

Mission project: How to make EU funding easier for civil society organisations

What is the problem?

Some civil society organisations (CSOs) are not getting the funding they need. The purpose of the EU's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV) is to provide funding for CSOs that work to protect the EU's core values but are under direct pressure from illiberal organisations. However, the programme has three main drawbacks:

- Applying requires a huge administrative effort. Small NGOs with few resources often cannot keep operating on a daily basis while also writing a 60-page application in bureaucratic jargon.
- The guidelines are very restrictive, particularly when it comes to personnel and travel costs. CSOs need more flexibility in how they use their funds, so they do not have to worry about their electricity bills every month.
- The rates for co-funding are far too high. Applicants themselves have to provide at least 10 per cent of the funding they require, a hurdle many CSOs cannot get over.

What is the solution?

- Relaxing rules for co-funding: lowering the required percentage and allowing for more voluntary labour and in-kind contributions as co-funding.
- Allowing for more flexible use of funds: at present only 7 per cent of allocated funds may be used to pay overheads and general administration. This should be raised to at least 20 per cent and perhaps 50 per cent.
- Reducing the administrative burden: the bureaucratic process needs to be simplified, and the financial eligibility criteria need to be updated and relaxed, especially with regard to personnel and travel costs.

The EU Commission needs to launch a legislative initiative to reform CERV and simplify its bureaucracy, accepting CSO feedback to make it easier. MEPs should call on their national parties in government to make their case in the European Council.

How does it affect Europeans?

Civil society organisations reach where governments cannot and take on a lot of work that is important to the functioning of our society. They serve as non-governmental guardians of civil society and democracy and offer aid to those whose needs are not or cannot be met by the government. If CSOs can no longer do their jobs, there is no guarantee that governments will pick up the slack, as developments in Hungary and elsewhere have shown.

Would you like more detailed information about this policy?