

Accessing EU funding for civil society organisations

**A toolkit co-created with
Bulgarian CSO partners**



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

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Introduction

Eurochild has developed this practical and accessible toolkit on EU funding opportunities for child-focused civil society organisations (CSOs). Its purpose is to equip CSOs working for and with children with clear, actionable guidance to identify, apply for, and manage support from key EU programmes, such as Erasmus+, ESF+, CERV, and Horizon Europe. The toolkit has been developed with local Bulgarian partners in Eurochild's project [Leveraging EU influence to deliver change for families in adversity in Bulgaria](#).

This toolkit is grounded in the experience of Bulgarian CSOs working with children. However, it is designed to be transferable and usable by CSOs in other EU Member States, or for CSOs in other sectors. We hope to strengthen equitable access to EU funding, and, ultimately, improve equity of opportunity for communities facing adversity in our societies.

A note on methodology: Co-creation through weaving a 360* approach

As part of the scoping phase, Eurochild convened an online questionnaire in summer 2025. Across 11 anonymous responses collected, most organisations reported prior success in securing EU funding, indicating a relatively experienced audience. Respondents primarily work on issues related to child poverty, social inclusion, and child protection. Respondents were also involved in child participation and working with young people.

Respondents outlined a clear need for guidance with comprehensive yet easy to understand information, a clear structure that distinguishes objectives of the existing EU programmes, and practical guidance to simplify administration and reporting. The findings point to a need for an advanced, hands-on, accessible guide reinforced by concrete examples, templates, and checklists.

Next to that, a virtual co-creation workshop to validate needs and challenges, gather practical examples, and refine the scope and priorities for the toolkit was organised in August 2025. This toolkit's development coincided with the beginning of the negotiation process for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). Together, we identified the need for a clear, detailed explanation of the new MFF and the programmes which will be included.

This engagement with national based CSOs also pointed out the specific barriers faced by child-focused organisations in accessing EU funds, such as lowering the administrative and financial burdens, ensuring capacity building of relevant stakeholders. While, this remains out of the scope of this toolkit, this toolkit can serve as a helpful starting point.

Existing EU funding in the 2021-2027 funding period

There are funds such as ESF Plus and Erasmus Plus under shared management (co-managed by Member States and European Commission) and direct management, such as the CERV programme managed by European Commission.

1. European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the European Union's main financial instrument for investing in people. It aims to contribute to a fairer and more inclusive society.

The ESF+'s core objectives are to promote access to quality employment, education and training, and social protection, while combating poverty and exclusion. ESF+ places particular emphasis on supporting young people, children, vulnerable groups, and the long-term unemployed, and on advancing gender equality and equal access to opportunities.

- **Budget (2021–2027):** €99.3 billion.
- **How is funding disbursed:** Nationally - through agreed national 'Operational Programmes' with each EU Member State, and by a designated national managing authority.
- **Frequency of calls:** varies by country and managing authority (typically annual).
- **Co-financing rate by MS:** 40%–85%, depending on priority and Member State/region
- **Eligible beneficiaries:** public authorities, NGOs, social partners, education and training providers, local and regional authorities.

ESF+ offers opportunities for projects in:

- Promoting employment and labour mobility.
- Improving access to education, training, and skills development.
- Social inclusion and the fight against poverty.
- Supporting reforms of social systems and employment policies.
- Strengthening the administrative capacity of institutions and social partners.

Note: The European Child Guarantee, the European Union's first policy and funding instrument dedicated to eradicating child poverty, is part of the ESF+. The current budget for this important initiative is €8.9 billion.

Open calls and information

List of national authorities

2. Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. It focuses on inclusion, digital transformation, and environmental sustainability. It promotes

school development, vocational training, higher education, adult learning, and youth initiatives. The programme addresses issues like democracy engagement, reducing unemployment, fostering innovation, and international cooperation.

- **Budget (2021-2027):** €26 billion.
- **How is funding disbursed:** Through European-wide open calls, and national-managed open calls through designated national managing authorities.
- **Frequency of calls:** once per year.
- **Co-financing rate by Member State:** European calls between 80-90%. National calls can be 100% financed by the managing authority.
- **Consortia requirements:** minimum 3 countries.

Erasmus+ offers opportunities for:

- Individuals to spend a mobility period abroad and receive linguistic training.
- Organisations to collaborate in project partnerships in the fields of academic and vocational.
- training, schools, adult learning, youth, and European sport events.
- Supports teaching, research, networking, and policy debate on EU topics.

Open calls for proposals

Open calls for proposals managed by national agencies

List of national agencies

3. Interreg

Interreg forms part of the European cohesion policy. The programme facilitates the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional, and local actors from different Member States, with the core target being an organisation responsible for regional development policy. The main objectives are to promote a sustainable and harmonious economic, social, and territorial development of the EU, focusing on addressing current challenges like climate change, digital transformation, and social inclusion.

- **Budget (2021-2027):** €7.95 billion.
- **Average total budget per project:** €1-2 million.
- **Frequency of calls:** Once a year.
- **Co-financing rate by Member State:** 75% to 85%.
- **Consortia requirements:** At least three countries represented.

Interreg offers opportunities for projects in:

- Cross-border cooperation (between bordering regions).

- Transnational cooperation (EU macro regions).
- Interregional cooperation (EU-wide).

Open calls (Interreg Europe – EU-wide)

4. Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme aims to protect and promote Union rights and values, contributing to sustain and further develop open, rights-based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies based on the rule of law.

- **Budget (2021-2027):** €1.55 billion.
- **Co-financing rate:** up to 90%.
- **Budget per project:** minimum €75,000.
- **Consortia requirement:** at least 2 countries represented.

CERV offers opportunities to:

- Combat inequality, intolerance, and discrimination based on gender, race, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation; protect children's and disabled persons' rights and promote gender equality.
- Educate on European history to raise awareness and understand the origins of the EU and promote participation in the EU's democratic and civic life.
- Prevent and combat gender-based and vulnerable group violence, ensuring equal protection for all victims across the EU.
- Protect and promote the rights of the child.
- Financial support for civil society organisations for the protection, promotion, and awareness of the rights and values of the European Union.

Open calls for proposals

CERV National Contact Points

5. LIFE

The LIFE programme tackles climate change and protecting the environment, where it supports green innovations and cleantech solutions across Europe. It is implemented via 4 sub programmes: Nature and Biodiversity, Circular Economy and Quality of Life, Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation and Clean Energy Transition. Through its Circular Economy & Quality of Life and governance priorities, LIFE funds cleaner air, safer chemicals, and better water - supporting children's health and well-being.

- **Budget (2021-2027):** €5,432 billion.
- **Co-financing rate by Member State:** up to 60% for environmental projects and 95% for Clean Energy Transition.

Life programme offers opportunities to:

- Facilitate the shift towards a sustainable, circular, energy-efficient, renewable energy-based, climate-neutral and resilient economy.
- Protect, restore and improve the quality of the environment, including the air, water and soil.
- Halt and reverse biodiversity loss.
- Tackle the degradation of ecosystems.

Open calls for proposals

6. Creative Europe

Creative Europe is the European Commission's flagship programme to support the culture and audiovisual sectors. The objectives of the programme are to safeguard, develop and promote European cultural and linguistic diversity and heritage, and to increase the competitiveness and economic potential of the cultural and creative sectors, in particular the audiovisual sector.

- **Budget (2021-2027):** €2.44 billion
- **3 types of projects:**
 - Small: min. 3 organisations from 3 countries; €200,000; co-funding rate: 80%.
 - Medium: min. 5 organisations from 5 countries; €1 million; co-funding rate: 70%.
 - Large: min. 10 organisations from 10 countries; €2 million; co-funding rate: 60%.

Creative Europe offers opportunities within 3 strands:

- Culture: focused on cooperation, reinforcement, mobility, and artistic and cultural innovation.
- Media: focused on the promotion of competitiveness in the audiovisual sector.
- Cross-sectoral: focused on media literacy, freedom of expression, intercultural dialogue, and social inclusion.

Open calls for proposals

7. Horizon Europe

The Horizon Europe programme is the research and innovation programme of the EU. The main goals are: to strengthen the EU's scientific and technological bases and the European Research Area, to boost Europe's innovation capacity, competitiveness and jobs, and to deliver on citizens' priorities and sustain our socio-economic model and values. It has a

particular focus on creating impact on the European Green Deal, the digital and sustainability transition and recovery from the coronavirus crisis.

Budget (2021-2027): €95.5 billion

Horizon Europe is structured in 3 pillars – 1. Excellent Science; 2. Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness; and 3. Innovative Europe. Pillar 2 is further divided into 6 clusters, namely:

- Health.
- Culture, Creativity, Inclusive Society.
- Civil Security for Society.
- Digital, Industry Space.
- Climate, Energy, Mobility.
- Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture, Environment.

[Open calls for proposals](#)

The next MFF: Funding opportunities

Note: This section is subject to change throughout the coming years until its final adoption.

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is the 7-year budget of the EU, which defines the maximum amount of expenses (the ‘ceilings’), the sources of revenue (the ‘own resources’) and the EU programmes, in terms of structure and budget. In July, the EU published its first proposal for the new EU budget 2028-2034.

Proposed size: ~**€2 trillion** in commitments, reorganised into **4 headings**.

1. Economic, social & territorial cohesion, agriculture, rural & maritime prosperity and security

This heading will cover all European funding for economic, social & territorial cohesion, agriculture & rural, fisheries & maritime, prosperity & security (the NRPPs umbrella).

Proposed budget: €946.404 billion.

Management: Shared (EU + Member States via National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs). The EU defines NRPPs as joint Member State-regional plans that bring together EU funds into one coherent, locally tailored strategy of investments and reforms to foster convergence and strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The NRPPs (one per MS) will include the following strands (each with its own “conditions of implementation under the NRPs” Regulation):

- European Social Fund (ESF)

- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
- Common Fisheries Policy; European Ocean Pact; maritime & aquaculture
- Interreg & Cohesion Fund
- Union support for asylum, migration & integration
- Union support for internal security
- European integrated border management & EU visa policies
- EU School Scheme for healthy food in educational establishments
- Support to the Turkish-Cypriot Community
- Decentralised agencies (relevant to Heading 1 scope)

2. Competitiveness, prosperity & security

Envelope: €522.205 bn

- Management: Direct/Indirect (by the EU)
- European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)
- AgoraEU
- Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM+)
- Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)
- Erasmus+
- Horizon Europe

(Added in the September package):

- Justice Programme
- Single Market & Customs Programme
- Euratom Research & Training
- Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation & Decommissioning
- Nuclear Decommissioning (LT/ Ignalina)
- Instrument for Emergency Support within the Union
- Decentralised agencies (relevant to Heading 2 scope)

3. Global Europe

Envelope: €190 bn

- Global Europe

- Overseas Countries & Territories (incl. Greenland)
- Common Foreign & Security Policy (CFSP)

4. Administration

Envelope: €104.447 bn

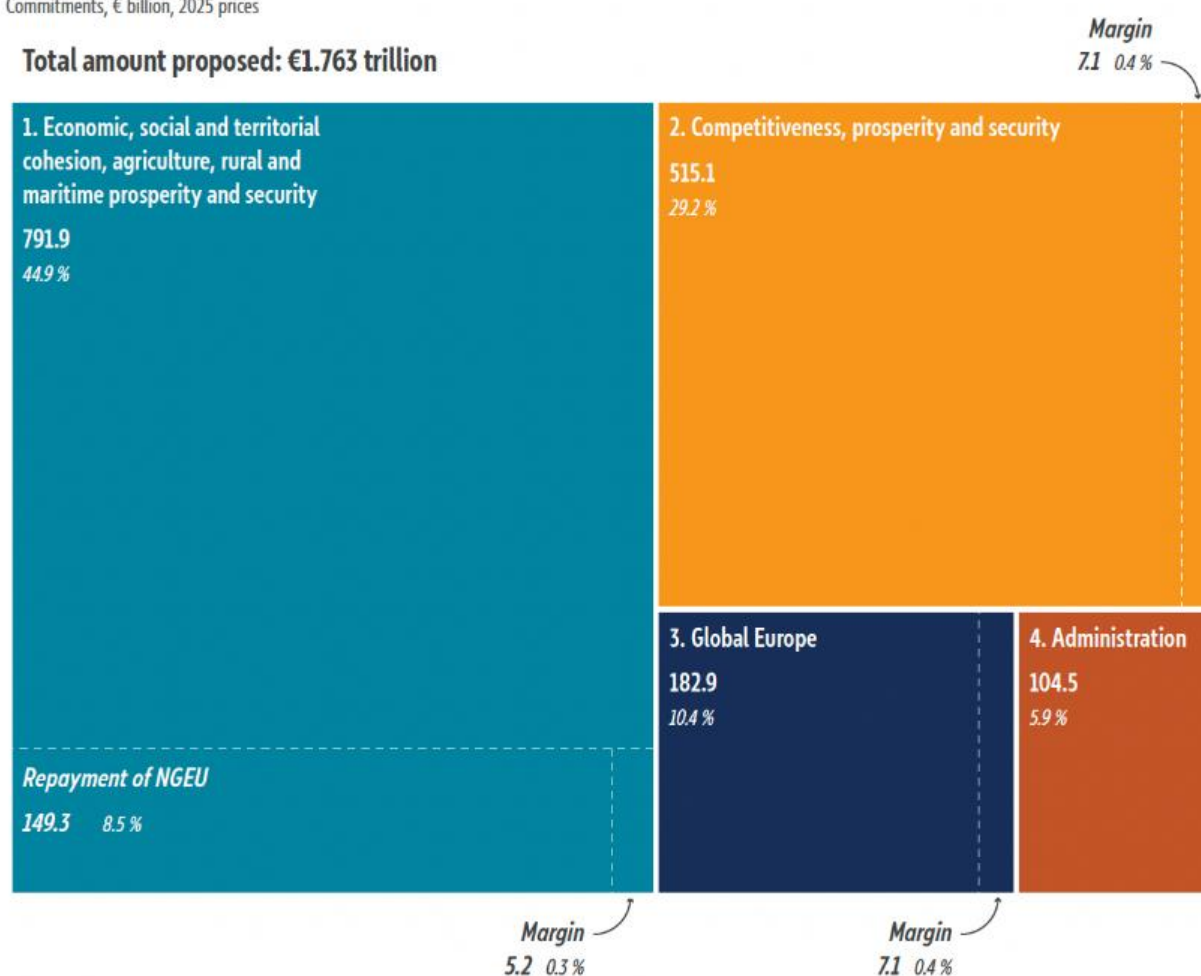
Separate line (outside the headings) - Repayment of NextGenerationEU: €149.3 bn (booked separately across 2028–2034)

Proposal of the European Commission is now complete (all sectoral regulations now tabled: [first package](#) 16 Jul 2025, [final](#) package early Sept 2025).

2028–2034 MFF overview

Commitments, € billion, 2025 prices

Total amount proposed: €1.763 trillion



Source: [EU budget 2028-2034: Overview of the Commission's proposal, briefing by the European Parliament July 2025](#)

Next steps

For the next MFF to be adopted, all 27 EU countries in the Council must agree and the European Parliament must give its consent. The Council aims to fix its first position on the MFF (the EU's long-term budget) by end-2025; the Parliament has already set out its position (see its [overview briefing](#)). Negotiations between the Commission, Council, and Parliament should finish by end-2027, with final approval of the whole package.

What do the CSOs think about this?

Eurochild, together with 50+ organisations, has [released a statement to weigh in on the Commission's initial proposal for the new EU budget](#). We welcome the technical streamlining in the European Commission's proposal for the new EU budget, the 2028–2034 MFF. Fewer, more harmonised regulations, simpler monitoring, and more flexibility could enable cross-sector reforms. However, the “14% for social priorities in the amount of 100 billion” of National and Regional Partnership Plans misleading: once competing priorities, inflation and extra responsibilities are factored in, it is worth less than the current MFF.

Eurochild has also published [its own reaction](#) that includes Eurochild's recommendations for the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF): the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRP Plans) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

Our shared worry is that the proposal dilutes people-centred spending. There is no dedicated ESF+ line, no earmarking for social inclusion and poverty reduction (such as under the current ESF+ and the European Child Guarantee), and no binding guidance on how Member States must allocate social funds.

Governance shifts to centralised National and Regional Partnership Plans weaken direct links between regional Managing Authorities and the Commission and risk sidelining civil society and local actors. At the same time, the scrapping of past enabling conditions and very broad definitions of what counts as “social” open the door to funds drifting to other priorities - leaving vulnerable groups exposed and social providers, already underfunded, asked to do more with less.

We call on EU institutions to restore enforceable protections for people-focused investment:

- bring back clear minimum shares (e.g., 25% social inclusion, 5% Child Guarantee, 3% material deprivation) or create a ring-fenced social window;
- define “social spending” narrowly (so it cannot be met with general infrastructure);
- re-empower local/regional authorities and CSOs through strong partnership rules and direct lines to the Commission; and
- re-anchor monitoring to the European Pillar of Social Rights with robust, transparent indicators.

Without these fixes, Eurochild and partners believe the next MFF will not reliably deliver on the EU's social aims.

Annex 1: Profile of organisations that supported the creation of this toolkit and advice for funding

Eurochild

Pan-European network that promotes children's rights and well-being through advocacy at the EU/national levels, membership exchange, and research.

Amalipe Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance

Leading Bulgarian Roma NGO empowering Roma communities and ensuring equal access to quality education, healthcare and social services, with long-running school and community programmes.

CEDAR Foundation

Bulgarian non-profit organisation established in 2005. The organisation's mission is to provide better care for children and adults in disadvantaged situations and to support their integration into the community so that they can have a fair, fulfilling, and dignified life.

CONCORDIA Bulgaria

Part of the international CONCORDIA family, it delivers day and residential social services for children, young people and families in need, focusing on education, vocational training and pathways to independent living.

Equilibrium

Bulgarian NGO working directly with children and families; it runs Bulgaria's first Early Childhood & Family Resource Centre and manages the Ruse Complex for Social Support of Children and Families.

Integro Association

A Roma-led NGO in Bulgaria (registered in 2002) that mobilises and empowers local Roma communities, builds active civic structures, and advocates for equal participation and representation in decision-making, in partnership with municipalities and national institutions.

Karin Dom Foundation

A non-profit foundation founded in 1994 in Varna by diplomat and philanthropist Ivan Stancioff. It runs a modern centre offering comprehensive social, health and educational services for children with special needs and their families - covering early intervention, therapies, Montessori groups, and a national training centre.

Know-How Centre for Alternative Child Care

A consulting and research organization working with the government to stop using institutional care for children and develop community services. The Know-How Centre is working to ensure that the deinstitutionalization of the children in Bulgaria is done in a way that values the uniqueness of each child, respects his / her opinion and supports parents and communities in providing a secure family environment.

Radost Foundation

Varna-based organisation (founded in 2004) providing a comprehensive set of social services for children and young people with disabilities and support for their families.

Trust for Social Achievement

A pioneering, results-focused grant-making foundation that supports evidence-based solutions to break cycles of poverty and raise achievement in Bulgaria – particularly among the Roma population.

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