

Collaboration - The key to unlocking cohesion

**Good practices from EU-funded
partnerships between public authorities
and civil society**



Eurochild
Putting children at
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Summary

This report highlights good practices of how Public Authorities (PAs) across Europe are meaningfully involving civil society organisations (CSOs) in the design, delivery, and/or evaluation of European Union (EU) funded projects that aim to strengthen social cohesion. While set in different countries, each initiative has improved the lives of children, particularly those at risk of poverty.

Drawing on examples shared by Eurochild members (2023–2025) and complementary desk research, the report identifies replicable models from 4 country-level project: Finland, Hungary, Ireland, and Slovakia.

Within each case study, success depended on structured CSO roles, co-creation between institutions and affected communities, and sustained support beyond the lifetime of the project, either financially or through non-financial support, such as commitment to continue participatory practices.

Each project in this report has been implemented through funds from the European Union (EU). This includes the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Child Guarantee, and the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV). Each good practice embodies the **partnership principle**.

*“When public authorities embed **partnership principles** - through clear mandates, participatory tools, with transparent and inclusive calls, EU projects can achieve greater reach, transparency, and longer-term social impact. The Partnership Principle was set out in the EU’s Common Provisions Regulation (2019) and the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (2014).”*

Introduction

Evidence from Eurochild's *2024 report, Children's Rights: Progress and Gaps* highlighted that many civil society organisations (CSOs) in the field of children's rights across Europe have not yet accessed ESF+ shared-management funding, or other sources of EU funding, at the national level.

However, several good practices stand out, that demonstrate that genuine partnership – when public authorities (PAs), municipalities, and CSOs share responsibility and commitment, the results are better outcomes for children, families, and vulnerable groups.

Each case study distils cross-cutting lessons for PAs seeking to strengthen cooperation with civil society.

Case studies

1. Finland - ESF+ Coordination for Social Innovation in Child Welfare (SOILA)

In Finland, the national ESF+ programme (*Innovation and Skills in Finland 2021–2027*) includes a national coordination project to accelerate social innovation in child welfare through co-creation with service providers, young people, and families.

Good practice: The Social innovations in child welfare (SOILA-coordination project) sets out clear and formal CSO roles in governance, an explicit co-creation mandate, and structured pathways for scaling successful models.

The Central Union for Child Welfare (CUCW), a national network for children's rights in Finland and Eurochild member, acts as a programme partner within the Finnish managing authority's (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment) architecture, ensuring that NGO insights guide regional pilots and national learning.

[Click here for further information.](#)

2. Hungary – The Child Citizens (JóKer) project, Józsefváros, Budapest

The Józsefváros Municipality in Budapest co-led the Child Citizens project with local CSOs in Budapest's most disadvantaged district, the 8th district of Józsefváros. Józsefváros has the highest rates of poverty and exclusion in Budapest. It has the highest population of people from the Roma community in Hungary, and is also a highly vibrant and international community. The Municipality championed a community-participation approach before, and this project expanded that by focusing on meaningfully involving children.

Good practice: Together with the municipality, civil society partners developed and embedded child participation standards and participatory tools across local governance – including early years education and care services, schools, youth services, and the municipality's administration. One of the most inspiring examples of success came from the child-friendly budgeting process. More than 900 children participated in the "Children's

Participation Budget”, deciding how more than €60,000 (26 million HUF) would be spent to improve their local community.

Municipality leadership, local and European CSOs provide expertise and capacity-building; improved local-level community engagement involving children in public decisions (funding, projects, professionals); involving very young children (3 years+).

Further information:

- [About the project](#)
- ["We need a team!" mini-community projects, created by local children](#)

3. Ireland - Building Children's Futures through Child Rights Impact Assessments

From 2022-2024, Ireland piloted Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA) through collaboration between the Department for Children, Disability and Equality, Tusla – the Child and Family Agency, and civil society partners. The project was created to respond to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, where important decisions about children's lives, such as school closures, took place without consulting children meaningfully. Together with the project partners, Irish public authorities wanted to learn from this experience.

Good practice: This joint process co-created research with children and young people on the effects of Covid-19 on their lives. Facilitated by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at the University of Galway (a Eurochild member) and Fóroige, children interviewed decision-makers with responsibility during the pandemic. The resulting Children's Report, launched by the Irish government, set a strong roadmap for changing national policymaking. Children's Rights Alliance (another Eurochild member), created a toolkit for implementing CRIAs in Ireland, with comparative evidence on the use of CRIAs across Europe. A training session for policymakers was created and delivered to pilot the tools.

Crucially, the Irish public authorities co-owned every project output. The CRIA was included in Ireland's national strategy for children, *Young Ireland: Ireland's policy framework for children and young people 2023-2028*. This is a strong example of how children's rights principles can be embedded into national policy design and programming.

For further information, access the [Children's Research Report, the CRIA toolkit and training module](#).

4. Italy – The DAY (Democratic Activation of Youth) Project, Naples

The DAY initiative in Naples built a local partnership between the municipality, schools, and CSOs to institutionalise child participation in local decision-making. The project engaged more than 1,300 students from nine schools to co-create neighbourhood level Youth Civic Agendas. These agendas for local change set out how children and young people wanted to improve their neighbourhoods, and promoted citizenship activation among young people. The European Union identified the DAY project as a promising practice in 2025.

Good practice: The City of Naples, and the local municipality authorities, engaged with the democratically elected Local Youth Advisory Boards throughout the project. The Youth

Advisors also travelled to Brussels to meet European decision-makers. Young people represented the project's findings to the City of Naples in the project's closing conference, as well as the Italian national parliament (Chamber of Deputies) in Rome.

CSOs, Fondazione Albero della Vita and CIDIS, facilitated the process to strengthen local-level democratic engagement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. With municipal support and partnership, the project created practical tools for replication and created strong outreach to local young people.

This approach is available in nine languages and continues to be replicated across other Italian cities.

For further information:

- [Access the DAY Project child-friendly model for child participation from Eurochild's website.](#)
- [More about the DAY Project.](#)

5. Slovakia - Centre Sniečko: Social Housing for Survivors of Domestic Violence

A CSO-led ESF+ project which provided safe housing and psychosocial support to 15 women and their children seeking security from domestic violence for two years. Despite strong evidence of results, the project did not receive follow-on funding and so ended. This example highlights the risk of discontinuity once pilots close.

Good practice (partial): Effective service delivery and local impact; key lesson on the need for sustainability and continuation funding in PA's design of projects.

[Further information about the project.](#)

Key learnings from the good practices

The practices shared in this report showcase the potential to bring the EU Partnership Principle to life. Each success story results from involving CSOs throughout the policy cycle: programming, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning. This goes beyond compliance with regulatory obligations but also tangible gains in programme quality, sharper targeting and greater legitimacy, as lessons are jointly reviewed, fed back into policy, and shared widely.

Four key learnings are proposed. Taken together, they point to a common recipe for constructive partnerships between Public Authorities and civil society organisations:

1. CSO roles should be institutionalised in governance so participation is defined in programme rulebooks.

The most durable systems combine clear institutional leadership from municipalities or PAs with CSO expertise in community insight, outreach and training; this blend of administrative capacity and local legitimacy makes innovation both credible and scalable.

To keep partnership quality visible and improvable, authorities should track and publish indicators such as the share of CSO-led projects, when and how CSOs are engaged, and the depth of consultation, aligning with European Court of Auditors guidance on stakeholder engagement.

Partnership can be embedded through steering groups, advisory councils, or co-creation labs. This makes involvement predictable, auditable and trusted at every stage, and is better than including partnership through ‘subcontracted delivery’, and is fully consistent with Common Provisions Regulation Art. 8 and the Code of Conduct on Partnership.

2. Co-designed tools and methods embed inclusion and rights-based thinking into decisions.

Whether through Child Rights Impact Assessments in Ireland or participatory toolkits such as Italy’s DAY model – co-design processes improve quality, targeting and accountability. Inclusive Social-Innovation that allow cross-border partnerships encourages transnational learning and adaptation of proven models rather than a series of isolated pilots.

3. Sustainability should be built from the start

Planning continuation grants, bridging finance or phased multi-year funding can all protect project’s outcomes beyond its endpoint and allows evidence to consolidate.

PAs can also finance the creation and testing of participation toolkits like CRIA or DAY once associated projects end. Replication materials can be included as deliverables, which can turn CSO-developed tools into institutional assets that travel across municipalities and agencies. Coordination projects - Finland’s SOILA is a good example - provide structured spaces for experimentation under MA supervision, funding CSO-led pilots, enabling peer learning and connecting local innovations to national frameworks.

4. Accessibility matters

Simpler forms, clear eligibility, consistent guidance, plain language, realistic co-financing and responsive helpdesks lower barriers for smaller NGOs and broaden participation. Finally, long-term capacity and learning deserve attention through small preparatory grants, mentoring for emerging NGOs, and ongoing peer exchanges or communities of practice that turn one-off collaborations into continuous improvement.

This approach involves a low up-front cost that can ensure funds are more effectively implemented, establishing stronger partnerships, and creating space for interventions that are more innovative and better tailored to local-level challenges.

Conclusion

Across Europe, Public Authorities are finding innovative ways to turn partnership principles into practice happening each and every day.

The lesson is clear: when public institutions open up their governance structures, fund co-creation, and sustain collaboration beyond project cycles, EU investments reach deeper into communities and produce durable social change.

From Finland's co-creation model and Italy's youth-participation framework to Ireland's rights-based assessment and Bulgaria's inclusive innovation pilots, these experiences show that structured collaboration with CSOs leads to stronger, more equitable outcomes.

Strengthening these mechanisms in the next EU funding period 2028-2034 will strengthen the EU's ability to better support children and families. It will also strengthen EU mechanisms such as the European Social Fund, with its broader goals to improve social cohesion in Europe.

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