemplary thus far. Maintaining this commitment in future programming will be essential for its long-term success.

## **2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

### **ABOUT ACF CROATIA**

The Active Citizens Fund aims to strengthen civil society organisations, promote active citizenship, and empower vulnerable groups. Croatia is one of the beneficiary EU member states of financial assistance donated by Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway.

The Active Citizens Fund Croatia Programme (ACF Croatia) is one of the programmes under the EEA and Norway Grants. The European Economic Area (EEA) links the EU member states and three of the four EFTA states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) into an internal market governed by the same basic rules. The EEA and Norway Grants contribute to the reduction of social and economic inequalities in Europe and, at the same time, strengthen bilateral cooperation between the donor countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and the Republic of Croatia. ACF Croatia supports the objective "Civil Society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered" through seven calls for thematic projects covering all outcomes and all five support areas, including technical assistance to potential applicants and capacity building for potential applicants and project promoters.

Community Foundation Slagalica, in consortium with Foundation for Human Rights and Solidarity SOLIDARNA (SOLIDARNA), SMART – Association for the Development of Civil Society (SMART) and CNVOS - Center for Information, Cooperation and Development of Non-governmental Organizations from Slovenia, managing the Active Citizens Fund Croatia Programme (ACF Croatia) as the Fund Operator (FO), delivered in the period January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2024. The Programme is focused on providing financial and capacity-building support to Croatian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) with an overall value of 9,1 million EUR, aimed at achieving the Programme's overall objective of "Civil society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered."

The Programme has included a series of open calls, accompanied by technical assistance, capacity building and opportunities for bilateral and regional cooperation with CSOs from other EEA/NG donor and beneficiary countries.

Active Citizens Fund's priority areas of support are:

- 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.

The programme is based on shared values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities.

The Programme in Croatia was addressing the following country-specific areas and concerns:

- Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the civil society sector;
- Improve outreach to under-served geographic areas and target groups;
- Empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma;
- Promote initiatives strengthening inter-cultural dialogue with particular emphasis on national minorities,
- Promote initiatives aimed at intergenerational cooperation

Additionally, the program facilitated bilateral activities at both the program and project levels, implemented by CSOs and the Fund Operator consortium in partnership with donor entities. This included the implementation of financed projects with a bilateral partnership component and follow-up small grant support for additional bilateral collaboration initiatives.

Regional civil society initiatives were implemented with fellow EEA Grants ACF Fund Operators. This enabled peer learning and collaboration among supported CSOs and fund operators across the entire EEA/NG region. ACF Croatia has been particularly active in the regional initiative "Community for Action," fostering peer learning and networking among FOs on a monthly basis.

## **THE PURPOSE AND THE SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION**

The external evaluation is focused on the design and delivery of the ACF Croatia Programme. Its primary purpose is to provide an independent review and analysis of the Programme's relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. Based on the answers to the evaluation questions, supported by findings, the evaluation should provide conclusions and a maximum of 15 concrete and actionable recommendations for any future ACF FO in Croatia to improve the Programme.



The external evaluation is built upon data and insights gained from Programme monitoring, annual reporting to the donor on the Programme's results and achievements, and internal monitoring activities undertaken during the Programme. Additional data collection is focused on gaining insight from the Programme's staff, associates, beneficiaries, and experts in civil society.

External evaluation is designed as the final programme evaluation, with the purpose of generating recommendations for future ACF programming. The scope of evaluations includes programme outcomes and country-specific priorities, yet with varying degrees of specificity and priority.

External evaluation was built on the perspectives of:

1. The direct beneficiaries of the ACF Croatia Programme are representatives of CSOs acting as project promoters and their partner organisations, the primary target group for evaluation.
2. Resourceful individuals from civil society, academia and the public sector who have not been directly involved in implementing supported projects led by CSOs yet are knowledgeable and experienced in its main Programme areas.
3. ACF Croatia staff and associated evaluators and trainers with direct experience in Programme implementation.

The evaluation paid particular attention to the context of social crisis, which has coincided with almost the entire period of ACF programme implementation. Evaluators accounted for how the ACF programme considered the changed circumstances of life and work under the pandemic and how the ACF has responded to the needs of the beneficiaries and target group in such restrictive and unknown circumstances.

Additional attention has been given to the relationships and management of the consortium members, as this was the first time that four organisations—partners—have co-designed and co-delivered the ACF Programme in Croatia. The collaboration and internal management have been assessed regarding the programme's relevance, effectiveness, design, and implementation efficiency.

Already collected information through internal monitoring and external evaluation has been built upon the additional methodology of collecting data and insights from the Programme's key stakeholders. Various beneficiaries, associates, implementors, donors, institutional partners, and experts in related fields have been involved in the evaluation methodology as a source of additional data and insights.

The external evaluation builds on the opinions of involved stakeholders on the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Programme through its unique combination of financial and capacity-building support to Croatian civil society so far and what kind of support should be designed for the future, considering the lessons learned from this Programme and the challenges faced by civil society at present and ahead.

Following the Terms of Reference (in Annex), this evaluation focused on the following programme outcomes and country-specific priorities:

1. Strengthened civil society watchdog/advocacy role;
2. Increased support for human rights, rule of law and good governance
3. Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness and engagement
4. Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society (organisations and sector)
5. Improve outreach to under-served geographic areas and target groups;
6. Empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Evaluation criteria and evaluation questions

This external evaluation was focused on the following criteria:

- **relevance** of the Programme to the needs of civil society in Croatia in light of the challenges faced
- **effectiveness** of the Programme to deliver its expected outcomes and
- **efficiency** of the Programme to deliver forms of support to civil society in a manner that adds value and manages resources with care

The matrix below lists evaluation questions expanding on each criterion, including the data collection methods.

#### Evaluation matrix and data collection methods

Table 1: Evaluation matrix

Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Indicators (Data Sources)	Methods of Data Collection
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How well designed is/was the ACF Croatia Programme?</i></li> <li>• <i>Consider to what extent the Programme addresses the</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Alignment of program goals with national/EU priorities (Literature review, key informant interviews)</i></li> <li>• <i>Stakeholder feedback on program design and</i></li> </ul>	Literature review, Key informant interviews, Focus groups, Survey

	<i>challenges faced by Croatian civil society at the time of programme design, and to what extent the programme has managed to stay relevant to Croatian civil society during implementation.</i>	<i>implementation (Focus groups, survey)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Evidence of adaptation to changing needs (Programme reports, interviews)</i></li> </ul>	
	In what ways has the Programme addressed the needs of stakeholders (organisations/institutions, target groups)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Number and types of organisations supported (Grant data)</i></li> <li>• <i>Demographic data of target groups reached (Programme reports)</i></li> <li>• <i>Stakeholder feedback on relevance of support (Focus groups, survey)</i></li> </ul>	Grant data, Programme reports, Focus groups, Survey
	To what extent is the format of the support offered by the ACF Croatia Programme relevant to the needs? Consider the size of grants, the timing of the grants, and how were the areas of support are structured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Distribution of grant sizes (Grant data)</i></li> <li>• <i>Timing of grant disbursements (Grant data)</i></li> <li>• <i>Stakeholder feedback on grant size and timing (Focus groups, survey)</i></li> <li>• <i>Alignment of support areas with identified needs (Literature review, key informant interviews)</i></li> </ul>	Grant data, Focus groups, Survey, Literature review, Key informant interviews
Effectiveness	To what extent were the outputs produced and outcomes achieved to the desired quality (as opposed to quantity)? Highlight results that were the most effective in terms of supporting the overall objective of the programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Number and quality of outputs produced (Programme reports)</i></li> <li>• <i>Achievement of outcome indicators (Programme reports)</i></li> <li>• <i>Stakeholder assessment of quality of results (Focus groups, survey)</i></li> </ul>	Programme reports, Focus groups, Survey
	Did any other outputs beyond those listed in the results framework materialize and contribute to the planned outcome(s)? If so, which?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Identification of additional outputs (Programme reports, interviews)</i></li> <li>• <i>Analysis of contribution of additional outputs to outcomes (Programme reports, interviews)</i></li> </ul>	Programme reports, Interviews
	Did any other outcomes beyond those listed in the results framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Identification of additional outcomes</i></li> </ul>	Programme reports, Interviews

	materialize and contribute to the programme objective? If so, which?	<p><i>(Programme reports, interviews)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Analysis of contribution of additional outcomes to the program objective (Programme reports, interviews)</i></li> </ul>	
	What if any are the key intellectual “results of the programme in terms of knowledge created and exchanged, new ideas, issues and solutions successfully promoted with influence on the policy context as well as civic space in Croatia?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Documentation of knowledge products (Reports, publications, presentations)</i></li> <li>● <i>Evidence of policy influence (Media coverage, interviews with policymakers)</i></li> <li>● <i>Stakeholder assessment of intellectual results (Focus groups, survey)</i></li> </ul>	Reports, publications, presentations, Media coverage, Focus groups, Survey
	What factors have been especially influential in respect to the Programme’s effectiveness? Consider the programme level with the setup of the programme various characteristics of the Fund Operator, as well as the project level with the project promoters and project partners, as well as any external factors in the context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Analysis of program design and implementation (Literature review, interviews)</i></li> <li>● <i>Identification of key factors influencing effectiveness (Focus groups, survey)</i></li> <li>● <i>Assessment of the role of Fund Operator, project partners, and external factors (Interviews, programme reports)</i></li> </ul>	Literature review, Interviews, Focus groups, Survey
Efficiency	To what extent did the Programme/Fund deliver, or is likely to deliver, the planned results (outputs and outcomes in the results framework) in an economic and timely way?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Comparison of planned vs. actual outputs and outcomes (Programme reports, grant data)</i></li> <li>● <i>Analysis of timeliness of delivery (Programme reports, grant data)</i></li> </ul>	Grant data, Programme reports
	To what extent were delays caused by external factors handled in an economic and timely way by key stakeholders at the programme and project level? Did the implementation experience delays cause by internal factors, such as the set up or available human resources? If so, which?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Documentation of delays and their causes (Programme reports, interviews)</i></li> <li>● <i>Assessment of timeliness of response to delays (Programme reports, interviews)</i></li> <li>● <i>Identification of internal factors causing delays (Interviews, focus groups)</i></li> </ul>	Programme reports, Interviews, Focus groups

	<p>To what extent was the organisational and procedural set-up and institutional collaboration for implementation of the ACF Croatia efficient at the level of consortium? This concerns the application, reporting and monitoring aspects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Stakeholder feedback on application, reporting, and monitoring processes (Focus groups, survey)</i></li> <li>● <i>Assessment of efficiency of institutional collaboration (Interviews)</i></li> <li>●</li> </ul>	<p>Focus groups, Survey, Interviews, Programme reports</p>
	<p>What risks have been detected and experienced in relation to implementation of the ACF Croatia programme (internal/external). How have these risks been managed at the level of consortium and with what outcomes? What have been the lessons learned in this respect?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Identification of risks (Programme reports, interviews)</i></li> <li>● <i>Assessment of risk management strategies (Programme reports, interviews)</i></li> <li>● <i>Evaluation of outcomes of risk management (Project reports, interviews)</i></li> <li>● <i>Documentation of lessons learned (Interviews, focus groups)</i></li> </ul>	<p>Programme reports, Interviews, Focus groups</p>

The external evaluation of the Active Citizens Fund Croatia (ACF Croatia) grant program utilised a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques to assess the programme's relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness. The overarching goal was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's results and impact and identify areas for potential improvement.

### **Data Collection**

1. **Literature and Project Documentation Review:** Relevant strategic documents, programme agreement and annual reports were thoroughly reviewed to gain a deep understanding of the program's context, objectives, and activities. This review provided a foundation for subsequent data collection and analysis.
2. **Key Informant Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the ACF Croatia program, including representatives of the Fund, Board members, external experts, and representatives of relevant institutions. These interviews aimed to gather insights into the strategic direction of the program, challenges faced, and perceptions of relevance and impact.
3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Grantees:** Five focus group discussions were held with 4-6 representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) in each group that received funding from ACF Croatia. The FGDs allowed for in-depth exploration of grantees' experiences with the program, their perceptions of its usefulness and impact on their work, and suggestions for improvement.

Participants for these discussions were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure that each group is homogenous and reflects at least five participants from each grant type. An interview schedule guided the conversations, ensuring uniformity in the application of questions and aiding in collecting detailed information. The focus group interviews were conducted via Zoom, accommodating participant convenience and current post-lockdown interaction norms.

4. **Online Survey:** An online survey was distributed to all grantees of the ACF Croatia program. The survey included closed-ended (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of the program's relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness from the grantees' perspective. The questionnaire was disseminated electronically using the Google Forms platform. This method facilitates a streamlined process for respondents to access and complete the questionnaire. Follow-up reminders were sent to encourage maximum participation. After closing the survey, 58 responses were received and analysed.
5. **Case studies:** Three case studies were conducted to provide in-depth insights into the program's impact on individual civil society organisations (CSOs) and their beneficiaries. These case studies involved reviewing project documentation and interviewing project staff. This approach helped to illustrate causality and attribution, providing in-depth insights into how the program's interventions led to specific outcomes and highlighting best practices and lessons learned.

## ***Data Analysis***

Collected data was analysed using the following methods:

- **Qualitative Content Analysis:** Each session was recorded with participant consent and transcribed using a Sonix web-based solution that was selected for its ability to transcribe the Croatian language correctly. The transcriptions were analysed using ATLAS.ti software. Interviews and focus group discussion transcripts were examined to identify key themes, patterns, and trends concerning the program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.
- **Quantitative Analysis:** Data from the online survey was downloaded, and descriptive and bivariate data analyses were conducted to uncover trends, patterns, and correlations within the data.
- **Data Triangulation:** Findings from the different data collection methods were compared and integrated to ensure the reliability and validity of the evaluation results. This involved cross-validating findings, identifying areas of convergence and divergence, and reconciling discrepancies.

## ***Attribution and Causality***

In addition to assessing the program's overall impact, the evaluation also sought to determine the extent to which observed outcomes could be attributed to the ACF Croatia

program and to understand the causal mechanisms through which the program contributed to change. This involved analysing the counterfactual scenario (what would have happened without the program), considering other contributing factors' roles, and examining the specific pathways through which the program's activities led to observed outcomes.

## ***Sampling***

A census of all grant recipients was conducted via an online survey for quantitative data collection. This approach was chosen due to its cost-effectiveness and ability to gather feedback from a wide range of beneficiaries. It was considered more advantageous than a stratified random sample.

Purposive sampling was employed for the focus groups and interviews to ensure the representation of diverse profiles and beneficiaries of different types of grants. Five focus groups, each with 4-6 participants, were conducted. The preliminary findings from the interviews and online survey informed the selection of participants, which was agreed upon with the evaluation commissioner.

This sampling strategy aimed to maximise the breadth and depth of data collected, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact across different beneficiary groups and perspectives. Combining a census approach for the survey with purposive sampling for qualitative data collection, the evaluation aimed to capture the overall picture and the nuanced experiences of the Active Citizens Fund Croatia grant program.

## ***Ethical Considerations***

The evaluation adhered to ethical research principles, including obtaining informed consent from participants, protecting their privacy, and ensuring the confidentiality of data.

## ***Limitations***

The Active Citizens Fund Croatia (ACF Croatia) is a substantial and multifaceted program with a wide array of expected results and corresponding indicators. Due to the program's breadth and depth, the evaluation questions were numerous and extensive. While the evaluation sought to provide comprehensive insights, it was acknowledged that not all questions could be addressed in equal detail.

The primary focus of data collection was on quantitative data, utilising online questionnaires to gather information from a large number of beneficiaries. This approach allowed for efficient data collection and a broad representation of grantee experiences. However, recognising the limitations of quantitative data alone, qualitative methods were employed to delve deeper into specific aspects of the program, particularly those related to organisational capacity building and financial support. This involved interviews with key stakeholders and focus groups with grantees, providing valuable context and nuance to the quantitative findings.

While this mixed-methods approach allowed for a robust evaluation, certain limitations should be noted. The evaluation primarily relied on self-reported data from grantees, which may be subject to bias. Additionally, the limited timeframe of the evaluation precluded a comprehensive assessment of the long-term sustainability of project outcomes.

Despite these limitations, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, along with a focus on key program interventions, allowed for a nuanced and insightful evaluation of the ACF Croatia program. The findings provide valuable information for program stakeholders and can inform future decision-making and program refinement.

## **4. FINDINGS**

The evaluation's findings are structured according to the evaluation criteria and the evaluation questions under each criterion. Valid and triangulated findings are presented for each evaluation question answered.

### **A. Findings related to the relevance of ACF in Croatia:**

The ACF Programme for Croatia was highly relevant at the time of its design, considering all the challenges CSOs were facing. A comprehensive needs assessment made in close collaboration with all sectors resulted in the creation of a program aimed at responding to the identified needs and challenges. The programme only partially responded to the urgent needs of the state of emergency, but it provided necessary and timely support. Two crises that hit Croatia at the time of implementation (earthquake and pandemic) required much more financial and organizational support for which the ACF was not programmed nor was an extensive enough fund to cover all these needs.

Croatian Civil Society was stagnant at the time of the design of the ACF Programme. Sustainability has mostly stayed the same, although financial sustainability was and still is one of the biggest challenges due to long delays in program funding, lack of stable funding, particularly in the area of democratization, rule of laws and protection of human rights. . At the same time, CSOs are still considered the leading players in civil initiatives focused on important issues, which resulted in positive and improved public perception, especially when responding to the earthquake crisis. The status of the civil sector corresponds to the overall focus of the ACF - long-term sustainable development and capacity building of the non-governmental sector. The main objective of ACF at the EU level is 'Civil society and active citizenship strengthened, and vulnerable groups empowered'. The programme aims to strengthen the role of non-governmental organisations in promoting democracy, public inclusion in decision-making processes on a national and local level, and human rights protection. An essential priority of the programme is strengthening bilateral cooperation between civil society organisations from Croatia and organisations from donor countries – Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. All those planned outcomes have been entirely relevant to civil society in Croatia. The ACF Programme has been designed to address CSOs' challenges at its inception. Survey results confirm this alignment, with 87% of respondents



agreeing or strongly agreeing that the ACF program's goals are aligned with the needs and priorities of Croatian CSOs.

Croatian CSOs rely heavily on funds from the public sector. Only larger organisations have the capacity to apply to more extensive foreign funding schemes. Private philanthropy is still underdeveloped in Croatia; thus, CSOs lack the diversification of available funding. Generating income through economic activities is still not a widely spread financing model. Creating ACF type of funding contributed additionally to the relevance of the Programme: micro or “Ad-Hoc Actions”, small grants, medium grants, large grants, sectoral innovation grants, and organisational grants. Various grant types and sizes have been highly relevant for achieving particularly country-specific areas and concerns within ACF's priority areas of support. The size and timing of the grants have been generally well-received by the grantees and considered appropriate. Additionally, 89% of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the time taken to process their project proposals and make funding decisions was appropriate.

Croatia declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020. Additionally, in 2020, Croatia was hit by two more powerful earthquakes, which caused severe damage and consequences for the citizens of Zagreb, Petrinja, and the surrounding area. These extraordinary circumstances heavily influence the operations of civil society organisations as first aid providers to the affected citizens and communities. CSO played a vital role in the face of these challenges, quickly organising and engaging to respond to the needs of the citizens. Parallel to the CSO engagement, ACF Croatia managed to provide funding as per the immediate needs of the citizens, showing that the design of the Program has been well planned and built. However, it did not predict such a circumstance, and it managed to react quickly in response to the crisis, although the needs exceeded by far the financial means and scope of the programme.

As the 2020 Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index stated<sup>1</sup>: “While overall sustainability remained unchanged, financial viability deteriorated as national and local government bodies reduced or eliminated funding for CSOs. Public image, on the other hand, improved slightly due to CSOs’ strong and rapid response to the challenges over the course of the year”.

The National Foundation for Civil Society Development (NFCSD) has stopped its Decentralized Financial Support program in 2017 (implemented by regional foundations), thus deteriorating CSOs' infrastructure. This situation led to the centralisation of NFCSD funding for CSOs, putting them in an unfavourable position, although regional centres continued to provide modified types of support. The ACF Programme, launched in 2020, has shown its full relevance to the sector's financial needs. CSOs have strongly supported the management of this vital initiative by mainly local foundations and associations.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fhi360.org/wp-content/uploads/drupal/documents/csosi-europe-eurasia-2020-report.pdf>

The government's failure to adopt the National Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development is an additional burden for the CSO sector. CSOs' collaboration with local authorities remains relatively modest in Croatia; thus, having advocacy, especially evidence-based and data-driven advocacy, as one of the expected output results of the ACF shows its relevance for the sector. The advocacy efforts of various CSOs from various fields have been recognised as needing improvement.

Project-based funding continuously jeopardises CSOs' ability to fulfil their mission, sometimes leading them to focus on the programmatic areas where funding is available. On the other hand, as part of good governance and requested by various funders, CSOs are encouraged to adopt strategic plans. Still, as a rule, only CSOs with greater organisational capacities and different funding sources undertake intensive strategic planning efforts. The ACF Croatia Programme recognised persistent gaps and incorporated funds specifically for strategic planning and capacity building of CSOs. CSOs used them effectively as part of the tender.

Capacity-building programs as part of the grant schemes have been rated as highly relevant to most grant recipients; prominent CSOs use this program as an instrument to help them develop strategic plans and improve their project management skills, while smaller organisations use it as an organisational development tool. Additionally, capacity-building programs significantly enhanced the advocacy activities of organisations and increased their visibility within their respective fields. The project promoters have highly valued personalised support in the form of mentoring as it allowed CSOs to address specific challenges unique to the team, leading towards refining their strategies and improving operations.

The Croatian CSO sector is traditionally better developed in urban areas. In contrast, CSOs in rural and remote regions often face challenges such as a lack of competent staff, financial resources, higher wages, and safer working conditions. Recognising these disparities, the ACF programme designed specific support to address the needs of underdeveloped and deprived areas of Croatia. This included additional evaluation points for organisations from less developed regions. This approach alleviated financial constraints and enabled faster development in these remote areas.

As per consultations with the different sectors, the type of financial support provided was entirely relevant to the needs and status of CSOs. The size and duration of the grants do not deviate significantly from the usual amounts of funds for such types of grants. Based on the available funding per grant type, 245 CSOs were supported. The size of the overall ACF funding available and division among different types of grants has been assessed as relevant by the evaluation participants, stressing that some of the funding came at the right time, amplified with the capacity building support as a significant component to most recipients.

## **Findings on relevance and responses to evaluation questions**

## Alignment with CSO Needs

The ACF program's goals align with the needs and priorities of Croatian CSOs. Survey Results show that 87% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this alignment. program's relevance is further supported by its focus on strengthening advocacy, promoting civic engagement, and fostering regional cooperation, areas identified as crucial by CSOs.

Through filling gaps in social services, active inclusion of the community, and advocacy for vulnerable groups, the Active Citizens Fund in Croatia has demonstrated high relevance to the needs of civil society. An example is the project conducted by the Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma in Zagreb: "**COMMUNITIES INCLUDE**," where it tried to establish socially beneficial general-purpose activities accessible to all. Over the span of 29 months, this project built a robust database that would underpin advocacy for universal access to social services in Croatia. It also established an advocacy coalition, conducted the first nationwide research on the availability of social services, and developed two digital instruments to assess social services. The created resources further informed national policy and have fed into the regulatory framework that guides social planning in social services. The focus of this project thus makes it particularly relevant within the context of Croatia's civil society landscape and its efforts to empower vulnerable groups.

Another example is the "Along with rainbow colours to mental health" project by the Association for Mental Health Advancement Vrapčići, which shows one more way ACF helps the underprivileged. In a region where resources regarding LGBTIQ+ are very scarce, this initiative formed a multidisciplinary task force of 17 professionals to enhance support for the LGBTIQ+ community, developed protocols, and established physical and online information centres. This project also improved regional LGBTIQ+ visibility and support, reflecting ACF's priority in enhancing social justice and inclusion.

## Addressing Financial Needs

The ACF program has addressed the financial needs of the CSO sector, which relies heavily on public sector funding. The variety of grant types and sizes, including ad-hoc, small, medium, large, sectoral innovation, and organisational grants, has been particularly relevant to addressing country-specific areas and concerns within the priority areas of ACF support. The size and timing of the grants have been generally well-received and considered appropriate. Additionally, 89% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the time to process their project proposals and make funding decisions was appropriate.

Organisational grants were introduced as a pilot program in the last two years of the project, covering seven ACF countries through additional funds, building on a model initially planned by ACF Slovenia under a different name. The grants were supported by a further allocation of €560,000 in 2022, with €508,000 from the Norway grants and €52,000 from the EEA. The FO made extra efforts for a quick reaction, and the call for organisational grants was launched, enabling 20 months for implementation for seven project promoters.

Feedback on these grants in Croatia has been overwhelmingly positive. Given this favourable feedback, we recommend continuing and increasing the number of these grants in the next period, as they have minimal administrative requirements and include financial audits covered by the grant. This approach would benefit both the FO and the participating organisations.

*"The diverse range of grants offered by ACF has been instrumental in helping us secure funding for various projects. The timely processing of our proposals allowed us to implement our initiatives without delay." - Focus Group Participant.*

### **Adaptability to Changing Circumstances**

The ACF program's relevance is also evident in its adaptability to changing circumstances. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the earthquakes in 2020, the program demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness by adjusting its activities to address the urgent needs of CSOs and affected communities. CSOs were crucial in providing aid, and the ACF program provided timely first aid support.

*"The ACF program's quick adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the earthquakes was crucial. It enabled us to continue our work and support our community effectively during these crises." - CSO Leader.*

### **Addressing Gaps in Capacity Building**

The ACF program recognised gaps in capacity building and incorporated funds specifically for the capacity building of CSOs. CSOs effectively utilised these capacity-building budget lines as part of the receiving grant. Most grant recipients rated Capacity-building programs as highly relevant, particularly in developing strategic plans and improving project management skills.

### **Support for Underdeveloped Areas**

The ACF program considered the status of underdeveloped and deprived areas in Croatia, creating specific support to alleviate the consequences of the lack of finances and enable faster development in these regions. Consultations with different sectors confirmed that the type of financial support provided was entirely relevant to the needs and status of CSOs.

*"The targeted support for underdeveloped areas has been crucial. It helped us reach often overlooked communities and provided them with much-needed services and advocacy." - Interview Participant.*

### **Overall Relevance**

The ACF program in Croatia has demonstrated a high degree of relevance in addressing the needs and challenges of Croatian civil society. A combination of data sources, including focus group discussions, annual progress reports, stakeholder interviews, and survey results, supports this relevance.

*"The ACF program's comprehensive approach has been highly relevant to our work. It addresses critical issues, supports our capacity building, and promotes effective advocacy." – Focus group participant.*

In addition to the findings presented above, the evaluation also found that the ACF program has positively impacted CSOs' capacity to contribute to social and economic development in Croatia. The program has also contributed to increased civic engagement and improved regional cooperation.

*"The ACF program has significantly enhanced our capacity to contribute to social and economic development. It has fostered greater civic engagement and improved our cooperation with other organisations in the region." - Focus Group Participant.*

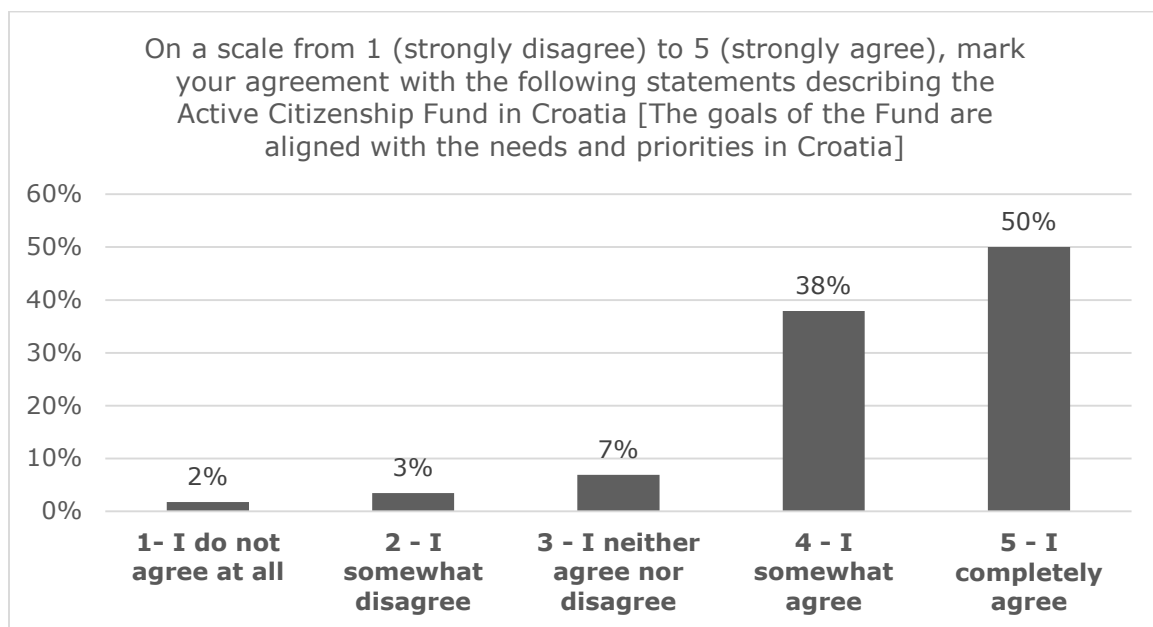


Figure 1: The percentage of respondents agreeing with the ACF alignment with the needs of Croatian CSOs

The chart presents the survey respondents' agreement with the statement: "The goals of the Fund are aligned with the needs and priorities in Croatia," rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data indicate a strong positive perception of the ACF program's alignment with the needs and priorities of Croatian civil society. Expressly, 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the goals of the ACF program align well with these needs and priorities. This high level of agreement underscores the program's relevance and effectiveness in addressing critical issues and supporting the priorities of civil society organisations in Croatia. Only a small percentage

(5%) of respondents expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, suggesting that any misalignment is minimal and likely addressable with minor adjustments. The 7% neutrality reflects a small proportion of respondents who may not have sufficient information to form a strong opinion or perceive the alignment as adequate but not exceptional. The data highlight the ACF program's success in meeting its intended goals and aligning with stakeholder expectations.

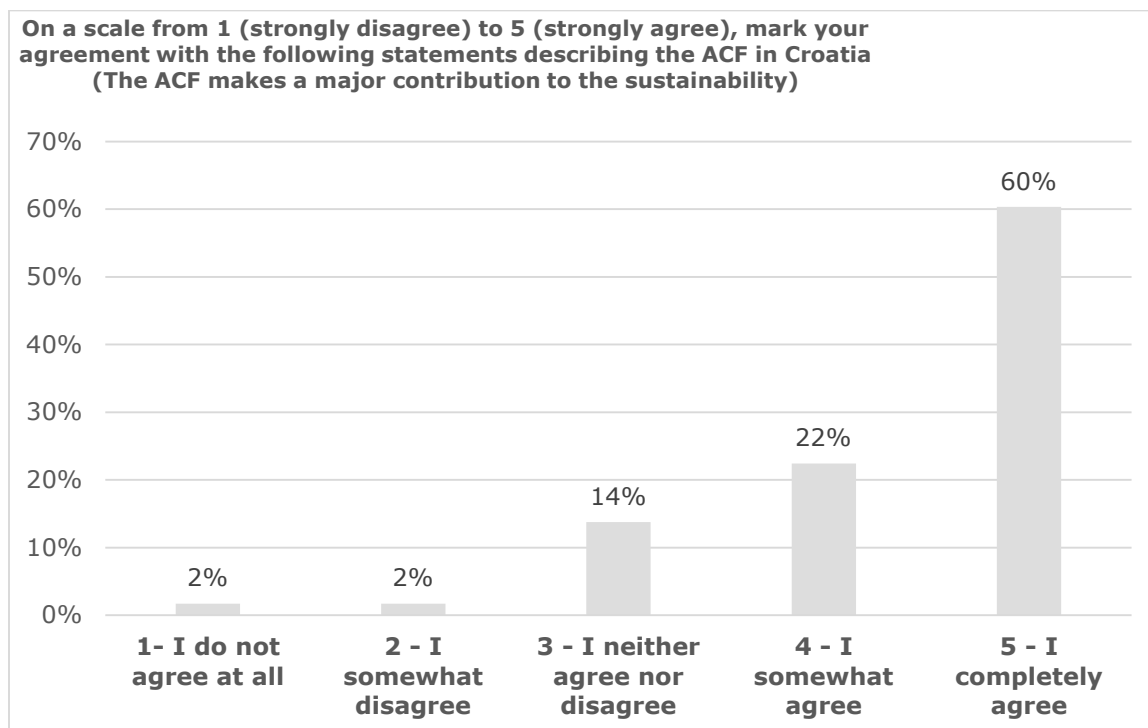


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who agreeing that ACF contributed to the sustainability of CSOs in Croatia

The chart shows survey respondents' agreement with the statement: "The ACF makes a major contribution to sustainability," rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data indicate that a significant majority of respondents (82%) perceive the ACF as making a substantial contribution to sustainability. Approximately 60% of respondents agree, and 22% somewhat agree with the statement. This strong positive feedback highlights the program's effectiveness in fostering sustainable development within Croatian CSOs.

A smaller segment (14%) of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, which may reflect uncertainty or a neutral stance on the program's impact on sustainability. Only a minimal percentage (4%) disagreed with the statement, indicating that very few respondents feel the ACF's contribution to sustainability is lacking.

Overall, these findings underscore the ACF program's success in supporting the sustainability of CSOs in Croatia, with most respondents recognising its substantial positive impact. This positive perception suggests that the program's initiatives and

support mechanisms effectively address the sustainability needs of the organisations it serves.

## B. Findings Related to the Effectiveness of ACF in Croatia

The evaluation focused on selected program outcomes as specified in the Terms of Reference rather than covering all the outcomes of the ACF programme. These key outcomes were chosen to provide a detailed assessment of the program's effectiveness in areas deemed most critical by stakeholders.

The program has shown significant success in achieving its targeted outcomes, particularly in strengthening advocacy, promoting civic engagement, and fostering regional cooperation. These efforts have resulted in tangible impacts, such as increased public awareness, policy influence, and enhanced collaboration among CSOs. The program has also generated valuable knowledge and expertise in human rights and democratisation.

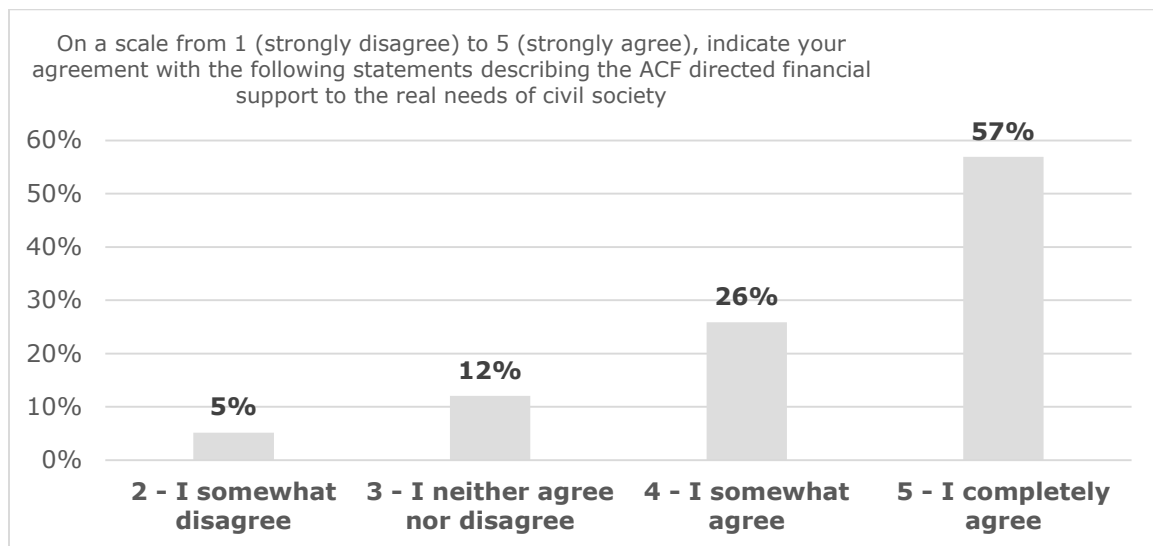


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents agreeing that ACF financial support was directed to the actual needs

The chart shows survey respondents' agreement with the statement: "The ACF directed financial support to the real needs of civil society," rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data indicate a strong positive perception of the ACF's ability to direct financial support to the real needs of civil society. Specifically, 83% of respondents agree entirely (57%) or somewhat agree (26%) with the statement. This suggests that most respondents believe the ACF effectively allocates its financial resources to address the actual needs and priorities of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Croatia.

A smaller portion of respondents (12%) neither agreed nor disagreed, which could indicate a neutral perspective or insufficient information to form a definitive opinion. A minority (5%) somewhat disagreed, suggesting a trim level of dissatisfaction or perceived misalignment with the financial support provided by the ACF.

Overall, these findings highlight the ACF program's success in addressing the financial needs of Croatian civil society, with most respondents recognising its positive impact. This positive feedback underscores the program's effectiveness in targeting and fulfilling the financial requirements of CSOs, thereby effectively supporting their operations and initiatives.

### **1. Strengthened civil society watchdog/advocacy role**

The ACF program has significantly strengthened the watchdog/advocacy role of civil society in Croatia. Through capacity-building initiatives, financial support, and networking opportunities, CSOs have been empowered to engage in advocacy and policy work more effectively. This is reflected in the increased number of media reports on CSOs' engagement in public policy and the number of evidence-based policy submissions by CSOs. For instance, focus group participants highlighted that the ACF program enabled them to "change things with our actions."

*"The ACF program enabled us to change things with our actions and engage in advocacy efforts that led to tangible changes in our communities." - Focus Group Participant.*

However, the program's impact on strategic litigation has been limited, with six cases supported so far. This could be due to the complexity and resource-intensive nature of strategic litigation and the limited capacity of some CSOs in this area. One stakeholder noted that while the program aimed to support strategic litigation, "*no one does it, and those who do it can take them up to ten years, and it costs money.*"

Strategic litigations have been recognised as relevant and essential for CSOs, but their completion or resolution often extends beyond the scope of the ACF. It has been observed that these processes take significantly longer than the financial support period provided through the ACF. This does not question the relevance of this outcome but highlights the need to set more realistic desired outcomes in line with the long-term nature of such litigation processes.

### **2. Increased support for human rights, rule of law, and good governance**

The ACF program has made notable progress in increasing support for human rights, the rule of law, and good governance in Croatia. The program has supported numerous projects to protect human rights, combat discrimination, and promote equality. These projects have resulted in increased awareness of human rights issues, improved access to justice for vulnerable groups, and greater participation of citizens in decision-making processes.

The survey results further confirm the program's positive impact, with most respondents reporting that their projects have contributed to increased support for human rights, the rule of law, and good governance. For example, one grantee highlighted the program's role in supporting projects that "*provide direct assistance to people in need.*"

### **3. Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness and engagement**

The ACF program has been crucial in strengthening democratic culture and civic awareness and engagement in Croatia. The program has fostered a more active and informed citizenry through its support for civic education initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and community engagement projects. The survey results indicate that 81% of



respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the ACF program contributed to increased civic engagement.

*"The ACF program's support has significantly contributed to increased civic engagement in our community." - Survey Respondent.*

#### **4. Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society (organisations and sector)**

The ACF program has significantly enhanced Croatia's civil society's capacity and sustainability. The program's capacity-building initiatives, such as training, mentoring, and organisational development support, have equipped CSOs with the skills and knowledge needed to operate more effectively and sustainably.

The survey results confirm the positive impact of the program's capacity-building efforts, with 77% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the activities were helpful for their organisation. However, some participants in focus group discussions noted that the training could be more tailored to the specific needs of different organisations. One participant suggested that the training should be "more flexible" and offer "different levels" to cater to the varying needs of CSOs.

#### **Organisational Strengthening Approaches**

The Fund Operator excelled in offering a wide range of organisational strengthening approaches to project promoters. Throughout the program, all project promoters had access to various workshops and trainings, most offered online during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. These online offerings ensured that capacity-building activities continued without interruption during the pandemic.

In addition to general workshops and training, project promoters could access mentoring support to introduce quality assurance systems, such as OK2015, into their organisational procedures. This mentoring support was also available for various aspects of organisational management, including financial management, fundraising, and overall operational efficiency. By covering a broad range of topics, the mentoring support significantly benefited organisations looking to improve their standards and effectiveness across multiple areas of development.

At the beginning of each project, the Fund Operator utilised an organisational assessment tool. This tool enabled organisations to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to develop comprehensive organisational development plans. These plans were designed to address identified areas for improvement and were supported by the program's funding allocation.

Recipients of medium and large grants were allowed to allocate 13% of their funding for their organisational development. This provision enabled them to access individualised and tailored services, further enhancing their capacity. The combination of workshops, training sessions, individualised support, and organisational assessments allowed organisations of various sizes to benefit from the capacity-strengthening efforts. Smaller and less experienced organisations gained significantly from the workshops and training.

In comparison, larger organisations, which often found general training less suitable to their specific needs, could leverage more individualised services.

This multifaceted approach to organisational strengthening ensured that the program was inclusive and responsive to CSOs' diverse needs, contributing to their overall effectiveness and sustainability.

## Strengths and Criticisms of the Capacity Building Approach

### Strengths:

- **Accessibility and Flexibility:** The shift to online workshops and training sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic was highly appreciated. Survey respondents noted that this allowed them to continue benefiting from capacity-building activities without interruption.
  - **Survey Data:** 85% of respondents reported that the online workshops were accessible and convenient, allowing them to participate despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.
  - *“The online workshops were a lifesaver during the pandemic. It ensured that we continued to receive support and training.” – Focus Group Participant.*
- **Comprehensive Support:** The combination of general workshops, training sessions, and individualised mentoring was seen as a comprehensive approach that addressed the various needs of CSOs.
  - **Survey Data:** 78% of respondents felt that the mentoring support for quality assurance systems was highly beneficial for improving their organisational procedures.
  - *“The mentoring support we received for implementing OK2015 was particularly beneficial. It helped us improve our organisational procedures significantly.” – Survey Respondent.*
- **Organisational Assessment Tool:** At the beginning of each project, an organisational assessment tool was praised for helping organisations identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop targeted development plans.
  - **Survey Data:** 82% of respondents agreed that the organisational assessment tool helped develop effective organisational development plans.
  - *“The organisational assessment tool was handy. It helped us understand where we needed to improve and how to allocate our resources effectively.” – Interviewee.*

### Criticisms:

- **Generic Nature of Training:** Some larger organisations felt that the workshops and training sessions needed to be more specific and addressed their particular needs.
  - **Survey Data:** 40% of larger organisations indicated that the training sessions needed to be tailored more to meet their advanced needs.
  - *“The training sessions were often too basic for our needs. We would have benefited more from advanced, tailored training.” – Focus Group Participant.*

The participants' responses conflict with the fact that the FO provided a wide range of opportunities, from basic training sessions to advanced coaching and other inputs for those already proficient. However, often, CSOs did not easily find time to participate fully. Program flexibility allowed organisations to select what was most appropriate for them. Still, the burden of other responsibilities often limits their organisation's members from getting the full benefit of such opportunities.

- **Mandatory Participation or sense of obligation:** The perception of the compulsory nature of some training sessions was considered unnecessary, especially for organisations that already possessed the skills being taught.
  - **Survey Data:** 35% of respondents felt that mandatory training sessions, particularly for basic skills, could have been a better use of their time.
  - *“Making basic training sessions mandatory felt like a waste of time for us. We already had those skills.” – Survey Respondent.*

It is important to note that ACF did not have mandatory training, and respondents might have confused ACF with various other programmes in the country, sometimes implemented by the same organisations.

- **Fixed Funding Allocation:** The strict 13% allocation for organisational development was seen as too rigid, with some organisations needing more flexibility to address their unique needs.
  - **Survey Data:** 28% of respondents indicated that the fixed 13% allocation for organisational development created challenges and that they would prefer a more flexible range.
  - *“The fixed 13% for organisational development was sometimes limiting. We needed more flexibility to allocate funds where they were most needed.” – Interviewee.*

## **5. Improved outreach to underserved geographic areas and target groups**

The ACF program has made efforts to improve outreach to underserved geographic areas and target groups, such as Roma communities and residents of less developed regions. The program has provided targeted support to CSOs working in these areas, including capacity building, financial assistance, and networking opportunities.

However, challenges remain in reaching some of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups.

## 6. Empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma

The ACF program has supported the empowerment and inclusion of vulnerable groups, including Roma girls and women, through various targeted projects and initiatives. These actions were undertaken to address social exclusion, promote Roma participation in civic and political life, and combat discrimination and gender-based violence. Specific activities included consultations with Roma community leaders, political representatives, and activists to raise their awareness of their rights, encourage Roma participation in decision-making, and address issues of discrimination and exclusion.

ACF collaborated with seven Roma organizations throughout the program, ranging from small, community-based groups to larger umbrella organizations, such as the Croatian Romani Union Kali Sara. These and other Roma and pro-Roma organizations were consulted by the FO team to understand the specific challenges and structural barriers Roma communities face. Indeed, insights from consultations with these organizations revealed substantial challenges related to organisational capacity, access to sustainable funding, and long-standing mistrust in institutions, confirming findings noted by Roma stakeholders themselves. Critical issues identified ranged from a lack of capacity in fundraising, financial management, and organizational planning, especially with the smaller Roma-led organizations. The response of ACF included specific organizational support, supervision, and training on how to apply to the ACF funding in efforts to help equip Roma organisations with key skills required for the organisation's management. However, consultations identified that capacity-building for the Roma organizations needed to go further and be more continuous. As one stakeholder underscored, "*Engaging Roma organizations tends to be difficult because of particular issues like lack of capacity and trust in institutions,*" which would underpin the need for more basic support and confidence-building actions.

Going forward, ACF's Financial Mechanism Office (FMO) is encouraged to conduct a comprehensive assessment before launching new programming targeting Roma communities. This assessment should involve in-depth consultations with Roma leaders, community organizations, and relevant government bodies to ensure that ACF initiatives align with the Government of Croatia's strategic priorities and existing support frameworks. Such alignment would enhance coordination, avoid duplication, and enable synergies with national policies. Relevant government institutions include the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities and the Government Office for National Minorities, both of which play a critical role in implementing Croatia's *National Plan for the Inclusion of Roma, 2021-2027*.

The *National Plan for the Inclusion of Roma, 2021-2027*, outlines a comprehensive strategy to improve the socioeconomic status and social inclusion of Roma communities across Croatia. This plan emphasizes the importance of building trust and capacity within Roma organizations, fostering active Roma participation in social and political life, and reducing discrimination. One of its strategic goals is "to improve the organizational capacity of Roma civil society organizations and to enable them to participate actively in the creation and implementation of policies affecting Roma communities" (Government

of Croatia, 2021)<sup>2</sup>. This aligns closely with ACF's objectives and highlights the need for coordination with national strategies to strengthen Roma inclusion through a holistic, multi-sectoral approach.

These findings were further underlined when the evaluation team discussed with the Roma organisations that future ACF programming needs to place a stronger emphasis on the long-term development of the Roma organisations' capacity, mentoring, and networking. These stakeholders further recommended facilitating peer-learning opportunities and collaboration with government bodies to develop even more robust, better-trusted relationships. Similarly, ACF can integrate these insights into improving the support given to Roma communities to increase its contribution to the empowerment of Roma and their social inclusion in Croatia.

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• <sup>2</sup> Government of Croatia. (2021). *National Plan for the Inclusion of Roma, 2021-2027*.

## Findings related to evaluation questions

### Outputs and outcomes

The ACF has produced many excellent-quality outputs arising from the programming that supported hundreds of projects, workshops, training events, advocacy campaigns, and publications.

These have fed into a number of outcomes, including:

- **Increased civic engagement:** ACF has supported various projects, promoting civic engagement, especially for marginalized groups and youth. The projects have been directed at human rights, democratic values, and participation in decision-making. *"The ACF program's support has significantly contributed to increased civic engagement in our community." - Survey Respondent.*
- **Strengthened advocacy and watchdog role:** Under the ACF program, support was provided in capacity building on advocacy. Training was done on advocacy strategies, media, and policy development. This, in turn, has prepared the CSOs for greater effectiveness in the realisation of human rights and in democratic reforms. *"Through the ACF program, we gained the skills and confidence needed to engage with policymakers and make a real impact on the issues that matter most to our community." - Focus Group Participant.*
- **Enhanced cooperation among CSOs:** The ACF program has, to date, fostered collaboration among CSOs operating in Croatia and their operating partner organisations from donor states. This has also led to networking and even the setup of a mechanism for collaborating and sharing knowledge and resources. *"The regional cooperation facilitated by ACF has been invaluable in sharing best practices and fostering collaboration." - CSO Leader.*

The most effective results in terms of supporting the overall objective of the program have been in advocacy and capacity building. The ACF has empowered CSOs to become more effective advocates for human rights and democratic values. It has also strengthened their organisational capacity to sustain their work in the long term. This is reflected in the survey results, where 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the capacity-building activities were helpful for their organisation.

- **Enhanced Bilateral Partnerships and Cooperation:** The ACF program has significantly enhanced bilateral partnerships with organisations from donor countries. These partnerships have facilitated the exchange of knowledge, resources, and best practices, contributing to the capacity building of local CSOs. Collaborative efforts with these international partners have led to more effective advocacy campaigns, improved project implementation, and a broader impact on crucial issues such as human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

*"Our collaboration with Norwegian organisations through the ACF program has provided us with new perspectives and innovative approaches to advocacy. Their support has been crucial in advancing our initiatives on human rights." - Focus Group Participant.*

*"Partnering with Icelandic organisations has greatly enhanced our environmental projects. The expertise and resources they brought to the table have enabled us to implement more effective and sustainable solutions." - Focus Group Participant.*

*"The bilateral cooperation facilitated by the ACF program has not only strengthened our organisational capacity but also expanded our network. Working with Norwegian and Icelandic partners has opened up new opportunities for funding and joint projects." - Focus Group Participant.*

- **Regional Civil Society Initiatives**

The ACF program has successfully supported numerous Regional Civil Society Initiatives, fostering collaboration and peer learning among CSOs across the EEA/NG region. The initiatives enabled organisations to share best practices and improve their advocacy efforts on critical issues.

One significant example is the "Community for Action" initiative, which has been particularly active in Croatia. This initiative promotes monthly peer learning and networking among Fund Operators (FOs) and has been praised for enhancing regional cooperation and capacity building.

*"The Community for Action has allowed us to connect with like-minded organisations, leading to meaningful collaborations and impactful projects." - Focus Group Participant.*

Overall, these initiatives have strengthened regional partnerships, improved CSO capacities, and contributed to a more cohesive civil society sector in the region.

The ACF program in Croatia has generated outputs beyond those in the results framework. These include:

- **Increased visibility of CSOs:** The ACF program has helped to raise the profile of CSOs in Croatia, making them more visible to both the government and the public. This has increased their legitimacy and influence and made it easier for them to secure funding from other sources.

*"The visibility of our organisation has greatly improved thanks to the ACF program, leading to more recognition and support." - Survey Respondent*

- **Greater public awareness of human rights and democratic values:** The ACF program has contributed to raising public awareness of human rights and democratic values through its support for various awareness-raising campaigns and initiatives.
- **Strengthened resilience of civil society:** The ACF program has helped to strengthen the resilience of civil society in Croatia by providing funding and support during challenging times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

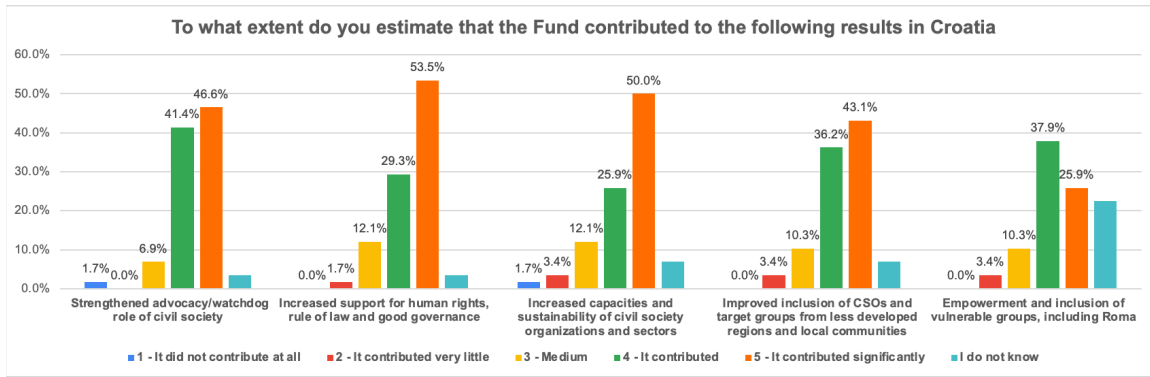


Figure 4: Respondents assessment of ACF contribution to the outcomes in Croatia

The chart illustrates the extent to which respondents believe the ACF contributed to various outcomes in Croatia:

- **Strengthened Advocacy/Watchdog Role of Civil Society:** 88% of respondents felt the ACF contributed significantly.
- **Increased Support for Human Rights, Rule of Law, and Good Governance:** 82.8% saw a significant contribution.
- **Increased Capacities and Sustainability of CSOs:** 75.9% indicated a substantial contribution.
- **Improved Inclusion of CSOs and Target Groups from Less Developed Regions:** 79.3% noted a significant impact.
- **Empowerment and Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups, Including Roma:** 63.8% reported substantial contributions, though 22.4% were unsure.

The survey data reflect a strong positive perception of the ACF's contributions to various key outcomes in Croatia. The highest levels of agreement were observed in strengthening the advocacy role of civil society and increasing support for human rights, the rule of law, and good governance. Significant contributions were also noted in increasing the capacities and sustainability of CSOs, improving the inclusion of CSOs and target groups from less developed regions, and empowering vulnerable groups. The positive feedback underscores the effectiveness of the ACF program in meeting its objectives and addressing the needs of civil society organisations in Croatia.

### Additional achievements

The ACF programme has also generated several additional outputs. These include increased collaboration between CSOs and public institutions, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and the development of new and innovative approaches. These achievements have significantly contributed to the overall effectiveness of the ACF program in Croatia.

- **Increased collaboration between CSOs and public institutions:** The ACF program has played a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue and cooperation between CSOs and public institutions on human rights and democracy issues. This has led



- to greater understanding and trust between these two sectors and resulted in policy changes.
- **Empowerment of vulnerable groups:** The ACF program has empowered vulnerable groups, such as the LGBTIQ+ community, women, and youth, by providing them with the resources and skills to advocate for their rights and participate in decision-making.
  - **Development of new and innovative approaches:** The ACF program has been a catalyst for developing new and creative approaches to addressing social challenges in Croatia. It has encouraged the use of new technologies, the development of new methodologies, and the creation of new partnerships and collaborations, fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.

### **Key intellectual results and policy impact**

The ACF program has generated a wealth of knowledge and expertise on human rights, democratisation, and civil society development in Croatia. This knowledge has been shared through various publications, conferences, workshops, and other events, stimulating new ideas and solutions for addressing societal challenges. The intellectual results of the programme are significant and multifaceted. The programme has contributed to creating and exchanging knowledge, new ideas, issues, and solutions that have successfully promoted influence on the policy context and civic space in Croatia.

In summary, here are numerous successful project results and policy influences from different organisations:

#### **Youth Empowerment and Awareness Campaigns:**

Multiple youth-focused organisations supported by ACF have organised successful online campaigns to raise awareness of youth issues. This has strengthened youth networks, enhanced cultural offerings, and increased visibility and support for youth-focused organisations. Results include improved mental health awareness, access to IT resources for youth, and establishing partnerships with local institutions.

#### **Educational and Civic Engagement Initiatives:**

Various educational and civic organisations have increased children's and youth's awareness and participation in volunteering and civic activism. Through interactive activities, they have also promoted empathy, tolerance, and the benefits of volunteering. Students have contributed to fundraising efforts for homeless shelters and raised awareness about homelessness.

#### **LGBTIQ+ Rights and Education:**

LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups supported by ACF, among their achievements, list the first research conducted on the educational experiences of LGBTIQ+ youth in Croatia, the widespread distribution of research findings, and the influence of curriculum analysis and

policy advocacy. Results include creating and distributing an inclusive children's book, "My Rainbow Family with Grandma and Grandpa," supporting LGBTIQ+ families and strengthening organisational advocacy and media literacy capacity.

### **Environmental Protection:**

Environmental CSOs led a successful legal action using a class action lawsuit to protect the environment. They raised public awareness about the importance of ecological CSOs in policymaking, improved cooperation with experts, and strengthened cross-sector collaboration.

### **Social and Economic Rights Advocacy:**

Notable results in this area include developing a platform for social mentoring, which has led to its inclusion in the City of Rijeka's development strategy; initiating steps toward establishing a Child Well-being Research Center in Rijeka; and addressing poverty and social exclusion through targeted research and advocacy efforts. **The Rehabilitation Center for Stress and Trauma (RCT)** research project on universally available social services, with its three publications, has been utilised by the Ministry and experts, further underscoring the program's impact on policy and professional practice in Croatia.

### **Promoting Human Rights and Public Engagement:**

Human rights organisations facilitated the cultural and social integration of migrants in Zagreb. They supported civil war victims in accessing their rights and monitored war crimes trials; published preliminary research on human losses during the Croatian war and enhanced public engagement in human rights advocacy through the establishment of a new program focused on economic and social rights.

### **Advancement of Roma Rights and Integration:**

Roma advocacy organisations created a platform for school volunteering, incorporating social justice education. They strengthened advocacy efforts for Roma inclusion and education, leading to signed cooperation agreements with local governments.

The examples mentioned here demonstrate various outcome successes, from grassroots activism to policy influence, which underscores how far-reaching these projects' effects have been in their localities.

## **Influential Factors on Program Effectiveness**

An evaluation of the existing program found that several factors contributed to its success:

### **What worked:**

- **Clear Vision and Mission:** The program had a clearly defined vision and mission statement that articulated its purpose, values, and goals. This provided a strong foundation for program planning and implementation.
- **Effective Management and Governance:** The ACF program had a governance system that aimed to ensure transparency, accountability, and effective decision-making. The program was managed by a competent and experienced team within the consortium. While there were challenges related to clearly defining roles and issues in communication and coordination, the consortium members continuously strove to work collaboratively and address these challenges. They operated transparently and were responsive to the needs of grantees. Despite the difficulties, the consortium's commitment to the program's success and their efforts to support grantees were evident throughout the implementation process.
- **Project Design:** The projects were well-designed, evidence-based, and tailored to the specific needs of the target population, increasing the program's effectiveness and relevance.

#### **Factors that contributed to success:**

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The program actively engaged and collaborated with stakeholders, including beneficiaries, partners, and local communities. This facilitated the sharing of knowledge, resources, and perspectives, improving program responsiveness and impact.

### **C. Findings Related to the Efficiency of ACF in Croatia**

The ACF program successfully delivered its results in a timely manner. Data from the interviews and focus groups both suggest that most stakeholders thought that the structured timelines for the program have been efficient in practice and enabled them to meet most critical milestones with only minimal delays. Further, the annual reports for 2022 and 2023 indicate that more than 85% of projects were successfully delivered on time, with some completing major deliverables before the deadline. Survey responses show a similar degree of strong positive perception by grantees regarding disbursement of funds and implementation of activities on time. This adherence to timelines has contributed to maintaining momentum across various initiatives, ensuring that the program's goals are met within the stipulated time limits and consequently maximizing the impact across the civil society sector.

The focus group participants, consortium members, and stakeholders praised the program's flexibility and responsiveness. Some criticism were directed towards perceived administrative burden and communication challenges. The consortium members acknowledged the significant workload and instances of miscommunication and delays. However, they also emphasised the positive aspects of their collaboration, such as shared values and mutual support. The consortium members also noted that the fast pace of program development, driven by the high expectations of Croatian civil society, contributed to some of the challenges faced during implementation.

The ACF Croatia program's efficiency is demonstrated by projects that utilised resources effectively to achieve substantial community impact. For instance, the *Get Together* project by the association “Bez granica/ Borders:none” promoted social mentoring for young refugees, leveraging local volunteer mentors to support integration efforts for 85 young asylum seekers. This approach, grounded in efficient resource use and volunteer engagement, directly addressed the needs of an underserved group while fostering community solidarity and intercultural understanding. The project's success exemplifies ACF's efficiency in delivering targeted support that maximises community benefit with available resources.

Another efficient initiative is the *Platform for School Volunteering Development* by Local Democracy Agency Sisak, which strengthened school volunteer clubs in the Sisak-Moslavina region. Despite modest resources, this project established a regional platform involving seven schools, significantly enhancing youth engagement in social justice initiatives and rebuilding community resources post-disaster. The project's success underscores ACF's role in efficiently mobilising local resources to support civic engagement and recovery in less developed regions.

## **Evaluation Questions and Responses**

### **Delivery of Planned Results**

The ACF program has largely succeeded in delivering its planned results economically and on time. However, there have been mixed reactions regarding the efficiency of the program's processes.

*"The ACF program was able to deliver most of its outputs and outcomes as planned, but the administrative burden was overwhelming." - Focus Group Participant.*

Survey results support this view, with 89% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the time to process their project proposals and make funding decisions was appropriate.

### **Administrative Burden**

Some participants noted that the administrative requirements associated with the grant were time-consuming, particularly for smaller grants. This administrative burden was perceived as a hindrance to project implementation and a source of frustration for some grantees. Survey results further support this finding, with 32% of respondents indicating that the effort required for application and reporting was not proportionate to the funding received. Additional qualitative analysis from interviews and focus groups indicates that this concern primarily relates to the reporting requirements, as project promoters felt that the extensive obligations diverted valuable time and resources from core project activities.

It is worth noting that the Fund Operator (FO) adhered to the requirements outlined in the agreement and the criteria for verifying project results and financial statements. The FO managed the project with great accountability and transparency, following the standard practices of Croatian government entities in grant-making. These practices ensure compliance and oversight, maintaining a high standard of grant management.

### **Handling Delays Caused by External Factors**

The program faced significant external challenges, notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 earthquakes. These events caused delays in implementation, but the consortium demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness in adapting to these challenges. It is important to note that, in response to the pandemic, donors removed the mandatory 10% co-financing requirement. This change, outlined in the "Letter to Fund Operators of the Active Citizens Fund - Mitigating actions COVID-19 outbreak," provided essential financial relief and facilitated continued project execution under difficult circumstances.

*"The consortium was very responsive during the pandemic, adjusting timelines and providing additional support where needed." - CSO Representative.*

### **Internal Factors Affecting Implementation**

Internal factors, such as the unequal distribution of tasks among consortium members and the detailed verification of financial reports, also caused delays.

### **Organisational and Procedural Efficiency**

The efficiency of the organisational and procedural setup at the consortium level received mixed reviews. While the collaboration among consortium members was generally positive, the financial reporting and verification aspects were seen as overly complex and time-consuming.

*"The application process was very detailed, which ensured quality, but it was also very time-consuming." - Stakeholder Interview*

90% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the support and communication with consortium representatives were of high quality, indicating that while the processes were complex, the support provided was appreciated.

### **Positive Aspects of Collaboration**

Despite the challenges, consortium members highlighted the positive aspects of their collaboration, such as shared values, mutual support, and a willingness to learn from each other. The consortium was commended for its flexibility and responsiveness, particularly in adapting to the changing needs of grantees and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey results also reflect this flexibility, with 89% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the time to process their project proposals and make funding decisions was appropriate.

### **Risk Management**

Several risks were identified and managed during the program's implementation. These included external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and earthquakes as well as

internal challenges like financial reporting and verification requirements . The consortium managed these risks through flexible timelines, additional support, and continuous learning. However, this effort placed significant demands on the Fund Operator's (FO) human resources.

While the dedication of the FO to ensure timely calls for proposals is admirable, it is important to consider strategies to prevent overextending staff in future programs. To address this, it is recommended to leave more time between different calls for proposals and to plan for and allocate additional time and resources for monitoring, reporting support, and processing of reports. These measures can help balance the workload and ensure the sustainability of program operations.

*"The consortium's ability to manage risks was commendable. They were quick to adapt and provide the necessary support." - CSO Representative.*

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

### ***Relevance***

The ACF program in Croatia has demonstrated a high degree of relevance in addressing the needs of civil society from the design phase to implementation. The program's design, implementation, and support formats were well-aligned with the challenges and priorities identified by Croatian CSOs and stakeholders during the planning phase. The program has been responsive to the evolving needs of CSOs, supported by qualitative data from focus groups and interviews, as well as quantitative data from surveys. Most respondents expressed satisfaction with the program's goals, areas of support, type of financial support, timing of the support, and responsiveness to the needs of civil society. Notably, 87% of survey respondents affirmed that the program's objectives matched the needs of Croatian CSOs. The program has successfully reached a wide range of target groups, empowering them, raising awareness of their rights, and facilitating their participation in decision-making processes. Additionally, the program has fostered collaboration between CSOs and public institutions, promoting dialogue and cooperation in the designated priority support areas. Significant results were achieved in the area of bilateral cooperation and regional civil society initiatives.

## ***Effectiveness***

The ACF program has met its goals and significantly contributed to Croatia's civil society development. By focusing on advocacy, civic engagement, and bilateral and regional cooperation, the program has yielded tangible results such as increased public awareness, policy influence, and enhanced CSO collaboration. The program has also generated valuable knowledge and expertise in human rights and democratisation. Despite these achievements, reaching vulnerable groups, particularly Roma communities, remains challenging. The results framework could benefit from emphasising qualitative outcomes and impacts instead of merely quantitative outputs.

## ***Efficiency***

The program with Croatia ACF went well in the effective and timely delivery of the projects, reaching its planned targets and outputs. Members of consortia and the focus groups were among those who testified to the structured timelines that allowed them to realise important milestones without any or with only minimum delays. The grantees also expressed strong satisfaction with the timely disbursement of funds and implementation of activities. Even though the program has been very flexible and responsive, it has not been without challenges, such as task distribution among the consortium members and a heavy administrative workload. These are the issues that call for continuous enhancement and refinement. The acknowledgement of these challenges by the consortium and its commitment to learning from them suggest that this program has the potential to become even more efficient in future.

# **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To further enhance the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the ACF program, the following 14 actionable recommendations are proposed. These recommendations are based on the evaluation's findings and conclusions and aim to address identified challenges and leverage strengths. Each recommendation is designed to be concrete and actionable, ensuring effective implementation.

**1. Maintain Flexibility and Responsiveness:** Continue to adapt the program to the evolving needs of civil society and the broader socio-political context. Incorporate Adaptive Management to plan for changes and ensure flexibility while balancing resource availability. Although the program was flexible, it came at a cost, stretching human resources thin. Adaptive management will help balance flexibility with resource availability to avoid overburdening staff. This recommendation is **addressed to the Fund Operator (FO) and donors.**

**2. Streamline Administrative Processes:** Enhance program efficiency by streamlining processes where possible and continue ensuring support is accessible to all grantees. This could involve reducing the required documents, simplifying reporting templates, and

providing more explicit guidance on administrative requirements. **Addressed to FO and donors.**

**A. Streamline Reporting Requirements:**

- **Simplified Financial Reporting:** Develop simplified financial reporting templates focusing on crucial information rather than exhaustive details. This will help grantees provide essential updates without being overwhelmed by paperwork.

**B. Digital Solutions:**

- **Online Reporting Portal:** Implement an online portal for submitting applications, reports, and other documents. This can streamline data entry, reduce paperwork, and help grantees manage their reporting obligations. Such a portal could also generate automated reminders, reducing the burden on FO staff.

However, such solutions can be costly, and the management fee would need to be raised accordingly. Additionally, donors could support exchanging existing digital solutions and their adaptation for each country's users.

**C. Tailored Support for Smaller Organisations:**

- **Dedicated Support Teams:** Continue with dedicated support teams to assist smaller organisations with administrative tasks and troubleshooting.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Continue exploring and utilising mentorship support.

**D. Balance Workload for Fund Operator Staff:**

- **Adequate Time Between Calls:** Allow more time between different calls for proposals to prevent staff overextension.
- **Resource Allocation for Monitoring and Support:** Plan and allocate sufficient monitoring, reporting support, and report processing resources to ensure sustainable operations.

**3. Continue Exploring Diverse Funding Mechanisms:** The Fund Operator has effectively utilised a variety of funding mechanisms, ranging from small to large grants, funding ad-hoc initiatives, organisational support grants, and sector innovation grants. Future programming should build on this by continuing to explore and implement different funding mechanisms and expanding the number of organisational grants, multi-year grants (2-3 years) and other flexible funding options. These approaches will help organisations plan more effectively, build long-term strategies, and increase their resilience. **Addressed to FO and Donors.**

4. Consider exploring trust-based grant-making: In light of the lessons learned from operating in crisis conditions and recent philanthropic research, trust-based grant-making can deepen the impact and responsiveness of funding for civil society organisations, especially where adaptability and rapid innovation are needed. Such models are encouraged to be further explored in the scope of future programme considerations of the Active Citizens Fund, with the aim of increasing the flexibility, autonomy, and sustainability of supported civil society organisations and civic initiatives. This is especially relevant for those operating in increasingly unstable and unpredictable



political, financial, and socio-economic contexts. Trust-based grant-making should always go hand in hand with ensuring a high level of mutual financial trust, transparency, and accountability. The thematic annex to the report provides a more detailed exploration of this potential. This is **addressed to FO and donors**.

**5. Strengthen Communication and Feedback:** To ensure that the program remains responsive to grantees' needs, the consortium and grantees should continue maintaining robust channels for communication and feedback. This could involve regular surveys, feedback sessions, and online communication and knowledge-sharing platforms. **Addressed to FO.**

**6. Focus on Quality over Quantity:** While the number of outputs is impressive, the focus should shift more towards the quality and depth of impact of the projects supported. This could involve prioritising fewer but more strategic and impactful projects and investing more in monitoring and evaluation to assess the program's long-term outcomes. **Addressed to Donors.**

**7. Enhance Sustainability:** While the Fund promotes sustainability, the reliance on external funding remains challenging for many CSOs. Ensuring organisations can maintain their activities independently of ACF funding is an ongoing concern. The program should continue emphasising the sustainability of project results, ensuring that the positive changes achieved during the program's implementation continue beyond its lifespan. The current practice of supporting organisational development, financial sustainability, and knowledge transfer should continue. This is **addressed to FO and donors**.

**8. Strengthen Collaboration and Networking:** The program should continue fostering collaboration and networking among CSOs within Croatia and with partners in donor states. This could involve organising more events and activities that bring together CSOs from different sectors and regions and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices. It is important to note that online events played a crucial role during the pandemic when many calls for proposals were announced. Future efforts should build on this successful online engagement model while exploring ways to incorporate in-person interactions when possible. **Addressed to FO.**

**9. Enhance Visibility and Communication:** The program should invest more in its visibility and communication efforts to raise awareness of its achievements and impact among the general public and policymakers. This involves developing a comprehensive communication strategy, utilising various media channels, and engaging in targeted outreach to specific audiences. Additionally, ensure that there are dedicated staff members and sufficient funding for these efforts. **Addressed to FO and Donors.**

**10. Tailor Capacity Building to Specific Needs:** Continue offering more tailored and targeted capacity-building initiatives that address the specific needs of different CSOs, including those working with vulnerable groups and in underserved areas. **Addressed to FO.**

**11. Continue Focusing on Underserved Groups:** This evaluation confirmed that one of ACF Croatia's key achievements was successfully reaching out to marginalized and vulnerable groups. These groups continue to be underserved by other funding programs and will continue to depend on ACF programming **Addressed to FO and Donors.**

**12. Refine Results Framework:** Revise the results framework to focus more on qualitative outcomes and impact rather than just quantitative outputs. This could involve developing more nuanced indicators that capture the program's long-term effects on civil society and democratic values in Croatia. **Addressed to donors.**

**13. Explore Technology Solutions:** Consider using online platforms or other technological tools to facilitate communication, collaboration, and reporting, which could streamline processes and reduce the administrative burden on both the consortium and grantees. **Addressed to FO and Donors.**

**14. Allocate Sufficient Resources for Program Implementation:** Ensure that the consortium has adequate staffing and resources to manage the program effectively, especially during peak periods of activity. This includes:

- **Adequate Staffing:** Ensure there are enough staff members to handle various aspects of the program.
- **Training and Professional Development:** Invest in continuous staff training and professional development, including support to prevent burnout.
- **Resource Allocation:** Allocate sufficient financial and material resources to support program activities.
- **Peak Period Planning:** Develop a plan to manage workload during peak periods.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Allocate resources specifically for monitoring and evaluation activities
- **Technology and Infrastructure:** Invest in necessary technology and infrastructure.

**Addressed to Donors and FO.**

By addressing these issues, the ACF program can improve its efficiency and ensure that resources are used more effectively to support civil society organisations in Croatia. The program's commitment to continuous improvement and its willingness to learn from the experiences of its partners and grantees are crucial for its long-term success.

# 1. ANNEXES

## i. Terms of Reference



Prilog 1 uz postupak jednostavne nabave: 02-23

Zaklada Slagalica

# Terms of Reference for External Evaluation

Active Citizens Fund Croatia Programme 2020-2024

## ii. Case studies

### ***Case Study 1: Center for Peace Studies (CPS) Project SKOCKANO – Quality Standards for Civil Society Organizations Constructively Engaged in Non-Formal Education Project***

#### **Project Overview**

The Center for Peace Studies (CPS) received 199,000 euros from the ACF for a project spanning over three years. This project focused on developing quality assurance standards for informal educational programs implemented by civil society organisations (CSOs) in Croatia. The initiative aimed to enhance the quality and recognition of these programs, ensuring they meet high standards and effectively contribute to civil society development.

#### **Objectives**

The primary objectives of the project were:

1. To create a comprehensive quality assurance system for informal educational programs.
2. To support CSOs in improving the quality of their educational offerings.
3. Establish a quality label that recognises and promotes high standards in informal education.

#### **Activities**

The project implemented a series of carefully structured activities:

- **Research and Needs Assessment:** Initial research identified the educational needs and current challenges of CSOs in delivering non-formal education. This phase included surveys and focus groups, engaging over 100 representatives from various organizations.
- **Development of Quality Standards:** Working groups, including sector experts, developed draft standards, which were refined through extensive intra-sector consultations. The standards emphasize inclusivity, democratic values, and human rights, aligning with CSOs' mission-driven education.
- **Pilot Testing:** The quality standards were pilot-tested with nine CSOs, leading to further refinements. These pilots highlighted the effectiveness of the system in improving educational quality and helped tailor the standards to a range of organization sizes and capacities.
- **Implementation of the Quality Label:** A quality label was introduced, with an annual evaluation process. The label, now awarded to 26 CSOs, has become a mark of excellence and credibility in non-formal education.

- **Capacity-Building and Training:** CPS provided training sessions and resources, including e-learning modules, to help CSOs meet quality standards. Over 40 CSOs have used these resources, increasing their capacity to deliver impactful education.
- **Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement:** The project involved targeted advocacy efforts, holding 10 meetings with policymakers to promote the adoption and recognition of these standards within educational policies and frameworks.

## Key Achievements

The project resulted in several significant achievements:

- **Established Quality Standards:** CPS successfully created and implemented the “SOK Skockano” quality standards, now adopted by 26 CSOs. The standards set a benchmark for quality in non-formal education and are supported by an online registry, viewed over 17,000 times within a year, enhancing visibility and public accountability.
- **Capacity Building through E-Learning Modules:** Four e-learning modules on non-formal education were developed and launched, covering essential topics such as education methodology and digital facilitation. These modules, available through an open-access platform, are used by CSOs and other stakeholders, making the training sustainable and widely accessible.
- **Sector-wide Impact:** The project significantly impacted the civil society sector in Croatia by encouraging a culture of continuous improvement. Feedback from participating organizations indicates improved program quality and a stronger sense of purpose and recognition within the sector.
- **Enhanced Inter-Sectoral Collaboration:** The project fostered collaborations between CSOs, educational institutions, and local governments. CPS conducted multiple public presentations and advocacy sessions, increasing awareness of the quality standards among policymakers and potential partners.

## Challenges

The project encountered several challenges:

- **Complexity of Quality Assurance:** The administrative demands of the quality assurance system were a barrier for smaller CSOs, requiring CPS to provide additional support and simplify some processes.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Securing active participation from all relevant stakeholders, particularly from government institutions, proved challenging. However, CPS's persistence led to valuable partnerships with entities such as AMPEU and the City of Rijeka.
- **Sustainability:** Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the quality assurance system requires continuous engagement and advocacy efforts. While initial support from stakeholders has been promising, ongoing investment in capacity-building and advocacy is needed to maintain momentum.

## Results and Impact

The project outcomes indicate substantial progress in enhancing the capacity and visibility of CSOs engaged in non-formal education:

- 26 CSOs achieved certification under the new quality standards, setting a sectoral benchmark.
- **Online Platform Utilization:** The e-learning modules attracted over 500 users, including representatives from CSOs, schools, and local authorities, demonstrating strong interest and usability across sectors.
- **Public Reach through Advocacy and Campaigns:** The project's online campaign reached over a million people, significantly raising public awareness about the importance of quality non-formal education and the role of CSOs.
- **Sectoral Change and Recognition:** The project strengthened the civil society sector's reputation, increasing trust among beneficiaries, funders, and governmental bodies. The quality label has become a symbol of reliable and impactful educational programming.

## Attribution and Causality

The project's success can be directly attributed to the support provided by the ACF. The financial resources enabled CPS to develop and implement a comprehensive quality assurance system that would not have been possible otherwise. The structured approach to research, stakeholder consultation, and pilot testing ensured that the standards were relevant and widely accepted. The project demonstrated causality in improving the quality of informal educational programs and enhancing the overall capacity of CSOs in Croatia.

## Conclusion

With the SKOCKANO project, a good foundation was laid for the assurance of quality within the framework of non-formal education in civil society in Croatia. Through the development of Skockano standards, CPS has considerably empowered CSOs to enhance their educational services toward better professionalisation and, thus, sustainability of the sector. This project is an example of how investment in such capacity-building initiatives pays off through the effective delivery of education services by CSOs in support of democratic and inclusive values. Its work has continued to inspire other sectors, setting the stage for possible policy integration of quality standards in non-formal education.

## ***Case Study 2: CROATIAN ROMANI UNION "KALI SARA"***

### **Project: Educated Roma Women, Empowered Roma Communities!**

#### **Overview**

The Croatian Romani Union "Kali Sara," a leading umbrella organization for Roma civil society in Croatia, implemented a project with support from the Active Citizens Fund (ACF). The initiative focused on empowering Roma women and youth by promoting socio-economic integration, improving educational outcomes, and fostering civic engagement. This case study highlights the project's objectives, key activities, achievements, and its lasting impact on Roma communities, drawing from program reports, annual reviews, and an interview transcript with a representative from Kali Sara.

#### **Objectives**

The project aimed to:

1. Improve the socio-economic status of Roma communities, focusing on women and youth.
2. Increase Roma's participation in local decision-making processes.
3. Promote awareness of Roma rights and cultural heritage.

#### **Activities**

Key activities of the project included:

- **Educational Workshops:** A series of workshops focusing on reproductive health, gender equality, and anti-discrimination were held across various locations in Croatia. Over 200 young Roma women participated, gaining critical knowledge on topics central to their personal and communal empowerment.
- **Cultural and Educational Events:** Events highlighting Roma heritage and rights were organised to foster pride in Roma identity and strengthen community cohesion. These events also aimed to reduce social distance between Roma and non-Roma populations.
- **Outreach and Advocacy Programs:** To engage Roma youth in education and civic life. Sessions on human rights and civic participation equipped participants with the tools needed for advocacy.
- **Creation of Educational Materials:** Resources, including a manual titled "Za moje zdravo odrastanje" ("For My Healthy Growth"), were developed and distributed, covering topics from health to rights awareness. This manual has become a lasting educational tool for Roma youth and community members.

#### **Achievements**

- **Increased Educational Attainment:** The project successfully motivated Roma youth, especially girls, to pursue further education. Testimonials from participants highlight instances where girls were inspired to continue their studies, with some even enrolling in higher education. For instance, one young Roma woman completed high school and enrolled in the Faculty of Social Sciences.
- **Empowerment of Roma Women:** The workshops on reproductive health and gender equality were transformative, equipping participants with knowledge and boosting their self-confidence. Many women reported feeling more empowered to advocate for their rights and engage in community discussions on pressing issues such as early marriage and reproductive choices.
- **Promotion of Roma Culture:** The project helped reinforce Roma heritage through cultural events, instilling a sense of pride and identity among community members. These activities have bridged divides between Roma and non-Roma populations, promoting mutual understanding and respect.
- **Enhanced Civic Engagement:** Training sessions on advocacy enabled Roma representatives to participate actively in local councils and decision-making bodies. As a result, Roma community members became more vocal and influential in advocating for their rights, contributing to a more inclusive civic environment.

### Attribution and Causality

The achievements of Kali Sara's project can be directly attributed to the support provided by the ACF program. The funding enabled the organisation to implement comprehensive educational and advocacy programs, which would not have been possible otherwise. The causal relationship between the ACF support and the project outcomes is evident in the increased educational attainment, empowerment, and civic engagement of the Roma community.

### Causality Analysis:

- **Funding and Resources:** The financial support from ACF was crucial in enabling Kali Sara to execute its project activities effectively. The availability of funds for workshops, educational materials, and cultural events directly contributed to the project's success.
- **Capacity Building:** Training and capacity-building initiatives for Roma women and youth provided the necessary skills and knowledge, leading to increased empowerment and participation in civic processes.
- **Collaborative Efforts:** The project's success was also due to the collaboration between Kali Sara and other civil society organisations, which facilitated knowledge sharing and resource mobilisation.

### Challenges

The project faced some challenges, including:



- **Complex Administrative Processes:** Securing buy-in from local councils and maintaining active stakeholder engagement required persistent advocacy and relationship-building.
- **Cultural and Socioeconomic Barriers:** Overcoming entrenched stereotypes and addressing the community's internalized challenges required sensitive approaches. Despite these barriers, the workshops effectively created a safe and supportive environment where young Roma women could openly discuss issues and learn.
- **Sustainability of Engagement:** Ensuring ongoing engagement and support for Roma rights after project completion remains challenging, requiring additional resources for continuous capacity-building.

## Results and Impact

The project led to several significant outcomes, with both immediate and long-term impact:

- **Reduction in Early Marriages and Pregnancies:** The educational sessions provided young Roma women with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their futures, including delaying marriage and childbearing. This has had a measurable impact on reducing instances of early marriage and pregnancy within the community.
- **Institutional and Policy Influence:** Through consistent engagement with local councils, the project facilitated the signing of three cooperation agreements to improve services and protections for Roma communities in cities like Beli Manastir, Slavonski Brod, and Sisak. These agreements signify a formal commitment from local authorities to address issues such as gender-based violence against Roma women.
- **Promotion of Roma Voices in Media:** The project's media outreach was substantial, with campaigns and video spots on local and national platforms. This increased visibility not only highlighted the issues faced by the Roma community but also showcased the proactive steps Roma women are taking to change their circumstances. The campaign's reach extended to over a million people, further sensitizing the public to Roma issues.

## Testimonials

Personal stories from participants underscore the transformative impact of the project:

- Lea Oršuš, a workshop participant, noted, “I realized that even a small encouragement can lead to change. Many young Roma women are now aware that education can open doors to a better life—not just for themselves but for their entire community. This project has empowered us to say, ‘I decide!’”.
- Talita Jašarevski, another participant, shared her experience of feeling safe and supported during the workshops. She said, “These sessions created a safe space

where we felt free to share our experiences without fear of judgment. It was empowering to know we have control over our bodies and choices”.

## **Conclusion**

The "Educated Roma Women, Empowered Roma Communities!" project, led by Kali Sara and supported by the ACF, has had a profound and lasting impact on the Roma community in Croatia. By focusing on education, empowerment, and civic engagement, the project has helped break down barriers faced by Roma women and youth daily. By establishing formal partnerships, the project has strengthened the civic and social framework needed to support Roma's empowerment in the long term. The success of this initiative demonstrates the importance of targeted interventions that address the unique challenges of marginalized communities, ensuring they have both the tools and the voice to advocate for their rights and future.

## ***Case Study 3: Association ANCHOR – preschool teachers in the protection of children right in preschool (SIDRO) - Equal Start for Every Child***

### **Overview**

SIDRO, an organization dedicated to advocating for early and preschool education rights in Croatia, received support from the Active Citizens Fund (ACF) to elevate public awareness, advocate for policy changes, and improve conditions for early education. SIDRO's project tackled pressing issues in the Croatian early education landscape, mobilizing public support and engaging policymakers in discussions on equitable education standards. This case study explores SIDRO's objectives, key activities, achievements, and the project's broader impact.

### **Objectives**

The project aimed to:

1. Improve the conditions and standards of early and preschool education in Croatia.
2. Raise public awareness about the importance of quality education for young children.
3. Advocate against detrimental policy changes affecting the education sector.

### **Activities**

The project implemented several impactful activities:

- **Public Performances and Protests:** SIDRO organized high-visibility events, including a protest at Markov trg, which drew significant media attention. These performances highlighted issues faced by preschool educators and rallied public support against proposed policy changes.
- **Workshops and Training for Educators and Parents:** SIDRO held numerous training sessions on advocacy, educational standards, and the importance of quality education. These sessions empowered over 400 participants to engage in the advocacy process actively.
- **Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Unions:** SIDRO partnered with various CSOs, unions, and educational institutions to strengthen its advocacy efforts. This coalition building enhanced SIDRO's capacity to mobilize broad-based support.
- **Social Media Campaigns:** Through social media outreach, SIDRO's campaign reached hundreds of thousands of citizens, engaging them in discussions about early education and mobilizing them to support SIDRO's advocacy goals.

### **Key Achievements**

- **Successful Halt of Harmful Policy Changes:** SIDRO’s advocacy led to a significant policy impact. The organization played a pivotal role in halting the passage of a proposed law that would have weakened preschool education standards by removing the National Pedagogical Standard—a key regulatory measure ensuring quality education. SIDRO’s outreach, including a widely circulated petition signed by over 22,000 citizens, helped sway public opinion and influence policymakers.
- **Public Mobilization and Increased Visibility:** SIDRO’s campaign achieved remarkable reach and engagement. Across various media platforms, the organization’s social media posts, television appearances, and radio interviews collectively reached over 800,000 individuals. This extensive media presence increased public awareness of preschool education issues, contributing to a surge in public support for SIDRO’s mission.
- **Organizational Development and Capacity Building:** With support from the ACF, SIDRO transitioned from a volunteer-driven initiative to a structured organization with a permanent staff. This professionalization has enabled the organization to manage projects more effectively, plan sustained advocacy efforts, and build stronger strategic partnerships with CSOs and unions.
- **Collaborative Advocacy and Partnership Building:** SIDRO’s ability to bring together various stakeholders—including four major unions, educational institutions, and 14 other CSOs—demonstrates the organisation’s leadership in early education advocacy. This coalition, titled “Equal Start for Every Child,” united stakeholders in demanding improvements in preschool policies and advocating for the rights of children with disabilities.

### Attribution and Causality

The achievements of SIDRO's project can be directly attributed to the invaluable support provided by the ACF program. The funding and mentorship not only enabled the organisation to execute comprehensive advocacy campaigns and capacity-building activities, but also underscored the significance of such support in driving impactful projects.

### Causality Analysis:

- **Funding and Resources:** ACF's financial support was crucial in enabling SIDRO to execute its project activities effectively. The availability of funds for organising public performances, training sessions, and social media campaigns directly contributed to the project's success.
- **Capacity Building:** Training and capacity-building initiatives for SIDRO’s members provided the necessary skills and knowledge, leading to more effective advocacy and organisational management.
- The project’s success was a testament to the power of collaboration. SIDRO, in partnership with other CSOs, unions, and educational institutions, facilitated knowledge sharing and resource mobilisation, demonstrating the strength of

collective action in education advocacy. They managed to mobilize more than 80.000 citizens and experts, receiving unprecedented support.

## Challenges

The project encountered challenges typical of advocacy initiatives:

- **Resistance from Policymakers:** Despite significant public support, SIDRO faced challenges in engaging with government bodies. Persistent efforts were needed to secure discussions with policymakers and halt detrimental legislative changes.
- **Logistical and Resource Constraints:** Coordinating large-scale protests, workshops, and a media campaign required considerable resources and logistical coordination. However, SIDRO leveraged its network effectively to overcome these challenges, maximizing its impact with the available resources.

## Results and Impact

The project's outcomes highlight SIDRO's considerable impact on early and preschool education in Croatia:

- **Policy Influence and Legislative Changes:** SIDRO successfully influenced the Croatian government to reconsider its stance on preschool education legislation, preventing a rollback of quality standards. The project generated significant political momentum, with policymakers acknowledging SIDRO's role in representing public concerns. The organization submitted over 30 amendments to the draft law, actively shaping legislative discussions on early education. More information can be found here: [https://www.peticijeonline.com/roditelji\\_protiv\\_najavljenih\\_izmjena\\_zakona\\_o\\_predkolskom\\_odgoju\\_i\\_obrazovanju\\_zpoo\\_i\\_protiv\\_ukidanja\\_dravnog\\_pedagogkog\\_standarda\\_dps](https://www.peticijeonline.com/roditelji_protiv_najavljenih_izmjena_zakona_o_predkolskom_odgoju_i_obrazovanju_zpoo_i_protiv_ukidanja_dravnog_pedagogkog_standarda_dps)
- **Enhanced Public Awareness and Civic Engagement:** The project empowered educators, parents, and the public to participate in advocacy efforts. SIDRO's initiatives fostered a culture of civic engagement, with parents and educators actively contributing to discussions on the rights of children and the quality of education.
- **Organizational Sustainability:** SIDRO's professionalization has ensured the sustainability of its advocacy efforts beyond the project timeline. By establishing a structured organization with employed staff, SIDRO is now better positioned to continue its work in defending and improving early education standards in Croatia.

## Conclusion

SIDRO's project, supported by the ACF program, has sparked transformative change in Croatia's early education sector. The project's success underscores the importance of targeted support and capacity-building for civil society organisations in the advocacy

landscape. SIDRO's achievements in halting harmful policy changes, fostering public engagement, and building organisational capacity illustrate the value of investing in initiatives that empower citizens to advocate for quality education and equitable access. The sustained impact of SIDRO's efforts demonstrates the power of collective action in advancing the rights of children and securing a strong educational foundation for all.

### iii. Reflection: Consideration of Trust-Based Grant-making Models

*Although it was not within the core focus of this evaluation, recent experiences and emerging trends in grantmaking, especially on human rights, advocacy, and democracy, illustrate the possible advantages of flexible, trust-based approaches. This reflective note briefly presents considerations on the potential use of such approaches in future iterations of the funding model.*

The current literature on human rights and advocacy funding calls for a movement from rigid, prescriptive funding structures to more flexible, trust-based grant-making models. This would afford organizations greater autonomy to respond dynamically to emerging challenges and opportunities. For instance, the African Women's Development Fund provides strong evidence of adaptive, trust-based grant-making, where flexible funding enables organizations to allocate resources where they are most needed without the delays of bureaucratic processes. Research by Monette Zard, Sara Hossain, and Ackerly (2012) underlines the role building robust partnerships with continued effects in advocacy can play through models emphasising trust. The approach can cut through bureaucratic obstacles while yielding better outcomes in complex, rapidly changing advocacy landscapes.

The current literature on human rights and advocacy funding urges a shift from rigid, prescriptive mechanisms of funding to flexible, trust-based models of giving grants-permitting organizations the autonomy to act responsively to shifting circumstances of challenge and opportunity. For instance, the African Women's Development Fund<sup>3</sup> provides strong evidence of adaptive, trust-based grant-making, where flexible funding enables organizations to allocate resources where they are most needed without the delays of bureaucratic processes. Studies by Monette Zard, Sara Hossain, and Ackerly (2012)<sup>4</sup> underline the role that building robust partnerships with continued effects in advocacy can play through models that emphasize trust. The approach can cut through bureaucratic obstacles while yielding better outcomes in complex, rapidly changing advocacy landscapes.

#### **Potential Benefits of Trust-Based Grant-Making**

1. **Empowering Grantees:** Grantees bear more empowerment and flexibility, focusing on what they perceive as most critical to their needs and the best-emerging opportunities-which, in turn, would better align the use of resources with organizational contexts and priorities peculiar to them.

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<sup>3</sup> Chléirigh, N., & Johanna, E. (2015). Grant-Making For Women's Rights Lesson Learnt: An Abridged Version of Devolved Grant-making Phase II Project Evaluation Report. African Women's Development Fund.

<sup>4</sup> Ackerly, B. (2012). Breakthrough Evaluation: An External Rights-Based Evaluation of Grantmaking for Gender Equality. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and The Global Fund for Women.

2. **Fostering Innovation:** Without too many constraints or bureaucracy, grantees can have more room for experimentation in testing innovations as better ways to solve complicated problems.
3. **Improved Relationships:** Trust-based approaches can cultivate deeper collaboration, trust, and transparency between funders and grantees, creating more effective partnerships.
4. **Reduce Administrative Burden:** A more flexible model relieves grantees from excessive reporting obligations, thus freeing them to devote their energy to core mission activities as opposed to mere compliance.

### **Exploration for Future Implementation**

This represents a new approach and is beyond the immediate scope of this evaluation, but it would be an exciting direction for future grant programming. A number of the following considerations can help frame an exploration and possible adoption of trust-based models within the ACF program:

Discrete best practice: Learning from effective trust-based initiatives, operators of funds can borrow from and adapt strategies that pave the way for grantees towards more flexibility and responsiveness. Collaboration with such established initiatives, like the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, may be very instructive.

- **Piloting Trust-Based Grants:** Consider introducing a pilot program focused on trust-based grants with reduced reporting requirements. By monitoring and evaluating these grants, stakeholders can assess their impact and scalability within the broader funding structure. Lump-sum grants, which provide maximum flexibility in resource allocation, are a potential model for piloting.
- **Adopting Best Practices:** Learning from effective trust-based initiatives, the Fund Operator can borrow from and adapt strategies that pave the way for grantees towards more flexibility and responsiveness. Collaborating with established initiatives like the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project may offer valuable guidance and support.

### **Further Resources**

For additional resources and guidance on implementing trust-based practices, interested stakeholders may refer to:

- [Trust-Based Philanthropy Project \(Inside Philanthropy\)](#): Comprehensive guidance and tools for adopting trust-based grant-making.
- [Inside Philanthropy \(NCFP\)](#) and **National Center for Family Philanthropy (NCFP)**: Practical resources and case studies for enhancing flexible, trust-based funding models.



## **Conclusion**

- Trust-based grant-making can deepen the impact and responsiveness of funding for civil society organizations, especially where adaptability and rapid innovation are needed. Such models are encouraged to be further explored by both FO and FMO within the context of future programmatic considerations, with the aim of increasing the flexibility, autonomy, and sustainability of supported initiatives.

#### iv. List of reviewed documentation

##### **Programme Documentation:**

- Annual Programme Report HR Citizens 2020
- Annual Programme Report HR Citizens 2021
- Annual Programme Report HR Citizens 2022
- Annual Programme Report HR Citizens 2023
  
- Programme Implementation Agreement
- HR Active Citizens Results Framework Document
- Management and Control Systems of the Programme "Active Citizens Fund in Croatia"

##### **Grant Documentation:**

- List of awarded projects
- Calls for applications and Grant Application Guidelines (retrieved from acf.hr)

##### **Additional literature reviewed:**

- Chléirigh, N., & Johanna, E. (2015). Grant-Making for Women's Rights: Lessons Learnt. An Abridged Version of Devolved Grant-Making Phase II Project Evaluation Report. African Women's Development Fund. Retrieved from <https://awdf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/AWDF-Abridged-evaluation-report-Final.pdf>
- Phillips, M. B. (2016). Funding Effective Human Rights Work: A Conversation Between Monette Zard and Sara Hossain. Journal of Human Rights Practice. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/jhrp/article-abstract/8/3/316/2697250>
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- American Bar Association. (n.d.). Internet Freedom Advocacy in Europe and Eurasia. Retrieved from [https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/rule\\_of\\_law/where\\_we\\_work/europe\\_eurasia/internet-freedom/](https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/rule_of_law/where_we_work/europe_eurasia/internet-freedom/)
- Agence Française de Développement. (n.d.). Financing CSO Projects. Retrieved from <https://www.afd.fr/en/financing-ngo-projects>

## v. Data collection instruments

### ***Interviews***

**Questions for a semi-structured interview with key stakeholders** (professionals who are not directly connected to ACF but are active in the field of civil society, development policy, including the development of CSOs):

1. *To what extent are you familiar with the Fund for Active Citizenship? Are you familiar with the conditions of the competition, the procedures, and the amount awarded?*
2. *What impact was achieved when creating the Fund for Active Citizenship?*
3. *Do you think that the ACF, as set up and implemented, contributes to the following set outcomes:*
  - a. Strengthening the advocacy/watchdog role of civil society organisations;
  - b. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs to provide support for human rights, the rule of law and good governance;
  - c. Strengthening democratic culture and civic awareness
  - d. Increasing the capacity and sustainability of civil society (organisations and sectors)
  - e. Increasing bilateral cooperation between organisations from Croatia and organisations from donor countries of the Program,
  - f. Strengthening regional (cross-border) cooperation in the civil society sector
4. *Which of the following outcomes would you estimate the ACF had the greatest impact?*
5. *Do you see changes in society due to the fund's grant scheme? Can you name specific changes achieved in your field of work in the last year? Did the Fund affect them directly?*
6. *How would you describe the Fund's communication strategy towards the general public? Is there room for improvement?*
7. *What do you think should be the strategy of the next Active Citizenship Fund? What do you think are the pressing challenges in society that the Fund could influence?*

**Questions for a semi-structured interview with the Fund's partner organizations.** The interview is conducted with the team of each partner organization separately.

1. *How would you rate the cooperation between partner organizations?*
2. *Is there trust between the partners? To assess the level of trust.*
3. *How do partners support each other and encourage development?*
4. *How flexible are the partners and ready to adapt to changes?*
5. *Were there conflict situations and how did you deal with them?*

6. *How satisfied are you with communication between partners? Would you change anything, and what?*
7. *What are the main advantages and challenges in cooperation between partners?*
8. *How do you see the future of your cooperation and do you plan to develop it further?*
9. *What are your recommendations for improving cooperation in the future?*
10. *Do you think that the Fund responded relevantly to the needs of CSOs at the time of its creation?*
11. *Do you think that the ACF's set-up and implementation contribute significantly to the set outcomes?*
12. *Which of the following outcomes would you estimate the ACF had the greatest impact?*
  - a. Strengthening the advocacy/watchdog role of civil society organisations;
  - b. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs to provide support for human rights, the rule of law and good governance;
  - c. Strengthening democratic culture and civic awareness
  - d. Increasing the capacity and sustainability of civil society (organisations and sectors)
  - e. Increasing bilateral cooperation between organisations from Croatia and organisations from donor countries of the Program,
  - f. Strengthening regional (cross-border) cooperation in the civil society sector
13. *Are there other circumstances that contributed to the realisation of the set outcomes?*
14. *What would you do differently to recreate ACF (support areas, tenders, procedures)?*
15. *How would you describe the Fund's communication with grant recipients? Is there room for improvement?*
16. *How would you describe the Fund's communication strategy towards the public? Is there room for improvement?*
17. *What do you think should be the strategy of the next Active Citizenship Fund? What are the pressing challenges in society that the Fund could influence?*

## **Focus groups questions**

Six focus groups were planned with recipients of financial support, which will be divided according to the areas of the Fund's expected effects:

1. Strengthened advocacy/ watchdog role of civil society;
2. Increased support for human rights, rule of law and good governance;
3. Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness
4. Increased capacities and sustainability of civil society (organisations and sectors);
5. Increased bilateral cooperation between organisations from Croatia and organisations from donor countries of the Program,
6. Strengthened regional (cross-border) cooperation in the civil society sector.

1. *How would you describe your experience with your organisation's capacity-building services through the ACF grant scheme?*
2. *How much did the capacity building program help you (only one question is asked depending on the focus group participants, i.e. depending on which outcome category they fall into):*
  - a. *Strengthening the advocacy position of the organisation*
  - b. *Strengthening the capacity of your organisation to provide support for human rights, the rule of law and good governance;*
  - c. *Strengthening the implementation of the program of democratic culture and civic awareness*
  - d. *Increasing the capacity and sustainability of your organisation and the sector in which you operate*
  - e. *Increasing bilateral cooperation between your organisation and organisations from the Program's donor countries,*
  - f. *Strengthening regional (cross-border) cooperation in the civil society sector*
3. *How would you describe communication and collaboration with service providers throughout the capacity-building program?*
4. *What specific changes or improvements do you notice due to group training?*
5. *What specific changes or improvements do you see resulting from the mentoring support?*
6. *In which areas do you think that capacity building contributed the most to developing your organisational skills? Specify specifically.*
7. *How would you evaluate the quality and engagement of trainers in group training?*
8. *How would you rate the work's quality and the mentor's engagement?*
9. *Did the capacity-building services provided meet your expectations, or is there anything you would like to see improved?*

10. *Why did you apply to the Fund for Active Citizenship in HR?*
11. *How was the grant application process? Did you find the procedure clear and simple?*
12. *How would you rate the support you received during the grant application? Did you get enough information and support from donors?*
13. *Did you encounter any difficulties or challenges while using the grant that was granted? If so, can you describe them and suggest possible solutions?*
14. *How would you describe the donor's administrative requirements when implementing the project; financial reporting, narrative reporting, other requirements?*
15. *Were you satisfied with the cooperation and communication with the donor during the application process and the use of grant funds? Do you have suggestions for improving cooperation and communication?*
16. *What are the advantages and benefits you have achieved through using grant funds? How did the funds help you achieve your goals?*
17. *Do you have additional suggestions or comments related to the grant scheme, application process or outcomes?*

# Vanjska evaluacija Fonda za aktivno građanstvo u Hrvatskoj

\* Označava obavezno pitanje

## Opće informacije

Naziv organizacije\*

Vaš odgovor

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Pozicija u organizaciji osobe koja odgovara

Vaš odgovor

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Vrsta potpore, iznos i razdoblje provedbe\*

Navedite vrstu potpore (Ad hoc akcijska potpora (do 5,000 EUR), Mala potpora (15,000-30,000 EUR), Srednja potpora (30,000-60,000 EUR), Velika potpora (150,000 EUR), Institucionalna potpora, Potpora za sektorske inovacije, Bilateralna suradnja), iznos i razdoblje provođenja projekta. Ukoliko ste dobili više od jedne potpore, molimo vas navedite podatke za svaku.

Vaš odgovor

---

Glavne aktivnosti koje ste provodili u okviru vašeg projekta podržanog od Fonda (moguće više odgovora)

- edukacije
- kampanje javnog osvještavanja
- zagovaračke aktivnosti i kampanje
- istraživanja i analize
- razvoj novih proizvoda i usluga
- direktna podrška građanima u potrebi
- strateške parnice
- Ostalo: \_\_\_\_\_

S kojim ste od navedenih ciljanih skupina direktno radili u okviru vašeg projekta ugovorenog u sklopu Fonda za aktivno građanstvo (moguće više odgovora)

- siromašne osobe i obitelji
- žene u riziku nasilja
- Romi
- mladi
- osobe s invaliditetom
- stanovnici manje razvijenih zajednica
- Ostalo: \_\_\_\_\_



## Općenito o Fondu za aktivno građanstvo

Na skali od 1 (uopće se ne slažem) do 5 (u potpunosti se slažem) označite svoje slaganje sa sljedećim tvrdnjama koje opisuju Fond za aktivno građanstvo u Hrvatskoj\*

	1 Uopće se ne slažem	2 Donekle se ne slažem	3 Niti se slažem niti ne slažem	4 Donekle se slažem	5 Potpuno se slažem
Fond za aktivno građanstvo daje velik doprinos održivosti rada ljudsko-pravaških organizacija koje nemaju odgovarajući pristup javnom financiranju u RH.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ciljevi Fonda su usklađeni s potrebama i prioritetima u Hrvatskoj	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fond za aktivno građanstvo usmjerio je financijsku podršku na stvarne potrebe organizacija civilnog društva koje štite ljudska prava.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
U razdoblju kad je program Fonda kreiran, odgovorio je na probleme i izazove s kojima se suočavalo civilno društvo u Hrvatskoj	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fond je učinkovito adresirao potrebe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

dionika i ciljanih skupina

Veličina i struktura financijskih potpora bila je primjerena potrebama civilnog društva i ciljanih skupina

\*Za ovo je pitanje potreban jedan odgovor po retku

U kojoj mjeri procjenjujete da je Fond pridonio sljedećim rezultatima u Hrvatskoj \*

	1 Uopće se ne slažem	2 Donekle se ne slažem	3 Niti se slažem niti ne slažem	4 Donekle se slažem	5 Potpuno se slažem	Ne znam
Ojačana zagovaračka/watchdog uloga civilnog društva;	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Povećana podrška ljudskim pravima, vladavini prava i dobrom upravljanju;	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Povećani kapaciteti i održivost civilnog društva (organizacija i sektora);	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poboljšano uključivanje OCDA i ciljanih skupina iz manje razvijenih regija i lokalnih zajednica	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Osnaživanje i inkluzija ranjivih skupina, uključivši Rome	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\*Za ovo je pitanje potreban jedan odgovor po retku

Postoje li ključne potrebe civilnog društva i ciljanih skupina u Hrvatskoj koje Fond nije obuhvatio, a trebao je? Ako da, koje su to potrebe?

Vaš odgovor

### O financijskim potporama

O financijskim potporama\*

Dolje su navedeni različiti dijelovi procesa dodjele financijskih potpora, od natječaja i prijave, do provođenja i izvještavanja. Molimo vas da svaki ocijenite na skali od 1 do 5, gdje 1 označava najnižu, a 5 najvišu razinu slaganja

	1 Izrazito se ne slažem	2 Ne slažem se	3 Niti se slažem niti ne slažem	4 Slažem se	5 Izrazito se slažem
Dobivene financijske potpore zadovoljile su specifične potrebe Vaše organizacije u području ljudskih prava i demokracije	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ciljevi natječaja bili su jasno formulirani	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Postupak dodjele financijskih sredstava bio je transparentan i pravedan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veličina dobivene potpore bila je primjerena za provedbu Vašeg projekta?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vrijeme potrebno za obradu Vašeg projektnog prijedloga i donošenje odluke o financiranju bilo je primjereno	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Podrška i komunikacija s predstavnicima konzorcija koji je upravlja Fondom bila je kvalitetna

Okvir za rezultate Fonda i njegovi indikatori bili su razumljivi i jednostavni za primjenu na našem projektu

Omjer između traženog truda za prijavu i izvještavanje te dobivenih sredstava bio je primjeren

\*Za ovo je pitanje potreban jedan odgovor po retku

Koje aspekte prijave i izvještavanja biste pojednostavili?

Vaš odgovor

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### O jačanju organizacijskih kapaciteta

Organizacije u sklopu konzorcija koji je provodio program Fonda u Hrvatskoj, primateljima potpora pružale su različite oblike podrške u jačanju njihovih organizacijskih kapaciteta, od info radionica, konzultacija u pripremi projektne dokumentacije do procjena kapaciteta organizacije putem upitnika i radionica za primatelje potpora. Koliko su Vam aktivnosti programa jačanja kapaciteta bile korisne za rad Vaše organizacije?

1      2      3      4      5

Uopće nisu bile korisne

Izuzetno korisne

Koliko su teme i sadržaji programa Fonda bili relevantni za potrebe Vaše organizacije?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nimalo relevantni	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Značajno relevantni

Koliko je program doprinio jačanju kapaciteta Vaše organizacije u sljedećim područjima:\*

	1 Uopće nije pridonio	2 Malo je pridonio	3 Srednje	4 Pridonio je	5 Značajno je pridonio
<input type="radio"/> Upravljanje organizacijom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> Strateško planiranje	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> Financijsko upravljanje	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> Prikupljanje sredstava (fundraising)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> Komunikacija i odnosi s javnošću	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> Zagovaranje	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/> Upravljanje projektima	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ako ste ojačali kapacitete u nekom drugom području koje nije gore navedeno, molim vas navedite ovdje

Vaš odgovor

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U kojoj mjeri su aktivnosti jačanja kapaciteta doprinijele održivosti vaše organizacije?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Nimalo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Značajno

Možete li navesti primjere kako ste primijenili stečena znanja i vještine u radu svoje organizacije te kakve su bile koristi od toga?

Vaš odgovor

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Koje biste sugestije ili prijedloge imali za poboljšanje podrške jačanju organizacijskih kapaciteta?

Vaš odgovor

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### O rezultatima potpore

Molimo navedite najvažnije rezultate koje je Vaša organizacija postigla zahvaljujući projektu financiranom od strane Fonda za aktivno građanstvo. (Možete navesti više primjera)

Vaš odgovor

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Očekujete li da će rezultati Vašeg projekta imati dugoročni utjecaj?\*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Uopće ne očekujem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Izrazito očekujem

Je li Vaš projekt rezultirao nekim neočekivanim pozitivnim ishodima? Ako da, molimo navedite.

Vaš odgovor

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Je li Vaš projekt naišao na neke neočekivane izazove? Ako da, molimo navedite.

Vaš odgovor

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Koliko biste uspjeh svoje organizacije u ostvarivanju ciljeva pripisali sudjelovanju u programu Fonda za aktivno građanstvo?\*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Uopće ne bih pripisala	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	U potpunosti

Koje druge faktore, osim sudjelovanja u programu, smatrate važnima za ostvarenje uspjeha Vaše organizacije?

Vaš odgovor

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Možete li navesti konkretne primjere kako Vam je sudjelovanje u programu pomoglo u prevladavanju izazova s kojima se Vaša organizacija suočavala?

Vaš odgovor

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### **Komentari za kraj**

Imate li bilo kakve dodatne komentare ili prijedloge za poboljšanje rada Fonda za aktivno građanstvo?

Vaš odgovor

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