

Elbląg, 22.01.2021

Joint Programming Committee Interreg South Baltic Programme

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Due to the presence of our representative at the consultation meeting of the Interreg South Baltic Program organized by the Euroregion Baltic Association, the Council of NGOs of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship would like to provide its comments on the future shape of the South Baltic Interreg Program, which take into account the issues important for the future of non-governmental organizations in the region.

The Council of Non-Governmental Organizations of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship (ROPWWM) was established in 2004 and is the only cross-industry representation of non-governmental organizations in the voivodship. It has to date 37 collective members - federations, networks, districts representatives and organizations with a regional dimension. In total, the Council represents over 1,200 non-governmental organizations from our voivodeship.

As ROPWWM, we are regularly screening the situation of the third sector in our voivodeship. We know very well their needs and problems. The key issues faced by non-governmental organizations are as follow:

- Insufficient funds for carrying out day-to-day activities (ignorance of financing sources, insufficient use of fundraising, missing the opportunities of donating 1% scheme of tax income dedicated to the NGO's and running commercial activities);
- Insufficient funds to strengthen the potential of the organizations (e.g. for training, legal services, accounting, promotion, operating costs);
- Insufficient resources for a financial contribution to projects;
- Shortage of staff and inappropriate infrastructure;
- Insufficient cooperation with the local governments;
- Disinformation about the third sector, low social awareness and small coverage in the media;

- Lack of developed documents necessary for running activities and strategic planning;
- Insufficient number of leaders in non-governmental organizations and professional burnout of leaders;
- Low activity of citizens, reluctance to engage in the activities run by NGO's, lack of people ready to get involved;
- Small number of cross-sectoral and international partnerships;
- Insufficient own assets of NGOs, low diversification of income, and thus heavy dependence from state and local government subsidies;
- A more difficult financial situation of rural organizations operating from small centres;
- Difficulties in using modern ICT tools, social media, lack of access to the Internet, inability to search for essential information;
- Small number of reliable partnerships, NGO networks, coalitions and lobbying activities in favour of the third sector.

In connection with the above-diagnosed problems, we would like to present our ideas and postulates regarding the shape of the future South Baltic Interreg Program for 2021-2027:

1. We call for the withdrawal of the required own contribution to projects submitted by NGOs. This measure would matter in the current, extremely difficult financial situation related to the pandemic. A good example of withdrawal of the required financial and in-kind contributions is the Active Citizens Fund Program, financed by the EEA and Norway Grants' Programmes.
2. We apply for introducing extra evaluation criteria under the Program intended for cross-sectoral partnerships between institutions and the third sector;
3. We consider that it will be highly important to award extra scores for the projects declaring the use of social clauses or the obligation to apply them;
4. We call for the possibility of using lump sums in projects, as it is the case of other programs such as Regional Operational Funds;
5. We consider as an important step to include in the Program schedule a separate scheme dedicated to local grant operators to provide support for smaller and less experienced organizations and to enable them to use the funds under simpler and less burdensome procedures;

6. We appeal for funds dedicated to the institutional development of NGO's and supporting the access to the databases for transnational partners helping find project partners;

7. We request for new eligible areas important for the development of the region related to a circular economy, environmental protection, participatory management, e-learning tools.

We are aware that only part of the presented concepts is feasible in a very near future. We gathered them to communicate the needs and problems of organizations in the region. We hope that at least some of the above-mentioned ideas will be implemented.

Yours faithfully

Arkadiusz Jachimowicz

Chairman of the ROPWWM