



# Active Citizens Fund

Programme Results

Executive Summary (2019–2024)

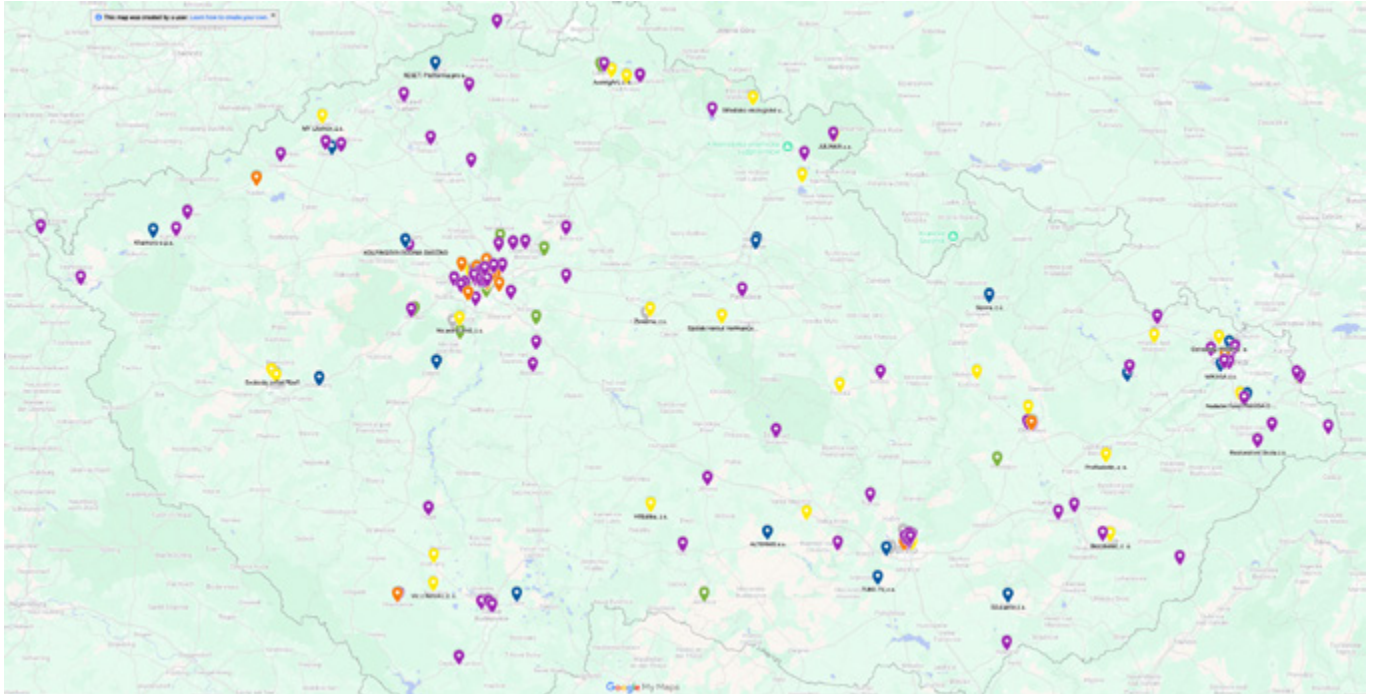
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| Nadace OSF

  
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**The Active Citizens Fund supported civil society and vulnerable groups. The programme was implemented as part of the EEA and Norway Grants; with a total budget of €15.25 million. In the Czech Republic, it was managed in the period 2019–2024 by a Consortium consisting of Open Society Fund Prague (OSF Prague), Committee of Goodwill – Olga Havel Foundation and the Czech Scouting Institute. We supported 307 projects across all 14 regions of Czechia, allocating over €13.5 million (CZK 330 million). A total of 297 organizations involved 2,560,989 people in civil society activities.**



The programme aimed at strengthening the civil society sector and promoting public participation and active citizenship as key components of democracy. By enhancing the capacity, sustainability and resilience of civil society organisations (CSOs), the programme better equipped them to influence policies, advocate for systemic change, and to contribute to the empowerment and inclusion of minorities, with a particular focus on Roma. Emphasis was placed on civic education and media literacy, and providing CSOs with necessary skills and know-how to advocate more effectively for public interests, including those of vulnerable groups. Increasing civic participation among youth and ‘emerging adults’ (aged 18-30) was a priority. Overall, while the programme made funding to CSOs, its ultimate impact in the Czech Republic was to increase citizens’ ability to take action to defend their rights and participate in democratic life at local, regional and national levels.

Over the course of its implementation, the programme allocated financial support totalling €13,515,154.76 across **307 projects**.

- 13 strategic projects aimed at systemic changes (€ 234,638 per grant on average),
- 139 projects focused on mid-sized goals (€ 67,821 per grant on average),
- 7 matching grants improved skills in online fundraising or crowdfunding campaigns (€ 3,588 per grant on average),
- 121 action grants supported small and regional organizations in local events or initiatives (€ 3,107 per grant on average).
- Additionally, we implemented 2 pre-defined projects – with the Czech Scouting Institute to involve young people in civic activities (€ 346,000) and with OSF Prague to develop advocacy skills among civic organizations (€ 135,900).
- 25 bilateral projects were awarded to foster bilateral cooperation between Czech organizations and organizations from Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein (€ 6,193 per grant on average).

All projects were implemented between March 2020 and April 2024.



## Outcome 1: Increased citizen participation in civic activities

A significant focus was placed on strengthening public participation and civic engagement. Awareness-raising activities on democratic principles and citizen participation reached over one million people, while 411,000 individuals engaged in consultations with public decision-makers. Not only did citizens gain or improve their skills in civic participation, but more than one third of supported CSOs also systematically worked in partnership with public institutions. This cross-sectoral cooperation is essential for supporting democratic principles, active citizenship and civil society values.

## Outcome 2: Strengthened civil society advocacy and watchdog role

CSOs encouraged over 500 public institutions (528) to newly engage in dialogue, contributing to more inclusive decision-making processes. This resulted in nearly 100 national policies and laws influenced by CSOs, leading to systemic changes at both national and local levels. Examples include advancements in whistleblowing and addressing prejudiced violence against people with disabilities. In addition to that, nearly 200 local policies and regulations were influenced by CSOs. The programme further supported the watchdog and advocacy role of civil society by training 3,586 individuals in advocacy-related skills and enabling 227 organisations to incorporate evidence-based approaches into their policy and advocacy work. Hundreds of CSOs developed their advocacy skills, which are crucial for the sustainability of all systemic changes.

## Outcome 3: Vulnerable groups empowered

The programme successfully empowered marginalized groups and created inclusive support systems. Over 807,613 vulnerable individuals, facing discrimination in education, housing, healthcare or the labor market, directly benefited from these empowerment measures, fostering greater inclusion and participation. This was made possible through CSOs ability to develop targeted measures based on systematically gathered insights into the needs of vulnerable groups. Nearly hundred CSOs conducted research, analysis and data collection with the aim to improve their support for these vulnerable groups. Improved data collection and follow-up work had a visible impact across programme outcomes. On top of that, improved CSOs' skills led to 260 public/private sector entities enhancing their strategies for vulnerable groups.



## Outcome 4: Increased support for civic education and media literacy

The impact of the programme under this outcome is well demonstrated by 800 hundred CSOs providing informal civic education or media literacy, in addition to 134 informal groups supported. A particular emphasis was placed on youth engagement, with 58,559 young people receiving training in civic rights (including nearly 6,000 youth trained by less-experienced and regional CSOs), and 51,375 youth trained in media literacy. This highlights the wide reach and importance of CSOs in civil society, which the programme significantly supported.

## Outcome 5: Increased capacity and sustainability of the civil society sector and individual CSOs

The programme's impact under this outcome may be considered the most important since it reflects the internal strength and knowhow of CSOs. Beyond advocacy skills under the outcome 2, improvements were seen in data management and digitalization. CSOs involved in the programme reported more transparent and accountable administration, better monitoring and evaluation systems, and more effective management. A full 94% of them perceive a positive shift in their chosen area of capacity building as a result of the programme.

The most valuable outcomes included the establishment of 403 partnerships between CSOs and public/private sector actors and the integration of 641 CSOs into various networks. Considering only less-experienced and regional CSOs receiving action grants, over 400 of their leaders were trained in capacity building, and at least 40 partnerships between these CSOs and public/private sector entities were established thanks to the programme.

The most frequently supported activities under the Outcome 5 were fundraising and donor communications (developing strategies, attracting new donors, improving campaigns and long-term funding), external communications/PR/public awareness (strengthening organizational presence through social media and a redesigned or new website), mapping needs and education.

## Pre-defined projects

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Project of the OSF Prague focused on capacity building and enhancing organizations' advocacy skills. Representatives from 40 CSOs gained necessary know-how through individual consultations and mentoring based on their needs, workshops on advocacy related topics, networking and training with advocacy experts to ensure sustainability.

Project of the Czech Scouting Institute strengthened the leadership capacity of young civic actors by supporting 160 participants in developing their own initiatives through tailored incubation programmes. It empowered 43 informal civic groups, focusing on informal civic education and promoting democratic values. A total of 117 young leaders were systematically trained in fundraising, public relations, time management, project planning, networking, and leadership.

## Bilateral and regional cooperation

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The Active Citizens Fund programme team and CSO representatives actively participated in various regional and bilateral events organised or organised by other Fund Operators (FOs).

The Bilateral Outcome aimed to enhance collaboration between entities in beneficiary and donor states. The focus was on sharing good practices, mutual learning, and implementing new tools through mentoring or online consultations. Knowledge exchange was further supported through 29 joint workshops and multiple study trips, addressing topics such as participatory methods, strategic planning in community energy, media campaigns, foster care support, activation of young people with migration experience, work with disadvantaged women, and advocacy activities. These activities facilitated the sharing of best practices and strengthened bilateral cooperation between entities in donor and beneficiary states.

Overall, 26 projects supported by mid-sized grants involved cooperation with donor partners from Norway and Iceland. 25 projects were supported under the Fund for Bilateral Cooperation. Partnerships typically involved sharing strategies and know-how and best practices to enhance project success. The cooperation was thematically well-balanced, spanning all programme areas and outcomes (citizen participation, advocacy and watchdog role, empowerment of vulnerable groups, civic education and media literacy and capacity building of civil society sector). Overall, 941 people were involved in activities under the Fund.

The Regional Civil Society Initiatives (RCSI) enhanced collaboration among beneficiary state entities. They covered a broad and balanced range of themes, reflecting the diverse challenges and needs of civil society in the region and programme priorities. These included forums and workshops focused on advocacy, rule of law, digital transformation, education, disinformation, and refugee support, as well as initiatives addressing burnout prevention, inclusive education, reproductive rights, and democratic participation. The RCSI fostered cross-border learning, strategic thinking, and collaboration among civil society actors, with a strong emphasis on resilience, inclusion, and innovation.

From 2019 to 2024 we organized 11 international events including 2 long-term initiatives. In total, 220 representatives from 166 organizations participated.

## Conclusion

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The Active Citizens Fund programme achieved measurable progress across a wide spectrum of civil society strengthening objectives. Beyond the numeric indicators, external evaluation findings confirm that the programme significantly contributed to improving internal governance, communication capacity, and stakeholder engagement among supported organizations. For instance, 94% of organizations reported improved external communication competencies, which directly aligns with indicators tracking increased visibility and public outreach. Similarly, evaluation findings show notable capacity gains in areas such as strategic planning, evaluation systems, and human resource management that correspond to institutional strengthening goals. Furthermore, case studies provide vivid examples of long-term impact, from the launch of advocacy platforms to increased civic participation in marginalized communities. This convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence highlights not only the programme's breadth but also its depth of impact, particularly in empowering underrepresented voices and enabling systemic advocacy.

While the Results Framework documents extensive achievements through quantitative indicators, integrating qualitative insights from the evaluation reveals how these outputs translated into systemic shifts. For example, the training of over 58,000 youth in civic rights is supported by case study evidence of increased student-led civic action and participation. Similarly, while numerical data show high participation rates among women and young adults, evaluation feedback illustrates that the programme enabled strategic partnerships and advocacy capacities in these demographics, often for the first time. Such cross-referencing reinforces the narrative of inclusive and sustained change.

The programme prioritised underserved regions and it targeted small and regional CSOs operating outside of the civic society activism centers. In response to Covid-19, we launched a call to strengthen CSOs digital knowledge, skills and wider use of digital technologies and digital tools, which was highly appreciated by the sector.

In addition to funding and capacity-building efforts, the programme maintained a strong communication and outreach strategy. The programme website, social media channels, and newsletters played an essential role in disseminating information, increasing public engagement, and showcasing success stories. The "Stories of Courage" section on the programme webpage was expanded to highlight impactful initiatives, and the use of the hashtag #sodvahu (#withcourage) enhanced the visibility of civic engagement efforts. The culminating event, "Celebration of Courage," held in October 2024 at Prague Castle and attended by Czech President Petr Pavel, highlighted the critical role of civil society in democracy and values, garnering attention from diverse sectors, including diplomats, government officials, and businesses. This flagship event significantly boosted the credibility and visibility of donors and project promoters, propelling their mission to broader recognition.



# Recommendations

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Based on the key findings of the evaluation report, several summary recommendations can be directed toward relevant stakeholders to enhance future programming and support structures.

**For Programme/Fund operators** (OSF Prague, the Committee of Goodwill – Olga Havel Foundation, and the Czech Scouting Institute), it is recommended to continue investing in external communication and visibility tools, as 94% of supported organizations reported increased competence in this area, the highest across all domains. At the same time, there is a clear call to streamline administrative requirements, given that 37% of organizations found the programme more administratively demanding than justified. Additionally, increased support for legal and legislative monitoring is also advisable, as this area was identified as highly important by 91% of organizations yet only 48% reported progress.

**For civil society organizations**, the findings suggest a strong foundation has been laid in strategic planning, human resource management, and evaluation systems, and it is recommended that these gains be consolidated and expanded. Furthermore, organizations should continue to build momentum in fundraising and donor development, especially given the rise in individual donors (from a median of 50 to 250) and growing newsletter subscriber bases.

**For funders and policy makers**, including the EEA/Norway Grants and relevant Czech authorities, it is recommended to prioritize long-term funding models to enhance sustainability, as 89% of organizations believe that programme-induced changes are likely to endure beyond one year. Finally, the value of mid-sized and strategic grants should be acknowledged for their proven ability to enable systemic change, such as legal reforms, advocacy wins, and public policy impacts highlighted in the programme's case studies.

**Overall, the Active Citizens Fund significantly strengthened the role of civil society in the Czech Republic, enabling citizens to participate more effectively in democratic processes and shaping a more inclusive and resilient society.**

## What was achieved in numbers

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- 307 supported projects across all 14 regions of the Czech Republic
- 851 grant applications received (including those rejected)
- 18% of financial support to structurally affected regions
- 40% of all supported projects were aimed at strengthening non-profit organisations for a total amount of € 2,636,006
- 13 international events took place with more than 220 participants from 166 Czech and foreign organisations
- 2.9 million people engaged in improving life in the Czech Republic
- 807,613 people with disadvantages improved their living conditions thanks to implemented projects
- 68% of the organisations cooperated with foreign non-profit organisations during the programme
- 94% of organizations perceived a positive shift in their chosen area of organization development
- 65% of organizations recommended the programme to another organization during their participation



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