

**Civic Alliance - Latvia Opinion paper for the  
Rights, equality, citizenship and values programme (REC, EfC and CERV)  
evaluation report**

**The Association Civic Alliance – Latvia (CAL)** greatly values the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) for its pivotal role in promoting democratic engagement, fundamental rights, and societal resilience. However, CAL has some suggestions regarding a regional approach and financing that would ensure more equal access.

*1. EU values in local level*

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are pivotal in building a strong, independent, and democratic society focused on the common good and social impact, thereby enhancing societal resilience. In times of crisis, CSOs provide essential services, addressing rising social tensions that can lead to increased crime and violence, exacerbating the spread of diseases, and diminishing the protection of vulnerable groups. Recent crises have highlighted how the CSO sector is a vital partner for public administration, informing and educating the public effectively during crises. However, CSOs, especially local and grassroots-level organisations, often struggle to secure the necessary funding to develop and carry out their activities. **Therefore, given the current geopolitical situation, it is imperative to strengthen civil society and promote EU values locally, especially in the Baltic states, to counter Russian disinformation, bolster societal resilience, and support Ukrainian and Belarusian civil society.** Given that applying for and implementing EU funds can be administratively burdensome, we advocate for additional opening calls for proposals under the CERV to select and support intermediaries capable of building the capacities of numerous CSOs especially at local, regional, and national levels in similar circumstances.

*2. Scope*

The European Commission's current framework for supporting projects under the Rights, Equality, Citizenship, and Values programme (REC, EfC, and CERV) mandates that projects cover multiple EU member states, ostensibly to promote EU-wide values. However, this approach may inadvertently sideline important national and regional initiatives that could play crucial roles in upholding and spreading these values within individual countries or smaller collaborative units, such as the Baltic states.

There is a compelling argument to be made for the European Commission **to adapt its criteria to also support projects at the national or regional levels. For instance, initiatives unique to the Baltic region**

**could address specific local issues or cultural contexts that are not as prevalent across the broader EU.**

By enabling such targeted support, the Commission would not only enhance the effectiveness of its programs in strengthening EU values but also foster greater inclusivity and responsiveness to diverse needs within the Union.

Furthermore, the introduction of positive quotas for project support could ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and attention across all member states. This mechanism would guarantee that civil societies in less prominent or smaller countries receive adequate support, thereby promoting a more balanced development of EU values across the Union. Such a policy adjustment would reflect a more nuanced understanding of the European mosaic of cultures and challenges, ensuring that every member state can meaningfully contribute to and benefit from the Union's ideals and objectives.

### *3. Pre-finance*

**Beneficiaries should not be responsible for pre-financing the implementation of CERV projects.** This requirement poses a significant barrier, especially for more vulnerable organizations that lack the financial resources to cover initial costs independently. A preferable alternative would be to consider reducing the advance payment percentage or exploring alternative funding mechanisms that alleviate the financial strain on organizations at the project outset. Ensuring accessible and equitable funding mechanisms is crucial to enabling diverse civil society organizations to participate fully in the CERV programme.

### *4. Co-funding*

**The requirement of co-funding for the CERV programme should be removed or reduced,** as co-funding, particularly for EU networks and re-granting organizations, poses a significant obstacle for some organisations disproportionately. Firstly, co-funding acts as a major impediment and disincentive, especially for framework partners who are already managing the re-granting schemes and bearing full financial responsibility. Secondly, many organizations, particularly those not supported by their national governments, struggle to secure the necessary co-funding. This limitation prevents them from participating on an equal footing with other organizations, thereby undermining the inclusive and equitable nature of the CERV programme. Removing or reducing co-funding requirements would enable a broader range of NGOs to access vital support, thereby strengthening the civil society, fundamental rights, and the rule of law across the EU. Alternatively, at least smaller and medium-sized projects implemented by grassroots CSOs should be exempted from the co-funding requirement or it should be reduced to maximum 5%. In-kind and voluntary work should be recognised as an alternative for own financial contribution. Greater use of lump sums should be applied, and more flexibility as regards the use of the budget should be allowed.