Iceland Liechtenstein Norway **Civil Society** Fund

CIVIL SOCIETY FUND

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS #03 – SMALL PROJECTS

CSOS THAT PROMOTE DEMOCRACY, THE RULE OF LAW, AND HUMAN RIGHTS, STRENGTHENED

The EEA Civil Society Fund is part of Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway's contribution to the 15 European Union (EU) Member States under the European Economic Area (EEA) Grants. The aims of the EEA Grants are to reduce social and economic disparities in the EEA and to strengthen bilateral relations between the Donor States and Beneficiary States.

The Civil Society Fund aims to support a vibrant and resilient civil society protecting and promoting democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF), in consortium with the Bissaya Barreto Foundation (BBF), has been selected as the Fund Operator of the EEA Civil Society Fund in Portugal, following an open and public tender procedure launched for that purpose.

This call is open to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) seeking to improve their organisational capacity under Civil Society Fund's Outcome 3: "CSOs that promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights strengthened", by enhancing their internal capabilities, and ability to collaborate and act collectively within the broader civil society ecosystem.

Civil society organisations are essential pillars of a pluralist and democratic society. Beyond the results they deliver and the social missions they pursue, CSOs have an intrinsic value: they represent citizens' capacity to organise, participate, innovate, and hold power accountable. They embody democratic values in practice by giving voice to diverse perspectives, fostering civic engagement, and strengthening social trust. However, in Portugal, CSOs face significant structural challenges, including limited and unstable funding, heavy reliance on public resources, capacity gaps in key organisational functions, and increasing operational complexity in a context of declining civic engagement and rising polarisation. At the same time, fragmentation within the sector, limited coordination, and the absence of a strong collective voice reduce its overall effectiveness and influence on public policy and societal change.

Recognising this role, the Civil Society Fund values CSOs not only for what they achieve, but also for what they represent and mean for democracy, and life in society. Thus, under Outcome 3, the Fund will support the capacity-building of civil society organisations and the sector's umbrella organisations, reinforcing civil society as an independent, resilient, and credible actor in our democratic ecosystem.

Through this support, the Fund aims to contribute to more sustainable and effective organisations, capable of diversifying funding sources, improving internal processes, enhancing transparency and accountability, and engaging more effectively with communities and stakeholders. It also seeks to foster stronger networks and coordination mechanisms, enabling civil society organisations and umbrella structures to better represent sector interests, influence decision-making processes, and create a more enabling environment for civic action. Ultimately, supported actions are expected to lead to stronger organisational performance, increased technical skills and knowledge among staff

and volunteers, improved cooperation and reduced fragmentation across the sector, and greater resilience and strategic positioning of civil society organisations in Portugal.

Applications shall be submitted online through the website: eeagrants.org/pt/eea-civil-society-fund-portugal and shall follow the evaluation and selection procedures detailed in this notice.

Without prejudice to the specifications contained in this notice, the provisions of the Fund Rules shall apply to this call for applications and should therefore be consulted by applicants, especially regarding the rules on eligibility of applicants and the selection procedures. The Fund Rules, the Manual and other useful information can be found on the Fund's website.

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SUMMARY OF THE CALL	
Title of the call	Call for applications #03 – small projects
Purpose of the call	Support under Output 3.1 – "Organisational development supported" aims to strengthen the organisational development and long-term sustainability of civil society organisations by enhancing the knowledge, skills and professional capacities of their staff and volunteers. Support under Output 3.2 – "An enabling environment for civil society supported" aims to strengthen the sector's recognition, coordination and collective voice by reinforcing the capacity and resilience of umbrella organisations, fostering platforms for cooperation and knowledge sharing, and promoting collaboration and networking among CSOs and with other stakeholders to reduce fragmentation and increase collective impact.
Outcome(s)	Outcome 3 - CSOs that promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights strengthened
Output(s)	Output 3.1 - Organisational development supported; Output 3.2 - An enabling environment for civil society supported
Relevant project activities	See number 1.6 of the call notice below for examples
Eligible project applicants	Civil Society organisations in compliance with number 2 of the call notice.
Project duration	Between 6 and 18 months
Project grant amount	Above € 25,000 and up to € 37,500
Co-financing	No co-financing required. Project funded at a rate of 100%.
Partnerships	Applications may be submitted in partnership with any entity established in Portugal, the Beneficiary States or the Donor States, as well as international organisations (see number 2 of the call notice). Partnerships with entities from the Donor States (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) are encouraged.
Application deadline	29 September 2026, at 12:00 (GMT/Lisbon time).

1. Objective

1.1 Projects to be selected under this Call shall aim primarily at strengthening civil society organisations and shall consider the overall objective of the Fund as set forth in Article 3 of the Fund Rules.

1.2 The present call notice is structured according to the two Output Areas under Outcome 3, for which applications are expected to be submitted:

a) Output 3.1 - Organisational development supported;

b) Output 3.2 - An enabling environment for civil society supported.

1.3 Support under Output 3.1 – "Organisational development supported" seeks to enhance the organisational development and long-term sustainability of civil society organisations by strengthening the knowledge, skills, and professional capacities of its staff and volunteers.

1.4 Support under Output 3.2 – "An enabling environment for civil society supported" seeks to enhance the sector's recognition, coordination, and collective voice, by strengthening the capacity and resilience of umbrella organisations, fostering the creation of platforms for cooperation and knowledge sharing, and increasing collaboration and networking among CSOs and with other stakeholders to reduce fragmentation and increase collective impact and influence.

1.5 Projects under this call shall be implemented in the territories referred to in Article 6 of the Fund Rules.

1.6 The above-mentioned projects contribute to Outcome 3 - "CSOs that promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights strengthened" and can encompass, namely, the following activities:

a) Cross-cutting training, mentoring or consulting activities for CSOs' staff and volunteers in key areas such as strategic planning, fundraising, marketing and communication, advocacy, citizens' engagement, impact evaluation, and governance.

b) Tools and mechanisms to improve CSOs' internal processes and systems, transparent financial management, governance structures, accountability and evaluation, strategic planning, institutional communication, and other areas.

c) Capacity-building activities for strengthening volunteer management practices, including recruitment, retention, and active engagement of volunteers, as well as recognition and support initiatives.

d) Support for diversifying CSOs' funding sources through improved fundraising strategies, social entrepreneurship initiatives, and strengthened partnerships.

e) Initiatives to promote recognition of the Civil Society sector and its contribution to society.

f) Activities promoting a more enabling legal and regulatory framework for CSOs, including advocacy for regulatory improvements, reduction of bureaucratic barriers, and strengthening of legal protections.

g) Capacity-building for umbrella organisations to enhance operational capacity, financial resilience, and strategic positioning, enabling them to better support their members and advocate for the interests of the sector.

h) Creation of new collaborative platforms and structures that facilitate cooperation among CSOs, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders, promote complementarity and collective impact.

i) Support knowledge production and dissemination through research, guides, toolkits, and reports to strengthen sector-wide expertise and share best practices.

1.7 Each supported project shall contribute to the four indicators set by the Fund for Outcome 3: "CSOs that promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights strengthened" in numbers 1.8 and 1.9. Each supported project shall also, for each of the selected indicators, quantify project-level target values according to its nature, objectives, and expected results. The indicators become a reporting tool during implementation.

1.8 The output indicators established for this call are:

a) Number of CSO staff who have completed a capacity-building programme;

b) Number of CSOs that completed a capacity-building programme.

1.9 The outcome indicators established for this call are:

a) Number of CSOs with improved overall organisational strength;

b) Number of employees with improved skills.

1.10 The indicator definitions, results-counting procedure and causal links are pre-established and defined in the manual, and aggregated by Output Area, facilitating their comprehension and usability.

2. Eligible Applicants

2.1 Project promoters must comply with the general conditions of eligibility of the Fund established in Article 7 of the Fund Rules. The limitation established in the number 5 of Article 7 does not apply to this call.

2.2 Civil society organisations with an average annual turnover of € 2,000,000 or more shall not be eligible to apply for capacity-building projects under Outcome 3 where the applicant is the primary target of the capacity-building activities.

2.3 In addition to the conditions defined in the previous numbers, promoters submitting an application to Output 3.2 – An enabling environment for civil society supported must be an umbrella organisation established in Portugal. For the purposes of this call notice, an umbrella organisation is a legally established entity that represents, coordinates, or provides services to a network, federation, or association of multiple independent member organisations operating within a common sector, theme, or purpose relevant to the Fund. The organisation shall cumulatively:

a) Have a mission that aligns with the Fund's areas of support, as defined in the Fund rules;

b) Have a formal membership base comprising at least five distinct legal entities, the majority of which must be non-governmental organisations;

c) Be able to demonstrate that its activities primarily serve and benefit its member organisations;

d) Be registered and compliant with applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

2.4 Project partners must comply with Article 8 of the Fund Rules.

2.5 Each entity, either as promoter or as partner, must comply with the limits on accessing support stated in Article 15 of the Fund Rules.

3. Size and duration of projects

3.1 Projects under this call shall be supported by a total grant above 25,000 euros and up to 37,500 euros, with the eligible costs of the project funded at a rate of 100%.

3.2 The duration of projects to be selected under this call for applications shall be between 6 and 18 months, with an expected start date between January and March 2027.

3.3 Regardless of the duration referred to in the previous number, the project's final date of eligibility shall be no later than 30 April 2031.

4. Submission of applications

4.1 The applications shall be submitted, electronically, through the MyGulbenkian application form, available through eeagrants.org/pt/eea-civil-society-fund-portugal.

4.2 Applications must be prepared and submitted exclusively by the project promoter and its partners. External consultants are prohibited from designing or submitting applications on behalf of others. Any consultant found advertising or providing such services will be disqualified from participating in or delivering services for supported projects.

4.3 Applications will be submitted through a two-phase process, designed to increase accessibility for smaller and less experienced CSOs. This structure aims to reduce entry barriers.

4.4 The first phase shall consist of the submission of a short, well-structured concept proposal, which includes the project's total estimated budget.

4.5 Applications to the first phase must be submitted from 3 July 2026 until 29 September 2026, at 12:00 (GMT/Lisbon time).

4.6 Applicants who advance to the second phase shall be invited to submit a detailed project structure, detailing the components that integrate the respective budget, targets, indicators and schedule.

4.7 For the second phase, only complete applications, including the attachments foreseen in number 6 of Article 16 of the Fund Rules, shall be considered for evaluation and selection purposes.

4.8 Clerical errors made during the online submission of documents may still be corrected within two working days, as mentioned in number 4 of Article 18 of the Fund Rules, following the procedure indicated in the manual.

4.9 Applicants are responsible for the truthfulness and authenticity of all submitted documents and are expressly informed that they may be required to present additional and/or original documents to the Fund Operator at any stage of the application process.

5. Administrative and eligibility criteria

5.1 In the first phase, applicants will be required to declare that the entity complies with the eligibility requirements stipulated in Articles 7 and 8 of the Fund Rules. At this stage, the Fund will conduct limited verifications of compliance with the formal and administrative eligibility requirements, in accordance with number 2 of Article 18 of the Fund Rules. In the second phase of applications, the Fund will conduct a comprehensive compliance verification of the formal and administrative eligibility requirements, in accordance with number 3 of Article 18 of the Fund Rules.

5.2 Applicants whose applications are rejected due to noncompliance with the requirements referred to in the previous number shall be informed and have a period of 10 days to appeal, counted from the day after the notification. Appeals shall follow the procedure established in number 7 of Article 18 of the Fund Rules.

6. Support to Applicants

6.1 In order to support the submission of applications aligned with the objective of the Fund, ensure equal opportunities to all applicants and to improve chances of success, the Fund makes available the following support to applicants:

a) A manual containing all relevant information and required documentation;

b) A set of dissemination workshops across the country to mobilise local organisations and stakeholders, explain the calls and support the preparation of projects and applications, clarify available support and capacity-building facilities;

c) A helpline, via e-mail and phone, for the clarification of queries;

d) Online information, namely, through FAQ published on the Fund's website;

e) A specific mechanism with individual support on project preparation, provided by external experts, made available to applicants selected to proceed to the second phase of the application process. This mechanism will consist of two different facilities:

i. Revision of the application form draft, providing advice on what should be improved, which can be requested up to 12 days before the deadline for the second phase of applications;

ii. Consultancy to support applicants in turning their idea into a project, which can be requested in the 10 days following the notification of approval to second phase of applications.

6.2 The eligible applicants for the specific mechanism mentioned in paragraph e) of number 6.1 are limited to CSOs with an annual turnover of up to 250,000 euros for the i. Revision of applications and up to 150,000 euros for the ii. Consultancy to support applicants.

6.3 In addition to the condition mentioned in 6.2, applicant CSOs can only receive this specific support if one of the following conditions is met:

a) They are located in underserved geographic areas (outside the Lisbon and Porto Metropolitan Areas);

b) They have been created and/or are composed of refugees, migrants, Roma or victims of gender-based violence, regardless of where they are headquartered.

7. Methodology of analysis, evaluation and scoring of applications

7.1 As defined in Article 20 of the Fund Rules, for each phase of applications, the scores are assigned by five experts on a scale between 0 and 100 points. Each application receives five scores. For the final score, the highest and lowest scores for each application are excluded, and the final score is calculated from the average of the remaining three scores.

7.2 For the first phase of applications, the evaluation and scoring of the applications shall be performed according to the selection criteria and the weights set in this notice as follows:

Criteria	Weight
1. **Relevance of the project in relation to the Fund's objective**: level of alignment of the organisation's mission with the Fund's objective, priorities and expected results; relevance of the identified need for the organisation and beyond; value added by the project;	40
2. **Clarity and coherence of the proposed concept**: clarity of the proposal, with a clear change logic, connecting the identified needs and the expected results;	20
3. **Systemic change potential**: expected results; and dissemination potential, for broader and more sustainable change, beyond its direct implementation; and/or (indirect) impact on beneficiaries' lives; and/or any differentiating factor, including the participation of donor country entities	40
Total	**100**

7.3 For the second phase of applications, the evaluation and scoring of the applications shall be performed according to the selection criteria and the weights set in this notice as follows:

Criteria	Weight
1. **Project feasibility**: quality of project design, including its internal coherence, adequate planning, reasonable and appropriate goals and expected results, temporal and financial feasibility, adequacy of allocated human and physical resources, and the inclusion of the necessary partners, including the participation of donor country entities;	35
2. **Suitability of the proposed intervention strategies**: level of involvement and project ownership of the organisation's staff and leadership; relevance and quality of proposed methodologies, including synergy and articulation between resources, partners and diverse sectors	65
Total	**100**

7.4 Although the evaluation is split into two phases, which classify the application based on different criteria, the evaluation must focus on the same object, i.e., the application should not change its objective and main characteristics between phases, under penalty of exclusion.

8. Selection process and reserve list

8.1 For this call, applications submitted under each Output mentioned in point 1.2 are treated separately and are in competition only with applications under the same Output. Each Output has an autonomous allocation, as specified in point 11.1. As such, applications under Output 3.2 are exclusively dedicated to umbrella organisations and are not in competition with any other CSOs.

8.2 The selection follows the process established in Article 23 of the Fund Rules.

8.3 Only applications with a final score equal to or above 60 points may be selected to advance to a subsequent phase and to receive a grant. Evaluators may request clarifications and make recommendations for improvement for the applications advancing to the second phase, which shall be addressed in the second application form.

8.4 The Fund Operator ensures alignment of the applications moving on to phase 2 with the Fund's objective.

8.5 To ensure competition in the second phase, applications corresponding to up to 200% of this call's allocation may advance to the second phase.

8.6 Whenever appropriate, the Selection Committee establishes a reserve list from the list of applications selected for approval, to be used in case of withdrawals or savings, composed of the highest-scoring not-selected applications for lack of available budget. The reserve list is ranked according to the score of each application up to a limit of 10% of the budget available for this call.

8.7 The Programme Director may draw applications from the reserve list to be supported, should funding become available due to savings or unused funds in previously approved projects. The reserve list is valid for up to 4 months following the notification decision, meaning that applications that are not selected to receive a grant by that date are automatically considered not selected.

9. Grant contracting

9.1 Promoters of selected projects shall be notified individually of the Steering Committee's decisions as foreseen in Article 24 of the Fund Rules.

9.2 The contracting of selected projects shall follow the process established in Article 25 of the Fund Rules.

9.3 Grant contracts will necessarily include the elements established in Article 27 of the Fund Rules.

10. Eligible costs and budget, grant form, and payment system

10.1 Eligible costs are those actually incurred by the project promoter or the eligible partners, as well as expenditure covered by simplified cost options, according to the criteria laid down in Article 41 of the Fund Rules.

10.2 Applicants should estimate, as a basis, 24 hours for reporting to the Fund, which would be advisable to budget for in the application. This estimate is based on three reports, defined in Articles 32 and 34 of the Fund Rules, taking an estimated 2,5 hours to complete, as well as one payment claim, taking an estimated 2,5 hours to complete, and seven two-hour meetings with the Fund, defined in Articles 25 and 37 of the Fund Rules, for a two-year project.

10.3 Projects shall be broken down into two to four components, as defined in Article 26 of the Fund Rules.

10.4 Projects shall establish a draft budget to be converted into lump sums, based on the project's components. The amounts for the lump sums shall be established ex ante, through a draft budget developed on a case-by-case basis and agreed by the Fund Operator before the signature of the grant contract, as defined in Article 40 of the Fund Rules.

10.5 The costs associated with service provision, i.e., those foreseen in paragraphs e) and f) of number 5 and on number 6 of Article 41 of the Fund Rules, shall be excluded from the lump sum and considered as real costs, established in paragraph a) of number 1 of Article 40 of the Fund Rules.

10.6 The inclusion of an expenditure item in a project budget approved by the FO cannot be considered as confirmation of the eligibility of that expenditure item.

10.7 The approved grant is disbursed according to the payment system set in Article 43 of the Fund Rules.

11. Budget Allocation

11.1 The total budget allocated to this call is 450,000 euros, of which 262,500 euros for *Output 3.1 - Organisational development supported* and 187,500 euros for *Output 3.2 - An enabling environment for civil society supported.*

11.2 Whenever part of the budget allocated to this call isn't fully used to fund the applications selected and the applications on the reserve list, the remainder budget is transferred to future calls of the same Outcome.

12. Publicity and additional information

12.1 This notice and other relevant information, including the Fund Rules, the application forms and the Manual, are available on the Fund's website: eeagrants.org/pt/eea-civil-society-fund-portugal.

12.2 Any amendments to the terms and conditions set forth in this notice shall also be publicised in the above-mentioned website, with a minimum of three working days prior to the date of its entry into force.

13. Contacts

12.1 The consortium partners are available to answer questions via telephone every workday between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.

12.2 Inquiries may also be submitted via email, which shall be answered within three working days. Responses are regularly integrated into a FAQ subpage on the Fund's website.

12.3 Contact information is listed below:

Website: eeagrants.org/pt/eea-civil-society-fund-portugal | https://civilsocietyfund.pt

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Lisbon, 3 July 2026