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# **Learning from donor practices: trends in supporting civil society**

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# Background to the reform of the European Youth Foundation

The European Youth Foundation (EYF or the Foundation) is an instrument of the youth sector of the Council of Europe to promote the Organisation's values and priorities. It supports youth cooperation by providing financial support to European activities that promote peace, understanding and cooperation between young people of Europe and the world, in a spirit of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Foundation provides grants to support youth projects of youth organisations developed by, with and for young people, from the member states of the Council of Europe and the States Parties to the European Cultural Convention. The Foundation is a partner for local, national, and international non-governmental youth organisations and networks, to strengthen civil society.

The EYF was set up by the Council of Europe in 1972. The Foundation has its [own statute](#) that defines its mission and governance. The EYF has operational regulations, including the basic rules governing the manner and conditions of using the Foundation's resources. The operational regulations have been revised regularly, every 10 – 15 years, since 1972. The [current operational regulations](#) were adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 January 2012 at the 1130th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies and entered into force on 1 January 2013.

The EYF provides grants for international youth cooperation activities, either one-off activities or a series of activities as part of an annual work plan, to cover the administrative costs of international youth organisations to carry out these international cooperation activities, and for ad hoc pilot activities that address the challenges young people face and their needs at the local or national level, with a European dimension.

Initiated in 2022, the EYF reform aims to enhance the EYF's role as a key instrument for youth civil society within the Council of Europe.

In 2024, a broader restructuring of the EYF grants began, with new operational regulations being drafted. An open consultation that included EYF stakeholders (youth organisations from local, national, and international levels, public bodies, youth workers, young people, etc.) was held between May and July 2024, gathering 105 contributions. These suggested keeping the current grant types but revising formats and procedures to be more dynamic and flexible, simplifying grant management and reporting, and improving the inclusion and accessibility of youth initiatives.

By September 2024, several consultation meetings, and the Programming Committee's working group (set up in 2023) have supported the reflection on the changes needed in grant procedures.

In parallel to the open consultation, the EYF commissioned two research studies to provide food for thought for the reform. One study focused on the trends in young people's civic engagement patterns. The second one focused on good practices in grant-making among relevant donors that support civil society.

## Aim, scope and methodology of the study

This study aims to identify trends and good practices of donors supporting civil society, within the values and principles of the European Youth Foundation.

The study includes findings based on desk research that involved the analysis of 30 donors and 10 in-depth interviews with the donors whose practices are close to the approaches of the European Youth Foundation.

The key themes included, among others:

- Grant-making practice (information dissemination, outreach, preparation work before the application, the application process itself, project implementation, evaluation, reporting, etc.)
- Priorities and mission
- Governance and decision-making on grants
- Capacity building and other forms of technical support for applicants
- Communication and transparency
- Balance between trust-based and control-based approaches
- Challenges for donors and grantees
- Approach to transversal themes such as gender equality and inclusion, climate change, etc

Donors were chosen considering the need to cover a wide range of organisations. The selection took into consideration:

- Donors that support civil society, including youth civil society
- The geographical coverage, ensuring that the donor's operations cover the Council of Europe member states
- The diversity of grants
- The nature of donor programmes, such as development agencies and programmes
- A mix of public and private donors.

This study was developed based on consultations with the selected donors and does not aim to cover the whole philanthropic field in Europe. The main insights, practices, and reflections are extracted and driven from the studied material and interviews, most relevant for supporting the reform of the EYF.

The study also briefly describes the donors involved in the desk research.

We would like to extend our gratitude to all the organisations who participated in the interviews. Our acknowledgements go to the Civil Society Forum (Nicolai Houe), the European Volunteer Centre (Gabriella Civico), the Danish Youth Council (Mathias Pedersen), the Franco-German Youth Office (Tobias Bütow and his team), the German Marshall Fund of the United States (Jörg Forbrig), the

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## Overview and understanding of grant practices

This part of the study presents an overview of the findings, consolidating them into reflections on various grant-making aspects which could be important for the EYF reform process. These reflections are also supported and explained/specified by a series of examples highlighted in text boxes. This section also features some practices often mentioned and shared by donors. These practices provide clear examples and useful tools or methods to address a specific part of their process. These examples are based on and prompted principally by the interviews with 10 donors.

### Transparency and accountability matter

Transparency and accountability are important aspects in managing funds and donors seem to be moving towards models that balance administration and flexibility.

For instance, the German Marshall Fund of the United States illustrates this trend using a trust-based approach. Instead of concentrating on heavy reporting requirements, the donor focuses on the overall impact and outcomes of the funded projects. This enables the grantees to adjust their expenditures flexibly while still being held accountable for the success of their project. Instead of demanding specified expense accounts per each activity, the German Marshall Fund of the United States requires regular reports that provide information about how well the project is managed and how goals are being met. This approach encourages trust and autonomy while still ensuring transparency through outcome-based accountability.

The European Climate Foundation provides a clear framework about how often progress reports, financial reports and final evaluations are to be made and submitted by grantees to ensure that they are accountable to the use of the funds. They also require grantees to submit progress reports and financial balance sheets regularly to ensure compliance with their open grant financing policy. The foundation uses these reports to ensure that projects align with their strategic objectives.

### Mission and agenda of the donor structure: the basis for donor relationship

The mission and agenda of any donor are the basis for long-term cooperation with grantees. Donors, especially those supporting youth initiatives, ensure that their strategies are clearly defined but remain flexible enough to respond to the beneficiary's needs. For instance, donors try to refrain from imposing rigid frameworks that limit the autonomy of grantees. Instead, they underline the importance of setting up funding policies that align with the core values of the organisations they support while keeping an eye on their goals and objectives.

To encourage a productive relationship, donors underline the importance of communicating transparently about their mission and include grantees in the co-creation of programmes and funding mechanisms. This allows grantees to pursue their missions while supporting the donor's objectives.

Furthermore, the analysis of grant-making practices and the interviews shed light on the attention paid to providing flexible sources of funding that reflect the scale, type, and purpose of the organisations they are funding, thus, supporting more projects beyond the existing ones, including those tackling new issues in youth work.

### Communication: a two-way street

Some interviewees stressed that the communication between donors and grantees must be two-way. Although communication is often considered a two-way process by default, in this context, it means that donors and grantees move beyond one-way interactions and (pro)actively engage with each other.

For instance, Stiftung Mercator, the European Climate Foundation and the Youth Climate Justice Fund have included regular feedback loops with grantees. This ensures that grantees are not just recipients of funds: it actively involves them as sources whose input helps determine what type of support they need. For example, grantees can share their challenges and evolving needs during the grant implementation period, allowing the donor to adapt its support accordingly. This two-way communication allows for an active two-way interaction where donors are attentive and responsive to real-time needs, and grantees feel empowered to voice their concerns and not fear that the grant may be withdrawn.

### Adaptability and flexibility to support a wide range of organisations and structures

Flexibility is important to support a wide range of organisations, particularly grassroots and informal groups (such as non-registered entities) that might not meet the formal criteria of “traditional” donors (meaning those traditionally funding only registered entities). This flexibility is part of the approach of the Bureau International Jeunesse (BIJ) when supporting small informal groups with micro-grants for, often, one-off projects.

The German Marshall Fund of the United States also understands the significance of funding such organisations and groups, particularly in countries where the operating environment is restrictive or politically sensitive. In such contexts, the Fund offers small grants to organisations that are not registered and cannot apply for mainstream funding because of legal or administrative restrictions. In providing small grants through relatively accessible application processes, the Fund helps such groups continue their work, providing them with much-needed resources while avoiding burdensome bureaucratic hurdles.

As another example, the European Endowment for Democracy provides flexible, rapid-response grants that adapt to urgent needs in a wide range of regions and contexts, such as crises or supporting at-risk human rights defenders. There have been many discussions and searches for possibilities to support non-registered groups of young people's activities, or even individuals through different programmes. Several foundations seem to have regulatory difficulties to finance projects from individuals or unregistered groups. Nonetheless, one of the solutions is the involvement of intermediaries, such as fiscal hosts, that can become a good instrument to open the



availability of funds to a wider public. These organisations have a legal entity structure, often a good level of experience in grant making, and can take responsibility for the legal and administrative aspects related to grant management on the ground and provide the chance for informal groups to implement their project. These intermediaries also often become donors' focal points, ambassadors, and partners who help the outreach and localised work.

### **The Heinrich Böll Foundation: South Caucasus regional office**

The Climate Change and Environment Programme of the Foundation works a lot with grassroots 'green' and ecological organisations in different countries. They are either identified or approached by the Foundation itself through a local mapping exercise. This often ensures that the organisations are well-known or that the Foundation takes time to explore their operations. The organisations can contact the Foundation and reply to open calls with project ideas and start a partnership at any point. Even though the programme is shaped and decided every September, the organisations can propose project ideas throughout the year. If their ideas are in line with the set priorities for that phase, the Foundation's local staff will support shaping them as projects to be funded. This allows local issues and needs to be identified by the local actors who also provide ideas for solutions and change, thus making the grant-making based on co-creation and more focused on real needs and priorities. The local partnerships are based on a deep knowledge of the organisations and take a long-term modality. The role of the local office is also to support the grantees in all the stages of application, especially because some of the grassroots organisations are small, without a large capacity to manage projects. The Foundation supports them to ensure that quality and expert work, often with a strong local impact and policy impact, can be done regardless the challenges with the administrative resource or grant experience.

**The Multitude Foundation** focuses on supporting political change through inclusive practices. It prioritises marginalised voices, such as refugees and migrants, while offering a combination of financial backing, strategic guidance, and community support to political innovators across Europe. It supports political change-makers across Europe who aim to build "more inclusive, humane, and hopeful politics". It provides financial resources, strategic advice, practical support, and a community of practice to help advance its mission. The Foundation provides grants in three stages:

- Ideation grants: €10,000 for individuals needing time and space to create solutions that promote inclusive and human-centred politics.
- Incubation grants: up to €50,000 for those ready to develop their vision into sustainable organisations, including expert support.
- Scaling grants: up to €100,000 for organisations prepared to expand their efforts and increase impact.

It reaches out to grassroots groups who are often excluded from grant-making and works to connect grantees to create a shared purpose and increase strategic efficiency. The Foundation identifies initiatives through its network of local connectors, grantees and supporters across Europe and supports potential grantees in the grant-making process.

## Building trust-based relationships and partnerships and the subtle balance between control and trust

Based on the consultations, donors seem to gradually go towards basing their work with grantees on trust, ensuring a deep knowledge about the organisations they support before starting to work systemically and in the long term. This approach often means taking time and investing resources to get to know each other. The donors get a good understanding of the background of the organisations, their mission, practices, and “track record”. Sometimes this involves site visits, meetings and discussions, internal document assessments and due diligence checks, exchanges with other donors working with experience with those structures, capacity-building activities, and workshops. Many donors start with a microgrant, a small pilot activity to contribute to better knowledge about new partners. This knowledge gives a chance to thoroughly understand the core of work, themes, priorities, organisational culture, administrative and thematic capacities of the grantee, and their needs. Often risks are also assessed to support mitigation and management efforts to be put in place. On the other hand, the grantees also get to know the donors’ structures, policies, and grant-making practices better, facilitating their further work.

Like the Youth Climate Justice Fund, **the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)** bases its funding practice on long-term relationships with grantees. The work often starts with an organisation coming up with an idea that is discussed and reflected on with the GMF. It is always based on local needs. Once the presented idea is discussed and accepted within the frameworks of the work of the Fund there is a period of getting to know one another, which includes looking into the background, history, mission and strategies of the organisation, previous work in the field and on the ground, other considerations related to operation practices. The organisations also get to know the Fund, its work, priorities, systems and practices. Often a pilot, small-scale project is initiated and funded, which gives a practical possibility for further relationship and partnership development between the Fund and the CSO or an initiative group. After a successful implementation of the pilot project, building on the experience and capacities developed, a larger-scale longer-term project can be initiated.

**Robert Bosch Foundation** has developed an approach to facilitate getting to know organisations that are to potentially start working with them or wishing to apply with a project idea. When an organisation comes up with an idea and turns to the foundation, it always starts with a period of acquiring deeper knowledge about the applicant organisation. Essential in this approach is that the main persons responsible for dealing with the specific grantee/partner (project managers within each thematic team and key account managers in the grant management teams are there to check legal requirements, possibilities, financial management practices, etc) work closely together to ensure building relationships and clarifying the working aspects. Instead of sending out several legal forms, templates, and checklists to be filled in, the Foundation has developed the format of in-person “partner consultation” which at its core is a due diligence exercise, with a questionnaire that serves as a base for this open and lively conversation with the organisations. It includes questions helping to clarify procedures on the spot, to avoid any misperception, miscommunication or lack of essential information or mechanism for smooth grant-making.

Another example is the Romanian-American Foundation which carefully explores the partners and invites them to apply. The entire application process takes around 3-4 months, with a due diligence check. The German Marshall Fund of the United States also explores quite closely the local partners to work with, as they build long-term partnerships always having a local organisation to implement the work.

There is no doubt that establishing trust-based relationships is one of the critical success factors of donor-grantee relationships. The examples of other donors show that the transition from mostly control-oriented approaches to more reliance on trust-enhancing measures can greatly decrease the administrative strain on both parties. Trust-based funding makes the grantees feel that they 'own' the projects and are responsible for managing them in a way that generates truthful and genuine results.

But all this does not exclude accountability: donors underlined the need to put in place precautions to prevent abuse and to guarantee accountability. The issue is to find the subtle balance between reducing the number of tasks that create extra work without compromising the level of supervision required. In this context, trust-based relations can be supported by the less bureaucratic approach to reporting, where grantees are encouraged to report results in any way that they find suitable, including the use of creative tools, such as visuals or stories that can provide a broader picture of the project than a set of metrics. When doing so, trust is created, clear yet flexible rules of the partnership are specified, and the accountability mechanisms reflect the reality of the groundwork, which helps donors build better and long-lasting relationships. These practices lead to stronger engagement from grantees, reduced bureaucratic burden, and ultimately, more impactful work that benefits donors and the communities they aim to serve.

## Long-term partnership, investing in growth and organisational sustainability

One of the essential discussions in the donor community is the topic of long- and short-term engagements, having long-time partners and grantees, having grants which span for 3, 5, 7, or 10 years, and grants which support not only projects *per se* but also core funding, such as staff, running costs, and organisational development. The Franco-German Youth Office works through "centrales", which are state and non-state partners on the ground and support implementing the programmes. This helps donors to develop a deeper understanding of their partners, fostering long-term perspectives, capacity building, and improved communication. Partners, in turn, gain a comprehensive grasp of how donor organisations operate, effectively becoming ambassadors for the mission and advancing the work on the ground.

The Robert Bosch Foundation has a modality to fund actors, which means providing structural support to organisations to sustain, learn and grow. There is a thorough initiation phase which supports the reflection of the structures on their growth needs and steps.

The **Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ)** collaborates with 'centrales' (local hubs), which are recognised organisations that promote Franco-German cooperation in the long-term. These 'centrales' can be associations, federations, or educational authorities in both countries. They

support project organisers in designing exchanges and managing grant applications, ensuring compliance with OFAJ guidelines. ‘Centrales’ process applications, distribute funds and guarantee the proper use of grants. They can also run their projects and may receive annual budgets from OFAJ. The cooperation between OFAJ and “centrales” is governed by framework agreements, with special considerations for school-sector “centrales”. These agreements aim to balance the unique aspects of school exchanges with easier access to funding for school projects. “Centrales” manage their budgets responsibly, in line with OFAJ guidelines, and coordinate their project planning with OFAJ.

Moreover, one of the most important lessons from the donors’ practices explored for this study is the importance of supporting experimentation and organisational learning, including a sort of “fail forward” approach. Innovative civil society work (including youth work) requires an environment that allows organisations to experiment with new ideas and practise, fail and learn without the risk of penalising measures. Too many restrictions in the guidelines and regulations also risk hindering the approach and spirit of experimentation. Although not all the grant-making practices follow that line, most of them tend to develop flexible funding frameworks, and are willing to take risks and adjust.

Easier and shorter application forms, brief reporting systems, and easy-to-use online portals - these less complex procedures help organisations spend less time dealing with bureaucracy and more time focusing on their projects' results and impact. While experimenting with such improvements, it's important to accept that some attempts will fail or not fully achieve their objectives.

Encouraging experimentation also means acknowledging that failure is part of the innovation process, and this is supported through grants that cater to different stages of organisational development. From micro-funding for smaller projects at the community level to multi-annual funding for larger established organisations, the diversity of grants facilitates the growth of all organisations to their full potential. Moreover, capacity building is a central theme, fundamental in ensuring that organisations have the skills and knowledge needed to manage their projects effectively and scale their impact over time.

## Co-creation and co-decision in grant-making

While co-management is a principle that has existed for decades in the Council of Europe, it is worth underlining that the trend in grant-making is precisely the involvement of grantees in the decision-making process, which alters the power relations between the donor and the grantee. Participatory grant-making is well illustrated by the Youth Climate Justice Fund. In their model, young leaders who are in close touch with the local movements are involved in allocating the funds. These leaders also join decision-making committees to ensure that the funds are directed to the most relevant and impactful projects. This benefits those at the grassroots level and improves the efficiency of grant giving because the decision-makers receive first-hand information about the community’s needs. There are mechanisms to ensure unbiased, transparent decisions, and help mitigate any possible conflict of interest.

The Danish Youth Council – DUF’s granting decisions are made by a DUF’s International Granting Committee, which includes young people from Danish civil society, but not necessarily experts in grant making. To support their work, they are also building the capacity of the granting committee members, who are young people, to help them understand and manage the selection process.

## Simplicity of procedures

It is important to simplify the application and reporting procedures, not only for smaller organisations (because it is harder for them to cope with complex administrative requirements often related to the application and reporting processes), but also for bigger structures and the donors themselves. From a value-for-money perspective, processing heavy applications takes time and resources of donors (staff). Hence, simplifying procedures is not only in the interest of the grantee but also of the donor.

For example, the Centre for European Volunteering has adopted in one of its funding lines an application form limited to the most basic questions such as “What do you want to do?” and “How will you spend the grant?” This method makes it possible for organisations to access funding, while at the same time avoiding the use of too many resources in the process of completing lengthy applications. The Centre for European Volunteering ensures that more organisations can participate in the funding process, especially those from rural or less formal backgrounds. Similarly, the Bureau International Jeunesse also simplifies the procedures depending on the level of funding and the organisation of the youth informal group behind the project. That is particularly valid for programmes such as Mini Mob, which supports collective initiatives and projects that enable young people to discover another environment, neighbourhood, territory, group of young people, or other structures or other places to live. The BIJ has a system of ‘agreement’ which simplifies the contractual procedure. In the case of small grants, it allows a reporting process that requires a minimum of justification and gives space for video, and pictures as proofs that the project took place and to showcase the outcomes (also see the part dedicated to reporting).

Similarly, the Nordic Council of Ministers has made its application processes easier thanks to well-described templates and procedures. The emphasis is placed on simplicity of procedures, especially for small organisations and events. As with many others, they have different grant amounts related to the work to be done and less complex conditions for disbursing smaller amounts.

## Impact and quality assurance

The discussion on impact and quality assurance is a complex and multilayer issue that needs mechanisms and practices put in place. Donors provide sets of standards and formal criteria, and methodological guidance to support the organisations working with them. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems play an important role in the impact and quality assurance work and after some reflection on that role, some donors have initiated a revision of those M&E practices to foster enabling and learning processes. For example, donors are moving towards more reflective, impact and change-oriented reporting, and conversational evaluations, with discussing jointly the projects which are financed in addition to or replacing the form-based written evaluations. More and more use of multimedia for reporting is encouraged. The Danish Youth Council (DUF) invites its grantees

and their partners to join in for an evaluation meeting hosted by two advisors from the secretariat of DUF where they investigate the project, its impact, and priority aspects and reflect on the outcomes and the role of the projects for the involved stakeholders.

The Franco-German Youth Office uses a customised software “Electra” for the evaluation, which is part of the organisation's broader effort to assess and enhance its youth exchange programmes between France and Germany. The staff checks every project according to the set indicators fixed for 3 years. The indicators are then assessed in this online system and the impact is made measurable and visible in yearly evaluations that allow to have insights and feed the further work.

### **The Danish Youth Council - DUF: The change triangle as cross-cutting priority angles for the grants.**

The Change Triangle is a tool developed by DUF to support organisational development and sustainable social change in projects involving children and youth financed by DUF. These three angles are to be present in the reflections of the organisations applying for funding. It ensures that they not only implement a project but also see this to support their strengths and capacities and learn from their experience. The idea is to grow while doing a project and learn how to implement advocacy work for their causes and constituencies.

This approach consists of three components: Capacity Building and Organisation Development, Advocacy for Children's and Youth Rights, and Activities for Children and Youth to Gain Influence. Organisation Development focuses on internal improvements, such as strengthening volunteer recruitment or enhancing democratic processes. Advocacy involves efforts to influence decision-makers and promote positive change for the target group. Activities for children and youth are the project's direct contributions to the target group, serving as a foundation for organisational development and advocacy. The balance between these components may vary depending on the project, context, and organisational competencies. The key principle is that all three elements are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. While not all components need to be present in every project, consideration should be given to the prioritisation of these aspects. The tool emphasises the importance of linking activities to broader organisational needs and advocacy efforts to ensure sustainable change.

## **Reporting: from documentation to change**

The main current trend is that donors are increasingly moving away from requiring exhaustive financial documentation and are instead looking at the outcomes/changes that the funded projects produce. Donors allow for narrative reports instead of predefined and non-changeable templates where appropriate, adjust reporting frequency based on grant size and grantee capacity and accept existing documents (such as reports to board or stakeholders) *in lieu* of bespoke reports. This flexibility extends to financial requirements as well, with funders accepting financial reports in grantees' existing formats rather than requiring specific templates and considering simplified financial reporting or spot checks instead of full audits for smaller grants.

The Youth Climate Justice Fund is one of those donors that allows grantees to choose how they report on their results, whether through written reports, videos, or presentations.

The Bureau International Jeunesse supports a similar process for small grants dedicated to informal groups and one-off activities. This flexibility relieves the grantees of the administrative burden, allowing them to focus on achieving results. For instance, instead of presenting a financial report, the grantee can provide a video with a brief description of the effect of the project on the community. This approach helps shift the emphasis from compliance to demonstrating change.

The Robert Bosch Foundation is moving away from complex and complicated reporting (impact, outcome, output level chronological reporting) into more impact discussion calls and more work around the relationship side of things. For the Foundation, it is important to shift from what one has done, to what has been achieved.

Some donors such as Stiftung Mercator view reporting as a mechanism for ensuring accountability and tracking impact. In that case and for example, Stiftung Mercator requires detailed reports at the project's conclusion, including financial statements and outcomes, which supports evaluating long-term systemic change rather than short-term achievements.

## Mechanisms ensuring inclusion and outreach

As further elaborated below, almost all the funders interviewed are developing inclusive mechanisms that make their processes more accessible, to ensure that their grants reach marginalised and more diverse groups.

For instance, the German Marshall Fund of the United States has local staff in various regions who are fluent in the local languages and familiar with the contexts. This enables the Fund to participate in the activities of grassroots organisations, particularly in rural or politically sensitive areas. In doing so, the Fund guarantees that even those who face significant barriers to accessing international funding can have access to its grants. This approach is advantageous because it targets a wider range of grantees that may otherwise be excluded from traditional funding channels.

Other donors such as the European Endowment for Democracy also ensure inclusion and diversity by prioritising grants to organisations or individuals generally facing obstacles accessing “traditional” funding schemes. By simplifying application processes and developing user-friendly funding systems, donors also try to make funding more accessible for smaller and grassroots organisations so that it can reach the most people possible while funding only the most effective initiatives.

Through its practice of “Explore” seminars, the Danish Youth Council expanded its outreach to involve more young people, look for new regions, and explore new topics. These seminars make it possible to explore more partners and take time to build new partnerships and work with new themes.



The “Franco-German Forum on Inclusion: How to design more accessible youth meetings?” is an event organised by the Franco-German Youth Office, intended as a space to share practices and improve the project implementation by providing a toolbox for their partners.

**DUF** offers various project types to support partnerships at different stages, from initial contact to long-term collaboration. Projects are designed to be sequential, with some concurrent options available. Partnerships are encouraged to start small and gradually increase scope based on capacity and experience. Each project should build on previous learning, with higher grants requiring increased quality and sustainability. The several funding modalities are:

<b>Grant Modalities</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Partner identification	Find the right partner organisation
Preparatory study	Investigate ideas and develop a project
Pilot project	Test a new idea or develop a small-scale project
Partnership project	Develop a comprehensive or long-term project
Partnership development	Meet up and develop your partnership
Youth leader exchange	Affiliate full-time volunteers to your pilot or partnership project
Engagement activity	Inform others about your work and get them involved
Network activity	Participate in a network activity.

## Capacity building and support to applicants

Capacity building has become a key element of effective grant-making, with most of the donors involved in this study acknowledging that financial support alone is not enough to ensure success. The European Climate Foundation, the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Youth Climate Justice Fund offer capacity-building programmes including training, individual consultations, advice and follow-up support. These capacity-building activities improve grantees’ operational capacity and ability to successfully manage their projects, thus producing more sustainable and longer-term positive impacts.

The Youth Climate Justice Fund offers project management and financial management training tailored to smaller organisations (sometimes in cooperation with external partners).

The Bureau International Jeunesse had coaching systems in place for scouts and girl guides organisations that applied for Youth Exchanges. Realising that they needed more support, BIJ organised a series of onboarding and training days, as well as the direct accompaniment of the youth groups to co-create the project and elaborate the application form.

The Franco-German Youth Office places great importance on networking, sharing and peer learning of the organisations involved in their programme. Regular meetings are organised for both state and non-state actors, who come together to consolidate their reflections and share experiences.

The Robert Bosch Foundation's "Funding Ideas" mechanism supports organisations in piloting innovative concepts or adapting successful models from different contexts. By providing financial



resources, the Foundation enables organisations to test new or imported approaches, with the understanding that the value lies not just in successful outcomes but in generating meaningful insights. Whether a pilot proves efficient or reveals limitations, the resulting knowledge serves as a critical foundation for organisational learning, strategic refinement, and potential future improvements, thereby fostering a culture of adaptive and evidence-based innovation.

The Philanthropy in Europe Association (Philea) has a system to support peer-to-peer learning for its members through providing quarterly online webinars on topics of interest for their members, providing knowledge and recommendations on “how to” in each field. The network also builds knowledge through thematic publications, such as Child and Youth Participation, Futures Philanthropy, etc.

**Philea** enhances capacity in the philanthropy sector through collaborative knowledge creation, peer learning platforms, and targeted events. These efforts include sharing effective practices, facilitating workshops and forums for inter-organisational learning, and hosting specialised events like the Philea Forum. These initiatives allow stakeholders to discuss challenges, share solutions, and collectively advance the field of philanthropy.

Philea's peer-to-peer learning offers enhances the skills and knowledge of philanthropy organisations through structured support and networking. It features Communities of Practice, where professionals meet regularly to exchange expertise in specific areas, including CEO retreats, communications, data science, and organisational development. Additionally, Philea provides peer exchange programmes that cater to all staff levels, from CEOs to newcomers, facilitating skill improvement across the sector. The organisation also offers tailor-made peer-learning opportunities, organising customised webinars, workshops, and meetings based on member interests and needs. These initiatives are informed by member feedback, research requests, and Philea's analyses, ensuring relevance in a rapidly evolving philanthropic landscape. Capacities are also built through the provision of thematic guidebooks to support specific dimensions of members' work.

The **German Marshall Fund of the United States** combines its capacity-building work with grant-making. GMF collaborates with local partners to deliver local capacity-building initiatives that empower communities and organisations. It is important that the work locally is done by local staff, in local languages, with all the grant-related information, documentation, forms, and guidelines being available in local languages. To support potential and existing partners on the ground, GMF provides workshops, site visits, coaching, and mentoring, helping grantees/participants build essential skills and confidence in project management and working with donors. Microgrants complementing these activities are made available and allow groups to experiment, gain practical experience, and learn to navigate the processes of applying for funding and fundraising. These experiences help lay the groundwork for collaboration on larger grants, enabling participants to undertake more ambitious projects with GMF in the future.

## Mechanisms to support applicants at all stages

Donors are increasingly recognising the value of supporting grantees throughout the entire grant cycle, from applying for the grant to the post-grant evaluation. For instance, the Centre for European Volunteering provides wide-ranging support by offering regular check-ins and ongoing feedback throughout the project period. It conducts monthly progress reviews and offers, as the Bureau International Jeunesse does, coaching or technical assistance to grantees to overcome obstacles they may encounter. It also ensures that grantees are sufficiently supported to implement their projects successfully which in turn enhances the quality of the projects and the donor/grantee relationship. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency offers workshops and technical assistance during the application process, while the European Climate Foundation engages in ongoing collaboration after the selection of grantees, including capacity building, strategic advice, and project monitoring.

**The Danish Youth Council (DUF)** appoints consultants to each group applying to implement projects. These consultants support and advise the grantees to succeed in doing impactful projects in equal and strong partnership and help them ensure the grants align with the requirements. The guidance focuses on making the project concept and advising on where to start in the granting system hierarchy. The consultants also support the implementation phase, evaluation, and reporting. The evaluation is facilitated among all the project partners and guided by the consultants. In general, for anyone who would like to apply for funding, the Danish Youth Council sees their grant-making programme as a learning experience for quality project-making. DUF provides annual fixed training courses for its grantees on general grant management and workshops on financial management, change triangle as their theory of change approach and the three main transversal themes. A set of workshops is also provided, the themes of which are hinted at and decided each year in consultations with the grantees themselves.

## Cross-cutting themes in grant-making practices

One of the objectives of the study was to examine transversal and cross-cutting themes prioritised by the selected donors and to identify the specific mechanisms implemented to ensure these themes are effectively integrated and addressed.

Cross-cutting themes in grant-making practices refer to overarching issues or priorities that span multiple areas of focus. They are much connected to the missions, vision, and values of donor organisations, and aim to support if not the inclusion of them in all the projects financed, but at least to open a reflection on the issues and explore ways of addressing them transversally throughout the projects in all their phases. Some of the donor structures enhance the inclusion of the topics through having these topics integrated into pedagogical aspects of the work, some have developed guidelines, some make this a must to include in the budgets, and some make sure to have capacity building of the grantees on these themes.

The study identified several of these themes, such as inclusion and equality, gender, climate change, volunteering, participation, collaboration, and networking. By focusing on these themes, grant-makers aim to create a more comprehensive and sustainable impact across various sectors and communities. For example, in addressing climate change, organisations make rules to limit air travel, use eco-friendly services or have programmes to sensitise the partners on the topics of

climate change, using pedagogic means to support the cause. For the Robert Bosch Foundation it is also essential to see the interdependencies between various thematic fields they work on and thus tackle some of the issues with interventions addressing interdependent issues. They also look into future trends and emerging issues to learn how to respond to them in an efficient way.

The **Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ)** strives to achieve carbon neutrality and protect the environment in the context of Franco-German youth exchanges to safeguard the rights of future generations. OFAJ is committed to conserving environmental resources in the organisation and implementation of projects and ensures that its project organisers do the same. Additionally, it encourages environmentally and climate-friendly actions. Environmental protection and the fight against global warming must be taken into consideration in terms of round-trip travel, accommodation, catering, and educational activities. Projects funded by OFAJ must be designed to minimise greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible. A designated system calculates these emissions for each project based on the distance and chosen mode of transport. Apart from the calculations, there is a big pedagogical dimension supporting participants' awareness of the exchanges organised and eco-friendly programme conduct ([dekarbo.ofaj.org](http://dekarbo.ofaj.org)).

The **Danish Youth Council's** international work is based on three cross-cutting requirements:

- **Children and Young People's Influence, Participation, and Rights:** Projects should actively strengthen youth rights and participation at both organisational and societal levels. This involves including young people in project planning, implementation, and decision-making processes.
- **Voluntarism:** Projects must promote a culture of voluntarism, supporting social responsibility and democratic involvement. This includes describing the local volunteer culture and explaining how the project will engage volunteers in both Denmark and the partner country.
- **Gender Equality:** Projects should address gender-based discrimination and power structures, ensuring equal opportunities for all genders. This requires analysing gender roles, needs, and barriers to participation at both organisational and societal levels.

For each requirement, projects need to analyse the context, design activities that address these aspects, and explain how they contribute to long-term positive change in these areas. The focus is on creating inclusive, participatory, and equitable project environments and outcomes.

Robert Bosch Foundation has created a foresight, impact and strategy team. Strategic Foresight is a systematic approach to examining and interpreting future developments. It involves developing possible future scenarios, assessing opportunities and risks and deriving strategic options for action. The objective is to make well-founded decisions and align the Foundation's work with future challenges and opportunities in the best possible way. By proactively identifying trends and developments at an early stage, the Foresight, Impact & Strategy team aims to make the Robert Bosch Stiftung future-proof and resilient.

The Foundation promotes innovation and identifies new ideas and approaches that contribute to solving social challenges, while also examining their role within philanthropy and the role of philanthropy in society. By sharing knowledge and experience with Foundation's grant making partners and within the sector, it strives to build a better future together.

## Key aspects of grant-making approaches

The donors consulted for this study support civil society organisations (CSOs) through various means, including financial resources and grants, capacity-building programmes, and technical assistance. Supporting civil society is crucial as it enhances democratic participation, holds governments accountable, and provides essential services where state capacity is limited or in some countries challenging to access. By funding CSOs, donors contribute to a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient society, ultimately supporting the overall development and stability of the field.

*‘Walk the talk: when donors’ mission and practice support each other’*

This part of the study summarises and sheds light on grant-making aspects and dimensions to consider and provides general recommendations for improving grant-making-related processes. It builds on the findings, reflections and sense-making of the overview of practices and gives specific suggestions for implementing the approaches into grant-making day-to-day practices.

### A pivotal dimension: the systemic and holistic approach to change

There is a clear difference between donors who adopt a systemic and holistic approach to change and those who don't. A good illustration of that is the key observation of those who have highlighted from their practices the importance of understanding support not just in terms of individual projects but as part of a broader system of change. This means that the funding strategies consider the interconnections between youth work, social change, and environmental issues, to ensure that funded projects contribute to long-term societal resilience.

For this reason, donor structures need to remain agile and responsive to the rapidly changing landscape of CSOs, including youth organisations and the field of youth work. These changes refer to demographic changes, technology, and the growing involvement of young generations in environmental activism (beyond climate). Such an approach allows donors to fund initiatives interconnected with broader social movements, ensuring that their support remains aligned with the needs of future generations. Moreover, donors underlined the need to pay attention to developing favourable environments (eco-systems) for people and communities. This requires financial assistance and capacity-building, mentorship, and advocacy for policy changes that enable more profound and lasting outcomes. By considering the whole system and providing multi-level support, donors can foster a sustainable and systemic change. In 2024, the Philanthropy in Europe Association developed the European Philanthropy Manifesto, “[Unlocking European Philanthropy Potential: 4 Key Steps to a Single Market for Philanthropy](#)” to support policies to pull resources together and increase the impact of philanthropic work in Europe and bring about systemic changes.

## Other key dimensions of grant-making processes

When analysing donor practices, several approaches and directions in grant-making were mentioned as crucial. These approaches imply shifts towards being a progressive and enabling donor and often include:

**Supporting agency at the grassroots level** - The donor empowers local and grassroots organisations to make decisions and take ownership of their projects. The donor trusts the expertise and knowledge of those working directly in communities, rather than imposing top-down solutions. For the donor, this involves:

- Putting in place flexible funding arrangements that allow grantees to adapt their strategies as needed.
- Encouraging grantees to define their success metrics.
- Providing capacity-building support to strengthen grantee leadership.

**Shifting power for shared responsibility** - The donor adopts the approach towards equal partnership and cooperation, a more symmetrical relation instead of a traditional donor-grantee relationship focused on control and compliance. For the donor, this includes:

- Involving grantees in decision-making processes about funding priorities.
- Creating feedback loops to ensure the donor learns from its partners and grantee organisations.
- Developing mutual accountability mechanisms, rather than one-way reporting.

**Enabling structure for sustainability** - The donor operates in the philosophy of supporting sustainability, financial stability and independence, capacity of organisations to help them become self-sufficient rather than perpetually dependent on grants. For the donor, this implies:

- Providing core, unrestricted funding to allow organisations to develop.
- Offering training and resources on fundraising, financial management, and organisational development.
- Supporting grantees to diversify their funding sources.
- Implementing a "graduation" model where organisations are supported to phase out from grant dependency over time and become financially more sustainable, independent, self-sufficient

**Being 'with', and not only 'for' CSOs** – The donor's position is to adopt a more integrative approach viewing themselves as part of the broader civil society ecosystem rather than merely an external entity providing financial support to the field. For donors, this means:

- Having CSO representatives on the donor's board or advisory committees.

- Creating platforms for grantees to collaborate and share knowledge.
- Creating spaces for donors and grantees to meet and discuss priority issues.
- Shaping the donor to be more directly accountable to the CSOs it serves.

**Linking global to local** - The donor facilitates and supports a better conceptual and practical understanding of local organisations helping them engage with global issues in their specific contexts. For the donor, this can involve:

- Providing resources and training on global trends and their local implications.
- Supporting the creation and development of networks and collaborations between local organisations and international partners.
- Funding projects that explicitly connect local actions to global challenges (e.g., climate change, human rights).
- Helping local organisations participate in global forums and policy discussions.

**Being a part of a wider donor ecosystem** - The donor is inclined to take up a role and recognises itself as one of the players within a larger ecosystem of donors, CSOs, and other stakeholders, with a commitment to learning and adaptation, and consolidation of efforts. For the donor, this involves:

- Collaborating with other donors to support shared causes, exploring options for joint proposals or reporting for multi-funded projects, avoiding duplication of efforts by building on existing work and creating shared platforms for grant management to reduce duplicate data entry.
- Focusing on the overall mission and wider systemic change rather than isolated projects.
- Sharing knowledge and best practices with other donors.
- Creating collaborative funding models to increase impact.
- Promoting consolidation of efforts among various actors in the field acting as advocates for the thematic areas and the whole field in general

**Being a learning grant-maker** - The donor commits to continuous learning, adaptation, and improvement. It regularly seeks feedback from grantees on the grant-making process, demonstrates a willingness to adapt processes based on grantee input, and shares learnings about effective practices with other donors to promote sector-wide improvements. For the donor, this implies:

- Regularly involving grantees in reflection processes and knowledge-building.
- Gathering insights on the needs of the field and situations on the ground directly from partners.

- Implementing feedback loops to adapt strategies based on learned experiences.
- Sharing lessons learned with the broader philanthropic community.

**Expanding participation, co-creation, and transparency** - the donor opens its grant-making processes, and decision-making to the target groups and grantees, shifting the power balance, making their operation participatory, inviting, and empowering the representatives of target groups into the discussions with shared responsibility and impact. For the donor, this may imply:

- Creating mechanisms to involve people and organisations in reflections and strategy development.
- Increasing the scope and number of stakeholders engaged in various aspects of the donors' work and funding practices, such as deciding priorities, selecting funded projects, and seats in governance boards.
- Being transparent about how partners' recommendations are used or implemented and building trust through open communication about decision-making processes.

**Focusing on wider systemic change** - The donor contributes more effectively to sustainable, systemic change while building strong, trusting relationships with its partners and peer organisations, and recognising the importance of addressing root causes and systemic issues. For the donor, this implies:

- Supporting initiatives that target issues by working with structures and policies. ensuring and steering systemic change on policy levels
- Encouraging grantees to think beyond immediate project outcomes to longer-term societal impacts.
- Facilitating connections between grassroots efforts and broader policy or advocacy work on different levels.
- Funding research and knowledge-sharing that can inform systemic approaches.

**Incorporating research and evidence into grant-making** - The donor systematically incorporates research and data into funding decisions, strategies, and practice. This approach represents a significant shift in how donors operate, grounding their practices in empirical evidence rather than tradition or intuition alone. For the donor, this means:

- Developing more nuanced and context-appropriate funding strategies by considering evidence on what works in different settings.
- Improving the allocation of resources by identifying high-impact opportunities and pressing needs through rigorous analysis, adapting more quickly to emerging trends and challenges.
- Contributing to the broader knowledge base in the social sector by supporting and disseminating research.



- Improving impact measurement and evaluation practices, leading to a better understanding of programme outcomes.

**Facilitating the grantees' work** - The donor makes a significant shift in how it operates, taking on more of the administrative and operational “burden” traditionally placed on grantees. This shift requires the donor to invest more in internal capacity and systems, ultimately creating a more supportive and empowering environment for grantees. For the donor, this may include:

- Taking up more administrative, bureaucratic work related to the management of grants from the grantees and allowing them to focus more on their content and programmatic work.
- Reducing the human and time resources grantees need to dedicate to financial management and reporting.
- Making funding more accessible and manageable to smaller or less-resourced organisations.
- Improving the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the grant-making process.

**Investing in growth and development of the staff of donor organisations** - The donor recognises the need for continuous capacity building of their staff in terms of both technical and operational capacities, but also on organisations' values, missions, visions, priorities, deep understanding of the current situation and approach to change, their implications for everyday practice. For the donor, this could imply:

- Opening spaces for reflection on the values, visions, missions, and value-based practices.
- Having structured and facilitated spaces for the staff to bring in questions they face in their practice and get peer support in dealing with the issues.
- Develop an understanding and approach of the team towards innovation/support innovative grant-making practices.
- Developing a deeper understanding of the content of the thematic priorities funded by the donor.

# Annexes

## List of donors analysed for the study

### → *Interviewed*

#### Bureau International Jeunesse

<https://www.lebij.be/>

The BIJ is a Wallonie-Bruxelles International service that helps young people (18-35 years old) to set up and finance their international mobility projects (volunteering, work experience or language immersion, etc.). In particular, it is the referral office for the French-speaking part of the country for projects such as the European Commission's Erasmus+ (Youth), the European Solidarity Corps and Eurodyssee (Committee of the Regions).

The BIJ has 12 funding programmes: Artichok, Axes Sud, Bel'J, Citoyens d'Europe, Citoyens en actio, Corps Européen de Solidarité, Entrechok, Erasmus+, Eurodyssée, Mini Mob, Québec, Tremplins Jeunes.

**Target group(s):** generally, young people between 18 and 35 years old. In some cases (programmes), the target groups are more specific: young artists and cultural practitioners, youth organisations, young entrepreneurs, youth, students, and educators.

#### **Funding**

From 300 Euro to a few hundreds of thousands (Erasmus+).

#### Transatlantic Trusts – German Marshall Fund of the United States

<https://www.gmfus.org/programs-grants>

Transatlantic Trusts support civil society as a key agent of democratic change and resilience in Central and Eastern Europe. Five Trusts – the Balkan Trust for Democracy, the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, the Engaging Central Europe program, the Fund for Belarus Democracy, and the Ukraine: Relief, Resilience, Recovery initiative – provide support through a mix of grant making, capacity-building, leadership development, regional networking, and analytical and policy work. In so doing, Trusts bolster democracy, security and transatlantic integration in Europe's East.

**Target Group(s):** CSOs, civic initiatives and activists, independent media and journalists that work to strengthen democracy, citizen participation, media pluralism, electoral integrity, rule of law, civic education, and local community development.

#### **Funding**

Transatlantic Trusts support up to 500 individual partners and projects annually with grants averaging €20,000.

## Civil Society Forum

<https://csf-ev.org/>

The Civil Society Forum is a network of non-governmental organisations that span across Wider Europe. Established in 2011, it functions as a bottom-up, non-partisan initiative aimed at building bridges between civil societies across Europe. Their work focuses on promoting pluralistic democracy, the rule of law, human rights, as well as social and climate justice.

**Target Group(s):** NGOs and civil society actors who aim to influence policymaking at governmental and intergovernmental levels.

### Funding

No detailed information about their funding structure but they provide support for joint activities and advocacy across various themes like solidarity and climate action.

## Danish Youth Council – DUF

<https://en.duf.dk/>

DUF – The Danish Youth Council is an umbrella organisation with 78 children and youth organisations as members. The member organisations of DUF range from scouts to political youth organisations, voluntary social organisations, cultural organisations, environmental organisations, organisations for youth with disabilities and many more. DUF's core values are participation, dialogue, volunteerism, and influence.

### Funding

The Danish Youth Council administer DUF's share of the Danish lottery funds and distributes approximately 140 million Danish kroner annually to Danish children and youth organisations. Internationally, DUF administers an international pool of funds with approximately 15 million Danish kroner annually with the aim of strengthening democratic youth organisation and young people's influence on and participation in their community. Approximately 80 different partnerships consisting of young people from a Danish youth organisation and their partner organisation from 30 different countries is receiving funding from the pool. It is also part of the New Democracy Fund's consortium. The Fund has a budget of 50 million DKK for 2020-2022 and it aims to strengthen civil society partnerships in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. DUF is also a part of the Ukrainian Danish Youth House which is a platform for young people from Ukraine and Denmark that supports youth participation, democracy, and creativity. The youth house has a pool of funds with 1,45 million Danish kroner annually.

## Centre for European Volunteering

<https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/>

The Centre for European Volunteering, established in 1992, is the European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to the promotion of, and support to, volunteers and volunteering in Europe at European, national or regional level.

CEV aims to be the leading voice in the values-based volunteering debate in Europe, influencing and sharing the current trends & challenges and those predicted for the future, developing and providing policy advice and expertise for European Policymakers so that volunteering policies and programmes developed at European level are effective and fit for purpose.

### **Target group(s)**

CEV members are legal entities under the law of their respective countries and must subscribe to the aims of the Centre for European Volunteering and commit to actively supporting its vision and mission as well as the implementation of its strategic plan. CEV does not have individual members.

### **EU Youth Empowerment Fund / DG INTPA**

[https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/youth/youth-empowerment-fund\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/youth/youth-empowerment-fund_en)

The EU Youth Empowerment Fund is a flagship launched on the first anniversary of the [Youth Action Plan for EU External Action](#) (2021 – 2027), the EU’s policy framework for a strategic partnership with young people to build a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable future. This initiative had been co-designed with young people to provide easier, youth-friendly access to finance. It is implemented via the Global Youth Mobilisation, a grassroots movement of the Big Six that invests in and empowers young people to lead solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.

**Target group:** 14 to 30 years old, young individual, informal group, registered youth-led organisations

**Eligibility:** Young people from countries eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA), particularly those from vulnerable, socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or those facing gender equality issues or disabilities.

**Funding:** From 2020-2022, it invested more than \$5 million to support 640 youth-led projects, which engaged more than 600,000 young people and reached over 3.6 million people across more than 125 countries.

- Grants for individuals and informal groups: Level 1: Up to 500 EUR for smaller projects or testing new ideas (available for all team types) - Level 2: 501 to 1,500 EUR for projects with broader reach or deeper impact (available for all team types).
- Grants for registered youth organisations: Level 3: 1,501 to 3,000 EUR for small-scale projects with measurable community impact (registered organisations only). Level 4: 3,001 to 5,000 EUR for medium-scale projects with measurable community impact (registered organisations only).

### **Heinrich Böll Foundation**

<https://www.boell.de/en>

The Heinrich Böll Stiftung is a politically affiliated foundation based in Germany, aligned with the Green Party. It operates globally to promote values such as democracy, human rights, social justice,

gender equality, ecological sustainability, and international cooperation. Through grants, educational programs, and public engagement, the foundation supports civil society initiatives, researchers, and political activists. Its key focus areas include environmental policy, human rights, democracy promotion, and sustainable development.

**Target Group(s):** civil society, political organisations, and researchers, supporting various initiatives through funding, publications, and educational programmes.

### **Funding**

No detailed information about exact amounts but the Foundation funds both small and large projects globally, often collaborating with civil society organisations, researchers, and activists. Their support typically includes grants for research, education, and advocacy efforts. They also fund scholarships for international students.

### **OFAJ/FGYO– Franco-German Youth Office**

[www.ofaj.org](http://www.ofaj.org)

The Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) is an organisation that subsidises programmes for children, adolescents and young adults. Its main goal is to intensify the Franco-German relationships through programmes to foster intercultural exchange, language learning, and professional development, focusing on French-German cooperation. Since 1963, more than 9.5 million young people from France and Germany have participated in over 382,000 exchange programmes.

**Target group(s):** young people such as children, adolescents, students, young adults, and institutions like schools and associations.

**Funding:** OFAJ's funding comes primarily from the French and German governments.

- Youth exchange programmes: short-term and long-term exchange programmes.
- Vocational training and professional development grants: for young people in vocational training or early career stages.
- Special thematic grants: for projects centred around environmental sustainability, digital innovation, and memory and peace education.
- Trilateral exchange programmes: for youth exchanges that involve a third country, often in Eastern Europe or North Africa.

The amounts for each grant depend on the scope and nature of the project.

### **PHILEA – Philanthropy Europe Association**

<https://philea.eu/>

Philea (Philanthropy Europe Association) is a European umbrella organisation that represents and connects foundations, philanthropic organisations, and grant-making bodies across Europe. Its mission is to strengthen the impact of philanthropy by fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange,

and advocacy efforts. Philea works on addressing pressing societal issues such as climate change, social inequality, democracy, and sustainable development through coordinated philanthropic initiatives. It also engages with EU institutions to shape policies and promote philanthropy's role in driving positive change across Europe.

**Target group(s):** foundations, philanthropic organisations, and networks across Europe.

### **Funding**

Philea itself does not directly provide funding. Its role is more focused on connecting philanthropic organisations, foundations, and grant-making bodies across Europe and helping them maximise their contributions to societal challenges, rather than offering grants or funding directly.

### **Robert Bosch Foundation**

<https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/en>

The Robert Bosch Stiftung is one of Europe's largest private foundations, established to continue the legacy of Robert Bosch. It focuses on addressing social and global challenges through projects in health, education, and global issues such as climate change, migration, and social inclusion.

**Target Group(s):** the foundation supports a variety of target groups, including civil society organisations, researchers, and educators.

### **Funding**

The grants are not explicitly detailed (projects need to be presented first) but the foundation provides substantial financial support to initiatives that align with its goals of fostering social change and sustainability.

### **Youth and Children's Justice Foundation**

<https://ycjf.org/>

The Youth and Children's Justice Foundation is an organisation dedicated to advocating for and supporting young people involved in the justice system. Their work focuses on addressing issues of inequity, promoting restorative justice, and providing resources to youth impacted by legal systems. They engage in advocacy, legal support, and community outreach, helping to create fairer outcomes for vulnerable youth.

**Target Group(s):** grassroots groups that take an intersectional approach to address climate action, particularly those representing marginalised and underserved communities, including Black, Indigenous, queer, and women-led organisations.

### **Funding**

YCJF provides flexible core funding of up to \$20,000 USD per grant. These funds are intended to support climate and socio-environmental movements and solutions that focus on increasing climate ambition, holding policy makers accountable, and building community power. In addition to financial support, YCJF offers opportunities for youth-to-youth capacity building, allowing grantees to enhance their skills and impact through peer learning.

## → **Analysed for the desk research and the study**

### Alwaleed Philanthropies

<https://alwaleedphilanthropies.org/en>

Alwaleed Philanthropies is a global philanthropic organisation that supports projects in over 189 countries, focusing on five key areas: community development, women and youth empowerment, intercultural understanding, disaster relief, and environmental sustainability. They aim to alleviate poverty, promote education, foster cultural dialogue, respond to natural and man-made disasters, and support environmental conservation. The organisation works with partners worldwide to create a positive and sustainable impact on various communities.

**Target group(s):** women and youth, underserved communities, cultural institutions and programme, disaster-affected populations, environmental and conservation groups.

#### **Types of grants**

Alwaleed Philanthropies offers grants and supports projects in several key areas:

- Community development.
- Women and youth empowerment.
- Intercultural understanding.
- Disaster relief.
- Environmental sustainability.

### Civitates

<https://civitates-eu.org/>

Civitates is a pooled philanthropic fund which supports independent public interest media and CSOs in Europe. In many parts of Europe, civil society and independent media are under pressure, as political polarisation deepens, civic space shrinks and disinformation spreads. Civitates was in response to this trend – and the rise of autocratic leaders elected on populist agendas – that Civitates was founded in 2018.

**Target groups/areas:** Civitates primarily focuses on Europe, with grants available to organisations and coalitions operating in various European countries. They have provided funding for 18 European countries since their inception, targeting specific countries depending on the thematic area, such as Civic Power, Tech and Democracy, or Media.

#### **Funding**

Civitates provides multi-year core grants ranging from €30,000 to €150,000, depending on the programme and specific needs of the coalition or organisation. The total grant amount should not exceed 50% of the lead organisation's operational budget from the previous year. For coalitions, the budget and responsibilities of each member must be clearly defined. Civitates offers funding under

three focus areas: Civic Power, Tech and Democracy, and Media. The geographical scope of their funding includes countries across Europe, with specific priority given to regions where civic space is under threat or where media freedom and democratic values are at risk.

### Equality Fund

<https://equalityfund.ca/>

The Equality Fund was created to address the historical underfunding of feminist movements globally. Its roots go back to the MATCH International Centre, established in 1976 to connect Canadian women's resources with women in the Global South. The Fund has since grown, merging feminist investment and philanthropy with sustainable funding for global women's rights organisations.

#### **Target Group(s)**

The Equality Fund specifically targets women, girls, and trans people, with a strong emphasis on feminist organisations and movements, particularly in the Global South. They aim to support those leading efforts to address critical social and political challenges related to gender, human rights, and justice.

#### **Funding**

The Equality Fund offers several funding schemes across its grant-making streams. The funding amounts per project can vary depending on the nature of the grant and the needs of the applicants. The Equality Fund allocated \$21 million CAD in total grants in 2021-2022 to 654 organisations across 90 countries. This includes both small-scale grassroots initiatives and larger global advocacy efforts. While the exact amounts for individual projects are not specified, this total funding amount suggests that grants may range significantly depending on the project size and location.

### End Violence Fund

<http://www.end-violence.org/fund>

The End Violence Fund is a key component of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, established to mobilise and allocate resources toward ending violence against children worldwide. The fund primarily supports initiatives in three main areas:

- Preventing online violence, particularly focusing on child sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Addressing violence in conflict and crisis situations that directly affect children.
- Combating violence within homes, schools, and communities.

**Target Group(s):** governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, UN agencies, and other relevant stakeholders working to prevent and address violence against children.

#### **Funding**

The fund has raised over \$86 million in its first five years, with more contributions aimed at increasing impact. The funding mechanism is flexible, allowing for innovative and scalable projects to tackle



emerging challenges aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 16.2, which aims to end violence against children by 2030.

### European Endowment for Democracy

<https://www.democracyendowment.eu/>

The European Endowment for Democracy is an independent, grant-making organisation, established in 2013 by the European Union and EU member states as an autonomous International Trust Fund to foster democracy in the European Neighbourhood (Eastern Partnership – EaP – and Middle East and North Africa – MENA), the Western Balkans, Turkey and beyond. EED provides flexible support to democracy activists, complementing other EU and EU member state democracy support programmes. EED is demand-driven and responds to the needs of local democracy actors, who may not be able to obtain funding otherwise.

**Target group(s):** CSOs, Individual activists, independent media outlets, Youth groups, Human rights defenders.

#### Funding

The EED's funding varies depending on the project's scope, urgency, and context. Grants can range from a few thousand euros for smaller, short-term projects or emergency needs, to larger amounts, potentially reaching up to several hundred thousand euros for more extensive, long-term initiatives. The amount is tailored to each project's specific requirements and the strategic importance of the work being funded.

### European Climate Foundation

<https://europeanclimate.org/>

The European Climate Foundation is a major philanthropic initiative working to foster the net-zero transition and ensure a healthy, thriving planet for current and future generations. The ECF supports over 700 partner organisations to drive progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement, promote practical policymaking in response to the climate crisis, and broaden political and public support for climate action. The ECF strives for a positive, people-centred, and socially responsible climate transition in Europe and around the world.

**Target group(s):** The ECF targets a broad array of groups to maximise the impact of its climate initiatives: NGOs, Research institutions and Think Tanks, Policy advocacy groups, Grassroots organisations, Media organisations, Industry and business coalitions, Youth and educational groups, Environmental networks and alliances, Philanthropic foundations.

#### Funding

The ECF's funding varies widely depending on the project's scope, strategic importance, and region. The foundation typically funds both small-scale projects with budgets in the lower tens of thousands of euros and large-scale initiatives that can reach millions of euros. The amounts are determined based on the project's potential impact, its alignment with ECF's strategic priorities, and the specific needs outlined in the proposal.

## Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organising

<https://fcyo.org/>

Founded in 2000, the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) is a collective of social justice funders and youth organising practitioners dedicated to advancing youth organising as a strategy for youth development and social change. FCYO's mission is to bring funders and youth organisers together to ensure that young people have the resources, capacities, and infrastructure they need to fight for a more just and democratic society.

**Target group(s):** Youth-led organisation, Intergenerational organisation, Organisations centred on racial and climate justice, Youth organising groups with transformative practices.

### Funding

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) offers several grant programs that focus on supporting youth-led initiatives, particularly those that advocate for social justice, racial equity, and systemic change. Types of grants:

- YO-CARE Capacity-Building Fund: Targets projects at the intersection of climate justice and racial justice, supporting youth-led organisations in these fields.
- Organising to Win Lab: Assists youth organising groups in building their organising capacity, providing them with resources and support to enhance their impact.
- Praxis for Power Lab: Focuses on youth organising groups with strong commitments to transformative power-building practices and deep alignment with community goals.

## Global Fund for Children - The Spark Fund

<https://globalfundforchildren.org/initiative/the-spark-fund/>

The Spark Fund is a youth-led initiative by the Global Fund for Children, created to support youth-led and youth-focused organisations addressing critical social issues such as climate justice, mental health, gender equity, and LGBTQ+ rights. Through participatory grant making, young people decide where the funding goes, ensuring it meets their communities' needs.

**Target Group(s):** the fund targets initiatives addressing urgent issues like climate justice, mental health, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender equity.

### Funding

The fund offers grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 and provides flexible support for grassroots organisations across 13 countries, helping them build capacity and drive social change.

## Multitude Foundation

<https://wearemultitudes.org/>

The Multitudes Foundation supports political changemakers in Europe who are working to create more inclusive, humane, and hopeful politics. They provide financial resources, strategic advice,

and practical support. Their grants include ideation grants aimed at early-stage political initiatives. The foundation also fosters a community of practice, connecting changemakers to share knowledge and collaborate.

**Target Group(s):** individuals or groups working to build more inclusive and human political cultures.

### **Funding**

The foundation offers three types of grants:

- Ideation grants of up to €10,000 for individuals or groups in the early stages of developing a political idea.
- Incubation grants of up to €50,000 to help turn early-stage ideas into sustainable initiatives, particularly those that have been reliant on volunteer work.
- Scaling grants of up to €100,000 for organisations ready to expand their impact, whether by increasing existing efforts or reaching new areas.

These grants come with additional non-financial support, including legal advice, communications, and mentoring. They aim to empower change makers across Europe, working in a broad range of countries, from Norway to Greece, and from Ukraine to France

### **Nordic Council of Ministers**

<https://www.norden.org/en/>

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official body for intergovernmental cooperation in the Nordic Region. The Prime Minister's vision is that the Nordic region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. The co-operation in the Nordic Council of Ministers must serve this purpose. The Nordic Prime Ministers have the overall responsibility for Nordic co-operation. In practice responsibility for the cooperation is delegated to the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation (MR-SAM) and to the Nordic Committee for Cooperation (NSK), which coordinates the day-to-day work of Nordic intergovernmental cooperation.

**Target Group(s):** NGOs, Research institutions, public sector entities, Private sector partners, Individual researchers and project leaders.

### **Funding**

Grants typically range from EUR 2,700 to EUR 13,500, with a maximum of up to EUR 20,000 for larger projects. About EUR 60,000 is earmarked annually for each Baltic country.

- Nordic talks grants
- Environment and climate sector grants
- Nordic development fund

### **Porticus Foundation**

<https://www.porticus.com/>

Porticus is a global philanthropic organisation working to create a just and sustainable world. They collaborate with partners to address systemic social, environmental, and educational issues. Their focus areas include education, climate action, human dignity, and societal transformation.

**Target Group(s):** primarily NGOs, educational institutions, and social impact organisations working within these areas.

### **Funding**

The grants are not explicitly detailed, but they fund projects that align with their mission to foster sustainable, long-term change.

### **Smart Balkans**

<https://smartbalkansproject.org/>

The SMART Balkans Project is a civil society initiative aimed at enhancing participatory democracy, security, and stability in six Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The project works to empower local CSOs through grant-making and capacity-building activities, fostering regional collaboration and inclusive societies.

**Target Group(s):** CSOs

### **Funding**

The project provides various grants, such as Ad Hoc, Core, Creative Box, Local Initiatives, and Media Grants, depending on the country's needs. These grants aim to empower CSOs to create sustainable development and democratic engagement in the region.

### **Stiftung Mercator**

<https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/en/>

Stiftung Mercator is a private and independent foundation. Through the projects it supports and through its own activities, it is committed to a society characterised by openness to the world, solidarity, and equal opportunities. Stiftung Mercator pursues activities in Germany, Europe and worldwide. It has a particular affinity with the Ruhr area, the home of its founding family and of the foundation's headquarters.

**Target group(s):** The foundation targets a wide range of groups, including NGOs, research institutions, think tanks, educational organisations, and sometimes governmental bodies. It particularly supports projects that involve collaboration across different sectors or that have a strong potential for scalability.

## **Funding**

Stiftung Mercator implements its projects and provides funding for external projects. In practice, roughly 20% of projects are implemented by the foundation itself, while around 80% are funded as external projects. Stiftung Mercator offers several types of grants, primarily focusing on projects that align with its strategic priorities. These grants typically support initiatives in four main areas: climate action, digital society, Europe in the world, and participation and cohesion.

## **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency**

<https://www.sida.se/en>

Sida – the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – is a government agency. SIDA strives to reduce world poverty by allocating resources and knowledge with the goal of making a difference for people in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. To achieve this, it collaborates with actors from civil society and universities as well as the public and private sector.

**Target group(s):** NGOs, government agencies, research institutions and universities, private sector entities, multilateral organisations, CSOs, startups and innovators.

## **Funding**

The amounts granted by SIDA depend on the scope and nature of the projects, which range from climate action and poverty reduction to democracy building and gender equality. Sida operates both through bilateral agreements and multilateral collaborations, including large-scale initiatives with UN bodies and the World Bank.

## **TASCO**

<https://tacso.eu/>

Technical Assistance to CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey (TACSO) is a regional project funded by the European Union (EU) that improves capacities and strengthens the role of CSOs. The project assists CSOs to actively take part in democratic processes in the region, and it also stimulates an enabling environment for civil society and pluralistic media development.

**Target group(s):** The EU TACSO 3 "People-to-People On-Demand" initiative supports CSOs and informal groups in the Western Balkans and Turkey (WBT) region. Target groups include registered CSOs (non-governmental organisations, associations, and foundations) and informal community groups (community-based or issue-specific groups not formally registered).

## **Funding**

The grant amounts are to be determined based on the specific needs and scope of each project.

## Trag Foundation

<https://tragfondacija.org/en/>

Trag Foundation brings together people who believe that small changes can make a big difference. We believe in the desire and ability of citizens to initiate positive change in their communities. By offering them support in the form of both knowledge and resources, we encourage and support their active involvement in improving the quality of life in Serbia. Every day, with joint efforts, we strive to create a fairer and more open society.

**Target Group(s):** Local communities and citizens, women's organisations, entrepreneurs and innovators, CSOs.

### Funding

Trag Foundation offers several types of grants, including:

- Active community programmes
- Grant programmes for women's organisations
- Green ideas programmes

No indications on the exact amounts as they vary.

## Urgent Action Fund

<https://urgentactionfund.org/>

The Fund's mission is to support women, trans, and non-binary activists who are striving to create a more just and equitable world. They aim to dismantle oppressive systems and promote feminist values such as justice, wellbeing, and integrity. They apply a feminist, human rights, and social justice lens to all their work, focusing on those most marginalised by systemic oppression.

**Target Group(s):** The primary focus is on women, trans, and non-binary activists who are at the forefront of feminist movements. This includes activists working on issues related to human rights, gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, and other intersecting social justice movements. Their support is particularly directed at those who face imminent risks due to their activism.

### Funding

Urgent Action Fund operates mainly through rapid-response grants, which are flexible and available year-round. They also have special funds such as Security Grants to protect activists at risk and Opportunity Grants to help them seize crucial moments. The grants typically range from \$1,000 to \$8,000, depending on the urgency and nature of the request. In 2023, they granted over \$3.7 million in rapid response funding.

## Visegrad Funds

<https://www.visegradfund.org/>

The International Visegrad Fund supports regional cooperation in Central Europe, primarily in the Visegrad Group countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) and partners in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe.

**Target Group(s):** grants target scholarships, fellowships, and residencies to NGOs, academic institutions, and individuals.

### Funding

The grant programmes include Visegrad Grants (up to €100,000), Visegrad+ Grants (up to €100,000), and Strategic Grants (over €100,000), aimed at fostering innovation, regional partnerships, and sustainable development.

## Western Balkans Fund

<https://westernbalkansfund.org/about-us/>

The Western Balkans Fund is an international organisation that fosters cooperation and reconciliation among six Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia). Their goal is to promote regional cohesion through cross-border projects in culture, education, youth, sustainable development, and more.

**Target Group(s):** small and medium-sized initiatives from civil society organisations, research centres, and public institutions.

### Funding

Through calls for proposals, often co-funded by the EU, with grants focused on small and medium-sized initiatives from civil society organisations, research centres, and public institutions.

## List of topics to look for in the desk research

- Rationale (context, purpose, methodology, ...)
- Name, location, contact
- General overview of the structure
- Brief history/background
- Mission
- Structure
- Budget and budget lines
- Priority (general areas for funding, priority areas in the current year/s, special calls, transversal themes/principles)
- Eligible regions/countries, structures, partnerships
- Funding schemes/types, durations, (also budget lines, calculation schemes)
- Processes and procedures
  - Getting started (e.g. registration needed, online/offline applications)
  - Support before submission (workshops, info sessions, video tutorials, workshops on specific themes of priority, step-by-step instruction, consultations, dedicated contact point, “hotline”, Q&A sessions, mentoring, info on selection criteria, online calculators/forms, glossary and explanation of key issues to address, guidelines, checklists, guidelines for budget and specific part of it, e.g. volunteer time calculation, sample forms, examples, etc)
  - Phases of application process (e.g. concept note phase following shortlisting for the full application, eligibility questionnaires, due diligence checks, etc)
  - Application forms and required documents (LogFrame, Gantt Chart, Theory of Change, CVs, experts lists, agreements, partnership agreements, etc)
  - Assessment scheme and selection criteria
  - Communication on progress
  - Support during implementation (e.g. visits, grantee meetings, sharing resources, capacity building, support for internal policies, procedures and guidelines,
  - Reporting schemes and instruments (templates, evaluation meetings, grantees consolidation meetings, feedback to funders, etc)
- Impact evaluation schemes of the foundation activity



## Questions for the interviews

(the questions have been tailored and/or selected based on the donor being interviewed)

1. Introduction and contact information:
  - Could you please introduce yourself and provide your name, position, and contact information within the organisation?
2. General overview:
  - Can you give us a brief overview of your organisation's structure and its main objectives?
3. Brief history/background:
  - Could you share some insights into the history and background of your organisation? What led to its establishment?
4. Mission:
  - What is the primary mission or goal of your organisation? What is the uniqueness of your foundation?
5. Structure:
  - How is your organisation structured internally? Are there specific departments or divisions responsible for different aspects of your work?
6. Budget:
  - Can you provide an overview of your organisation's budget and how funds are allocated?
7. Funding priorities:
  - What are the general areas for funding that your organisation focuses on?
  - Are there any priority areas for funding in the current year or upcoming years?
  - Do you have any special calls for proposals or funding opportunities related to specific themes or principles?
8. Eligibility and partnerships:
  - Which regions or countries are eligible for funding from your organisation?
  - Can you describe the types of structures or partnerships your organisation engages with or supports?
9. Funding schemes:
  - What types of funding schemes does your organisation offer?
  - How long are the durations for these funding schemes?
  - Could you explain the budget lines and calculation schemes used for determining funding amounts?
10. Processes and procedures:

- What are the steps involved in applying for funding from your organisation?
  - Is registration needed prior to applying?
  - Are applications submitted online or offline?
11. Support before submission:
- What kind of support do you provide to applicants before they submit their proposals?
  - Are there workshops, info sessions, or consultations available?
  - Do you offer step-by-step instructions or guidelines for completing applications?
12. Phases of application process:
- Could you outline the different phases of the application process, from submission to final decision?
13. Assessment and selection criteria:
- What criteria does your organisation use to assess and select proposals for funding?
14. Communication on progress:
- How do you communicate with applicants regarding the progress of their applications?
15. Support during implementation:
- What support do you offer to grantees during the implementation phase of their projects?
16. Reporting schemes:
- What are the reporting requirements for grantees?
  - Do you provide templates or guidelines for reporting?
17. Success stories: Could you share a particularly impactful or inspiring success story from a project or initiative funded by your organisation?
18. Challenges and lessons learned: What are some of the biggest challenges your organisation has faced, and what lessons have been learned from overcoming them?
19. Collaboration opportunities: How does your organisation collaborate with other stakeholders, both within and outside the sector, to achieve its mission?
20. Impact evaluation: How does your organisation evaluate the impact of its funded activities?
21. Outlook: What are the key priorities and goals your organisation aims to achieve in the coming years, and how do you see its role evolving in response to changing target groups, needs and circumstances?