Iceland Liechtenstein Norway **Civil Society** Fund

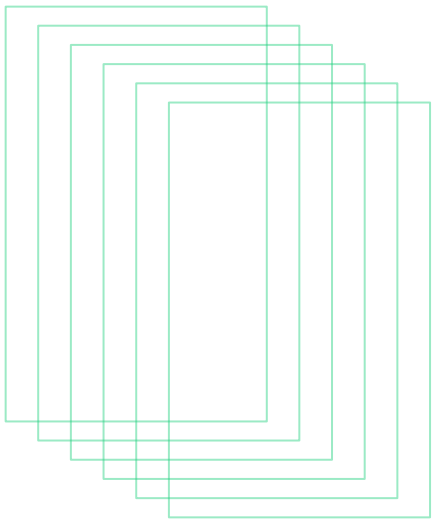
INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH IN PROJECTS

A practical guide for applicants to the EEA Civil Society Fund in Romania

Remember: Within the EEA Civil Society Fund in Romania, applying the principle of gender equality is mandatory. Intersectionality is encouraged.

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Guidance document. Where this document differs from the official documents, the Applicant's Guide for the relevant call takes precedence.

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About this toolkit

This document supports potential applicants to the Civil Society Fund in Romania in gaining a clearer understanding of intersectionality and how it can be integrated into projects submitted under the funding programme.

Who it is for: organisations that do not yet use an intersectional perspective consistently, or that want to check whether it is genuinely integrated into a Civil Society Fund in Romania project rather than merely mentioned in the application form.

What it covers: problem analysis, target groups, intervention logic, activities, budget, monitoring and evaluation. It provides also specific guidance for each of the six calls in which intersectionality is encouraged.

What it does not do: it does not provide a single recipe and does not replace specialist expertise, such as expertise on gender, anti-discrimination or disability, or direct consultation with communities. It is not an exhaustive guide; the information has been selected in line with the approach proposed by the programme.

How to use it

1. Before drafting: talk to the people affected and check whether the organisation has the necessary experience, partners and safety measures.

2. During project design: use the questions in this guide to explain the links between barriers, activities, the budget and results.

3. For the selected call: consult the page dedicated to the call and integrate the intersectional approach in line with its objectives, approach and grant type.

4. Before submission: complete the self-assessment at the end of this guide and revise any elements that remain merely declarative.

Important: A project does not need to cover every group and every inequality. It should identify the differences relevant to the problem, explain whom it prioritises and why, and adapt the intervention accordingly.

Note on the use of AI

This material was prepared with the support of generative artificial intelligence tools, used to structure and review the text. The content was adapted on the basis of programme documents and should be read together with the Applicant's Guide and the annexes to the relevant call. In the event of any discrepancy, the official Civil Society Fund in Romania documents take precedence.

Intersectionality in brief

Intersectionality helps us see that people within the same group do not automatically have the same experiences. Ethnicity, disability, age, income, location, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, legal status, education and other characteristics may combine with social rules and institutional practices to create different barriers.

"The intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism."
Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989

In practical terms, this does not mean adding as many situations of vulnerability as possible to a project. It means understanding how barriers combine in a specific situation and what the project needs to change so that the people affected can genuinely participate and benefit.

A simple example

A local authority organises a public consultation only online and during working hours. The procedure appears to be the same for everyone, but it is not equally accessible to a person without internet access, a woman with unpaid care responsibilities, someone who does not understand administrative language, or a person who does not trust that their opinion will be taken into account.

An intersectional approach does not simply state that "vulnerable groups will be included". It proposes a different way of organising the consultation: it also uses offline methods, offers different times, uses plain language, provides transport, makes the venue accessible and gives a public response explaining how the proposals received were considered.

What intersectionality is

- an analysis of differences within a group;
- an analysis of barriers, institutions and power relations;
- a method for adapting activities, the budget, monitoring and evaluation.

What intersectionality is not

- a long list of categories;
- a single activity about diversity;
- a promise that the project will respond to every need.

Three basic questions: Who is affected differently? Which barriers combine? Which rule, practice or power relationship needs to change?

Project design: analysis and target groups

Start with barriers, not labels

Instead of merely stating that the project works with “vulnerable people”, explain what prevents them from exercising a right, accessing a service or participating. Barriers may relate to cost, distance, language, lack of information, disability, discrimination, timing, mistrust, legal status or lack of trust in institutions.

Useful formula: For [people described precisely], the combination of [barriers] and [rules or practices] limits [a right, access or participation].

Define the group without treating it as homogeneous

A well-defined target group is specific enough to show who is affected and why, but does not assume that everyone has the same needs. Use available data, whether official or collected by your organisation, information from discussions with the community and the experience of local partners.

Example

Too general: “Young people in rural areas do not participate in civic life because they are not interested.”

More precise: “People aged 16–20 in the target communities participate little in civic and community life because of transport barriers, a lack of easy-to-understand information and mistrust of public authorities. The barriers are greater for young Roma people, young people with disabilities, young people not in employment, education or training, and those with care responsibilities. This is supported by local data showing that (...), including data collected by our organisation and local partners showing that (...).”

- Describe the area and the situation, not only the identity or vulnerability.
- Show the relevant differences within the group.
- Explain whom you prioritise and why the project can realistically work with those people.
- Identify community resources as well: leaders, organisations and networks, skills and existing solutions.

Questions to check

☐ Which people are most affected but remain invisible in general data?
☐ Who contributed to defining the problem?
☐ Which institutions or practices create or maintain the barriers?
☐ What risks may arise if people participate or disclose their identity?
☐ What information is missing and how can it be obtained safely?

Do not overpromise: A more focused, well-justified and adapted intervention is more credible than a general promise to include every group in a simplistic way.

Project design: intervention logic and activities

The project logic should show a clear and credible link between the problem, the change sought and the activities.

Basic chain: Barriers and causes examined through data → intended change → adapted activities → results for people and institutions → monitoring and evaluation.

Describe the change, not only the activity

Activity: we organise six civic education workshops and provide follow-up support.
Change: after the workshops, participants understand local participation mechanisms, use them and are able to influence a decision; the public authority changes the way it conducts consultations.

Every activity should reduce a barrier

Standard activity	Intersectional adaptation
A consultation at the institution's premises.	Local or decentralised meetings, varied schedules, transport provided, written contributions and responses to proposals.
The same training course for everyone.	Adapted content and format, plain-language materials, mentoring and practical application of learning.
A campaign for the general public.	Co-created messages, differentiated audiences and channels, and protection for people who may be exposed through visibility.

Participation must be able to influence the project

The people affected can contribute to analysing the problem, choosing activities, setting monitoring and evaluation criteria and interpreting the results. Meaningful participation requires accessible information, sufficient time, equal access, safety and a clear decision that the community can influence.

Also track institutional change

- a procedure or policy is amended to reflect an intersectional approach;
- a consultation or reporting mechanism becomes accessible;
- resources and decision-making power are distributed more fairly.

Quick test: If you replace the target group in the project proposal with another group, would the same activities, budget and results still fit? If so, intersectionality is probably only declarative.

Project design: budget, safety, monitoring and evaluation

Possible costs of an intersectional approach

The budget shows whether the adaptations proposed for the activities are real. An activity does not become accessible simply because it is described as such in the application.

Consider:

- transport, accommodation, meals and infrastructure costs, such as internet access;
- childcare and support for other dependent persons during the activities;
- interpretation and translation, plain-language materials, audio materials, subtitles and assistive technologies;
- rental of accessible or adapted venues;
- remuneration of local and community experts;
- legal or psychosocial support;
- participatory data collection and reflection meetings used to adjust the activities.

Safety and data

Collect only the data you need. Explain why it is collected, who can access it and how long it is retained, in line with a GDPR policy explained in plain language. For sensitive identities, use separate consent and allow people not to answer. Do not propose stories, images or details that could lead to identification, stigma or retaliation.

Practical monitoring and evaluation criteria

- who participated and who withdrew, analysed only by relevant differences;
- which barriers were reduced: time, cost, access, information or safety;
- whether people felt that they influenced a decision;
- which proposals, procedures or policies changed;
- what unintended effects occurred and how the project was adjusted.

Coherence check

☐ Are the barriers identified in the analysis addressed in the activities and the related budget?
☐ Are the adaptations included in the activities reflected as costs in the budget?
☐ Does community participation have a clear role and dedicated resources?
☐ Does monitoring and evaluation show for whom the project worked and how?
☐ Is there a mechanism through which feedback can influence the activities and budget?

Call #1

Strengthening democracy and the rule of law through civil society initiatives

What the call focuses on: The call supports large-scale advocacy, watchdog and monitoring projects that seek changes in public policies and institutional practices. The focus is on systemic and lasting change, rather than one-off actions or isolated campaigns.

What to examine through an intersectional lens

- Which people are affected differently by the policy, law or institutional practice being examined;
- Which experiences are missing from general data or official reports;
- Whether underrepresented groups are merely consulted or can influence the problem analysis, recommendations and advocacy strategy;
- Whether participation in national processes involves costs, time, travel, legal expertise or access to information that not all people and organisations have;
- Who collects and interprets the data, and whether community experience is treated as a relevant source of knowledge;
- Who has direct access to decision-makers and who depends on other organisations to make their perspective heard;
- Whether the proposed recommendations work in practice for people in different situations and territories.

Minimum elements to consider in the project proposal

Analysis: show which groups and identities are poorly represented in the processes concerned and which institutional mechanisms produce this lack of representation.
Activities: combine monitoring and research with accessible forms of direct involvement, participatory data collection, advocacy and structured, participatory dialogue with institutions, with a focus on enabling groups to represent themselves.
Budget: include costs for travel and meetings in several regions; transport and accommodation for participants; interpretation, translation and plain-language materials; and remuneration for local organisations and experts by experience.
Results: track not only the number of participants, but also the recommendations taken up, repeated participation by underrepresented groups and the changes produced by the activities.

Example of an activity using an intersectional lens

A project monitors how an institution organises public consultations. Instead of using only a simple online form, the team works with local organisations, organises meetings in several regions, provides plain-language and accessible materials and allows anonymous contributions. The report separately identifies who was unable to participate and proposes minimum accessibility standards. The institution incorporates the recommendations, pilots and then adopts the new procedure, while responsibility for watchdog monitoring of its implementation is transferred to the community.

Avoid

- research based solely on existing data, without contact with the people affected;
- consultations held only online or with one person treated as representative of an entire group;
- collecting community experiences without involving communities in interpreting the data and formulating recommendations.

Call #2

Empowering civic participation in underserved communities

What the call focuses on: The call supports the involvement of citizens, especially young people, in rural areas, small towns and marginalised urban neighbourhoods. Small grants support local action, while large grants should develop participation models that lead to wider change.

What to examine through an intersectional lens

- Who already participates in community activities and who is consistently absent;
- Whether activities are accessible to people without transport, internet access, digital skills or the freedom to participate at certain times;
- Differences among young people, including whether young Roma people, young people with disabilities, those from low-income families or those with care responsibilities face additional barriers;
- Whether the language, information and methods used can be understood by people with different levels of education;
- Whether previous experiences of discrimination, unfulfilled promises or a lack of response from public authorities have reduced trust and willingness to participate;
- Who speaks on behalf of the community, and whether the most visible voices are also those most affected by the problem;
- Whether participation is symbolic or community proposals can change a decision, service or local practice.

Minimum elements to consider in the project proposal

Analysis: identify a specific local problem and the groups affected by it in different ways.

Activities: propose a civic education process that includes practical action, such as participatory problem mapping, petitions, consultations, participatory budgeting, monitoring, community-led initiatives and the development of physical, online or hybrid spaces for participation.

Participation: give young people roles in choosing the issue, facilitating activities, engaging with public authorities and evaluating the project.

Budget: provide for participant transport; activities held in their own localities, not only in the town centre or county capital; internet, telephone or equipment temporarily used for participation; plain-language and accessible materials; meals and, where needed, accommodation; small-scale actions, testing solutions and monitoring results; and offline communication for people who do not regularly use digital channels.

Example of an activity using an intersectional lens

In a rural municipality, young people are unable to attend activities and local council meetings because of transport and scheduling. The project is not limited to a training course on participation. Young people collect data on mobility needs, hold separate discussions with those who are not in education or employment, develop a proposal and present it at an evening consultation with transport provided. The intended result is a revised transport timetable and a regular dialogue mechanism.

Avoid

- training without a practical application stage and without a link to a public problem or decision;
- activities held only in the town centre or exclusively online;
- involving only high-achieving students, already active volunteers or people close to the organisation;
- assuming that all young people have the same interests and opportunities to participate.

Call #3

Community-driven projects for human rights and social justice

What the call focuses on: The call supports underserved communities and marginalised groups that experience discrimination, rights violations and limited access to justice, services or protection. It also addresses the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, including people displaced from Ukraine.

What to examine through an intersectional lens

- How different barriers and identities combine, including gender, ethnicity, disability, age, poverty and legal status;
- Which right or rights are affected and at what point the barriers arise;
- Which people try to access support but cannot, are refused or withdraw during the process;
- Whether procedures require documents, travel, appointments or digital skills that not everyone has;
- Whether a service, including one provided by the organisation, is formally available but not accessible in practice;
- Whether legal status or the lack of documents limits access to health care, education, work, housing or justice;
- Whether people fear that reporting a violation may affect their job, residence permit, relationship with public authorities, family or safety;
- Which institutions and practices create unequal access, not only the attitudes of individual people.

Minimum elements to consider in the project proposal

Analysis: start from specific situations involving rights violations. Which right is being violated or is difficult to exercise? Who is most affected? Where does the first barrier arise? Which institutions or service providers are involved?

Activities: propose a combination of information, legal and/or social support, reporting mechanisms, case documentation, strategic litigation, self-advocacy and community empowerment, training for professionals, and campaigns to reduce stigma, xenophobia and discrimination.

Data and safety: establish clear data-collection procedures, collect only the data that is necessary, and set clear rules on confidentiality, consent and referrals.

Budget: include costs for interpretation and translation; plain-language, audio and other accessible materials; transport and community-based activities; legal, social and psychological counselling; intercultural mediation; childcare support; team travel to rural or underserved areas; remuneration for mediators and experts by experience; confidential reporting mechanisms; and protection measures for people at risk.

Example of an activity using an intersectional lens

A refugee woman with a disability and children in her care cannot access legal support because information is available only in Romanian, the premises are not accessible and the opening hours prevent her from attending. The project provides information in several formats, interpretation, accessible counselling and childcare support. Cases are documented without identifying information, and the patterns observed are used in an advocacy initiative to change the institution's procedures.

Avoid

- services delivered as an end in themselves, without participation, empowerment or advocacy;
- collecting extensive identity data without a clear purpose and safeguards;
- presenting people only as victims, without recognising their resources and decision-making capacity.

Call #4

Promoting diversity, equality and combating gender-based violence

What the call focuses on: The call addresses gender equality, the prevention and response to gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the rights of LGBTIQ+ people. Medium grants may support adapted interventions for underserved groups, safe spaces and services, referral mechanisms and direct support. Large grants should also pursue systemic change by improved policies and procedures, stronger cooperation among institutions and organizations, and sustainable models for prevention and protection.

What to examine through an intersectional lens

- How different identities combine and overlap, including gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability and age;
- Whether services are physically, financially, linguistically and digitally accessible;
- Whether people can request support without being required to disclose publicly their sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or experience of violence;
- Whether reporting mechanisms are safe and confidential;
- Whether reporting may lead to retaliation, further violence or loss of housing, employment or support;
- Whether organisations led by the target groups participate in decisions or are involved only to recruit beneficiaries;
- Whether services respond only to the immediate situation or also contribute to changing procedures that create unequal access.

Minimum elements to consider in the project proposal

Analysis: describe who is affected and how access to rights and protection differs within the target group. Identify the relevant differences and explain why some people find it more difficult to access support.

Activities: combine complementary interventions, including safe spaces and services, information in several languages and formats, reporting mechanisms, legal or psychosocial support, training for professionals, monitoring and advocacy.

Budget: include costs for safe and discreet transport; community-based activities and team travel; interpretation and translation; plain-language, audio and accessible formats; physical and digital accessibility; legal, psychological and social counselling; temporary accommodation or other protection measures where relevant and eligible; digital security; and measures to prevent staff burnout.

Communication: obtain consent for participation, quotations, photographs and the disclosure of a person's identity.

Example of an activity using an intersectional lens

A service for survivors of violence observes that women in rural areas, Roma women and women with disabilities find it more difficult to access support. The project creates local contact points, discreet transport, audio and plain-language materials, physical accessibility and secure online channels. Data on barriers is discussed with institutions and leads to a local referral protocol and training for staff in health care, the police and social services.

Avoid

- public visibility that may expose people or organisations to violence, harassment or digital attacks;
- an identical service for everyone, without adaptations and without a budget for access;
- reducing the intervention to services or awareness campaigns without protection and reporting mechanisms.

Call #5

Roma inclusion and empowerment through the development of interethnic communities

What the call focuses on: The call supports the inclusion and empowerment of Roma people, social cohesion in interethnic communities and the reduction of discrimination and structural inequalities. Small grants support local, community-led action, including mobilisation, participatory planning and concrete initiatives involving Roma and non-Roma community members. Large grants should also pursue systemic changes.

What to examine through an intersectional lens

- What differences exist within the Roma community and between ethnic groups in the community;
- Who is most affected by segregation, poverty, poor housing and the lack of services;
- Whether Roma women and girls have equal access to education, health care, employment, services and decision-making processes;
- Whether segregation is treated as a structural problem rather than a community choice;
- Who is recognised as a community leader and whose perspectives are missing;
- Whether the people targeted by the project can influence decisions or are merely consulted;
- Whether Roma organisations have access to the budget, information and decision within the partnership;
- Whether interethnic dialogue helps solve concrete problems or remains limited to symbolic interaction, such as cultural activities only.

Minimum elements to consider in the project proposal

Analysis: use data and local knowledge to describe discrimination, segregation and differences between groups in the community. Start with a specific problem and document how it affects community members differently.

Activities: proposals should combine complementary activities, such as community development, local action plans, advocacy, litigation and legal assistance, documenting and reporting discrimination, leadership for girls, women and young people, interethnic dialogue and desegregation measures.

Participation: create initiative groups with a clear mandate and diverse representation, and explain how decisions are made. Roma organisations and community leaders should not be involved only to identify beneficiaries or facilitate the applicant organisation's access to the community.

Budget: include costs for remunerating Roma partner organisations, mediators, facilitators and experts by experience; participant transport; meetings held in the community; childcare and support for other dependants; translation or interpretation, including into Romani where relevant; plain-language materials; legal assistance; participatory data collection and analysis; and local and offline communication.

Example of an activity using an intersectional lens

A community prepares a local plan to reduce school segregation. Instead of the organisation drafting the plan on its own, working groups are created with Roma and non-Roma parents, girls and boys, people with disabilities, teachers and public authorities. Roma women receive support to participate and take on co-facilitation roles. The plan includes measures, a budget, responsible actors and public monitoring, while the organisation documents discriminatory practices and supports the adoption of the measures by the local council.

Avoid

- a project “for Roma people” without Roma leadership, expertise and decision-making, or based exclusively on consultation with already visible leaders;
- isolated cultural activities with no link to discrimination or access to rights;
- using community images and stories in a stigmatising way;
- treating the Roma community as homogeneous by definition.

Call #6

Protecting human rights through climate and environmental action

What the call focuses on: The call links human rights to the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It supports community participation, advocacy, environmental monitoring, public policies and a just green transition. Small grants support local, participatory action, such as community mobilisation, monitoring environmental problems and local advocacy. Large grants also pursue systemic changes.

What to examine through an intersectional lens

- Who lives closest to pollution sources and who has limited access to water, sewerage, public transport, green spaces or health services;
- Whether people with low incomes can bear the costs of environmental measures, such as energy-efficiency upgrades, changing heating systems or higher tariffs;
- Whether people whose livelihoods depend on polluting activities have realistic alternatives;
- Whether environmental risks overlap with poor housing, poverty, health conditions;
- Who benefits from green investment and who bears the costs or loses access to resources;
- Whether technical data is presented in a form that the community can understand;
- Whether the community's direct experience is treated as a relevant source of information alongside technical measurements.

Minimum elements to consider in the project proposal

Analysis: combine environmental data with information on health, housing, income and access to services, and speak directly with the people affected.

Activities: combine participatory mapping, participatory data collection and interpretation, local adaptation planning, advocacy, watchdog work, strategic litigation, campaigns and dialogue with public authorities or private actors.

Participation: communities should help choose monitoring and evaluation criteria, collect and interpret data and formulate solutions. The community should not be involved only after experts have defined the problem and the solution.

Budget: include costs for monitoring equipment that community members can use, community training, travel and activities in affected areas, participant transport, accessibility for people with disabilities, legal advice and litigation, physical and digital security for activists, remuneration for community facilitators and local experts.

Example of an activity using an intersectional lens

A marginalised neighbourhood is affected by waste and air pollution. The project does not limit itself to measurements carried out by experts. Residents choose the monitoring points, receive easy-to-use tools and discuss the data in accessible meetings. Effects on children, older people, people with disabilities and outdoor workers are analysed separately. The data supports an advocacy campaign and a public mechanism through which authorities report the measures taken.

Avoid

- relying only on a general average that hides the communities most exposed;
- treating the environmental problem separately from health, housing, income and access to services;
- technical solutions that transfer costs to people with low incomes;
- general environmental campaigns that do not pursue an institutional or policy change.

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Project proposal self-assessment

For each criterion, give a score: 0 = missing; 1 = mentioned but unclear; 2 = integrated through actions, resources and responsibilities. Note next to each criterion what needs to be improved.

1. The problem – The application uses data to explain identities, barriers and causes, rather than merely describing a group as vulnerable.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

2. Differences within the group – The proposal identifies relevant differences within the group and situations in which identities and barriers overlap.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

3. Early participation – The people affected contributed before the project design was finalised, and their contribution changed the final version of the proposal.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

4. Decision-making power – The community has a clear role in implementation, monitoring and choosing solutions, rather than merely attending activities.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

5. Activities – The activities respond directly to the barriers and causes identified in the analysis and are adapted to the target groups.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

6. Partnerships – Local and community organisations and informal groups have a role, budget, information and visibility proportionate to their contribution.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

7. Accessibility – The necessary adaptations are described and the related costs are included.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

8. Safety – Risks of exposure, harassment, stigma, retaliation or retraumatisation are analysed and protection measures are in place.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

9. Budget – Participation, community expertise, accessibility and project adaptations are budgeted.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

10. Change – Monitoring and evaluation criteria show for whom the project worked, how barriers were reduced, which practices or policies changed and what effect these changes had on the target groups.

Score: 0 / 1 / 2

What needs to be improved:

Indicative interpretation

0–8 points: the approach is largely declarative; revisit the analysis and discussion with the community.

9–18 points: there are concrete elements, but the links between the problem analysis, activities and results need to be strengthened.

19–20 points: good integration; check feasibility, low-scoring criteria and the risk of overpromising.

Bibliography and resources

This list is indicative. For eligibility conditions, activities, indicators and budgeting rules, always consult the official Programme documents.

Civil Society Fund in Romania documents

Applicant's Guide – Call #1: Strengthening democracy and the rule of law through civil society initiatives (2026).

Applicant's Guide – Call #2: Strengthening civic participation in underserved communities (2026).

Applicant's Guide – Call #3: Community projects for human rights and social justice (2026).

Applicant's Guide – Call #4: Promoting diversity and equality and combating gender-based violence (2026).

Applicant's Guide – Call #5: Roma inclusion and empowerment through the development of interethnic communities (2026).

Applicant's Guide – Call #6: Protecting human rights through climate and environmental action (2026).

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Final note: The examples in this toolkit are indicative and should be adapted to the relevant call, the local context and the experiences of the target groups.