

OPEN CALL FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS (#1)



PLATO

Protecting Democracy, Human Rights and
the Rule of Law through an Open Civic Space



Co-funded by:



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“Protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law through an open civic space” (PLATO)
Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)

HISTORY OF CHANGES			
Version	Publication Date	Change	Page
1.0	10/03/2025	Initial Version	
2.0	28/04/2025	Adjustments to the definition of a small organization	
		Clarifications concerning the available funding rate for small organizations	
3.0	04/06/2025	Clarifications concerning the distribution of funding between the 2 open Calls	3 & 11

CALL FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS (#1)

“Empower civil society to promote the rule of law, participative democracy and good governance, and to defend civic space and media freedom”

The Bodossaki Foundation, in consortium with the NGO Support Centre, announces the 1st open call for project proposals for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Greece and the Republic of Cyprus for funding under the “Protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law through an open civic space” (PLATO) programme. The aim of the PLATO programme is to protect, promote and raise awareness of EU rights & values by financially supporting Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Greece and the Republic of Cyprus as well as by enhancing their knowledge, capacities, and sustainability. The programme also offers a comprehensive capacity-building and professional support scheme, tailored to the needs of CSOs in both countries, aiming to promote their organizational development and sustainability.

PLATO is co-funded by the European Union, through the Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values (CERV) programme, and by the Bodossaki Foundation and NGO Support Centre, with the total grant amounting to €3.1 million.

Background

The European Union (EU) was founded on core values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and respect for fundamental rights which remain widely cherished by European citizens¹. These values and rights are enshrined in the EU's founding treaties, including [the Treaty on European Union \(TEU\)](#), the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights \(the Charter\)](#) as well as in secondary legislation and case law.

¹ European Union, Eurobarometer, EP Spring 2023 Survey: Democracy in action - One year before the European elections, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3093>



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Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are recognized as instrumental in promoting and upholding these values by advocating for human rights, ensuring government accountability, and engaging citizens in democratic processes². They serve as a crucial bridge between institutions and the public, upholding the rule of law, amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and fostering civic participation.

Objective and priorities

The objective of the 1st open call **“Empower civil society to promote the rule of law, participative democracy and good governance, and to defend civic space and media freedom”** is to strengthen the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in upholding democratic values, ensuring institutional accountability and reinforce media freedom and pluralism by countering disinformation, and promoting an open civic space where civil society can operate without restrictions.

Specifically, the 1st Open Call focuses on the following three (3) key **priorities**/outcomes:

- **Promotion of the rule of law**

Civil society has an important role to play in contributing to the checks and balances that uphold the rule of law. Projects under this priority will support CSOs in promoting the rule of law, advocating judicial independence, tackling corruption, and increasing public awareness of the importance of a fair legal system. Initiatives may include legal monitoring, strategic litigation, and policy advocacy to enhance institutional accountability and transparency.

- **Promotion of participatory and deliberative democracy and good governance**

Ensuring inclusive and participatory governance is vital for a healthy democracy. Projects under this priority will promote dialogue between civil society and authorities and the involvement of civil society in decision-making, to contribute to inclusive, participatory and deliberative democratic and policy-making processes, transparency and good governance.

- **Promotion of an open civic space, media freedom and media pluralism**

An open civil space that supports an enabling environment for civil society actors and media freedom are both essential to protect EU rights and values. Under this priority, CSOs will be supported to implement projects aimed at promoting the civic space for civil society actors to operate, and/or to safeguard media pluralism and media freedom.

Each organization can submit only one (1) application for only one (1) out of the two (2) calls, choosing one (1) out of the three (3) priority areas, either as a lead applicant or as a partner (in the case of large grants). Comprehensive details on the application process can be found in the ['Application Guidelines.'](#)

The total funding available under this open call is €1,128,100, with €923,500 allocated for Greece and €204,600 for the Republic of Cyprus. At least 30% of the open call's total funding

² E.g. Council conclusions on the role of civic space in promoting and protection fundamental rights in the EU, EC. In December 2022, the Commission adopted its 2022 Annual report on the application of the Charter, dedicated to the role of civil society organizations and human rights defenders in upholding fundamental rights, COM (2022)716 final; COM (2021) 819 final



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will be reserved for small organisations³ to implement small grants. In the event of a low number of eligible applications or underutilisation of funds under one Call, the Selection Committee may decide to reallocate the corresponding unutilised budget to the other Call. Similarly, if an insufficient number of applications are submitted by small organisations, the corresponding funds may be reallocated to large-scale grant projects, following the ranking list of applications received. The reasons for any such readjustments will have to be clearly justified and documented in the Selection Committee minutes.

Eligible Types of Activities – Work Packages

General Specifications

In the application, the activities of the proposed project must be organized in Work Packages. Each Work Package must include the project activities, as well as the deliverables that correspond to these activities. Under this call, **there are three (3) predefined Work Packages**, as described below:

Work Package 1:	Project management
Work Package 2*:	Empower civil society to promote the rule of law, participative democracy, good governance, and to defend civic space and media freedom
Work Package 3*:	Communication/Dissemination plan

***For Work Packages 2 and 3 there are predefined types of activities which are listed below:**

Work Package 2: Empower civil society to promote the rule of law, participative democracy, good governance, and to defend civic space and media freedom

The predefined **types of** activities under Work Package 2 are as follows:

- **Awareness-raising activities**, e.g.: on democracy, the rule of law, the importance of a fair legal system, active citizenship, open dialogue, the importance of and challenges to media freedom, and good governance and outreach to the general public and key actors such as policy and law makers, legal professionals and judiciary.
- **Training/capacity building activities**, e.g. To empower CSOs to contribute to the rule of law mechanism, to implement watchdog and monitoring activities, to promote and establish dialogue with authorities, to conduct research and advocacy activities.
- **Organization of civic platforms and civic dialogues**, e.g. on themes related to democracy, active citizenship, open dialogue, open civic space, media freedom, and good governance.
- **Advocacy activities**, aiming to influence policy and contribute to decision-making processes (at a national, regional or local level), including revision/update/adoption of policies and legislation, e.g. relating to legal reforms, ensuring an open civic space, promoting journalists' rights, media pluralism and the role of independent media.
- **Monitoring, watchdog, and reporting activities and the promotion of the implementation of adopted laws**, e.g. on themes related to the rule of law, anti-

³ A small CSO, for the purposes of this programme, is defined as one whose average turnover over the past two years does not exceed €40,000.

corruption, democracy, good governance, active citizenship, open dialogue, open civic space, and media freedom.

- **Research and analysis** aimed at informing policymaking at EU and national level, on themes related to the call priorities.
- **Activities that support learning and exchange** related to the call priorities with CSOs in other EU countries.

The **indicators** related to the aforementioned activities for this open call are as follows:

- No. of people engaged in CSOs' activities (including in training/ capacity building/ awareness raising/ civic platforms & dialogue activities)
- No. of people reached by awareness raising campaigns & activities
- No. of awareness raising activities/ campaigns
- No. of monitoring and advocacy activities
- No. of publications
- No. of national policies or laws influenced
- No. of mutual learning and exchange activities with other EU countries

Work Package 3 – Communication/Dissemination Plan:

The **predefined** project activities under Work Package 3 are as follows:

1. Project Communications Activities
2. Presence (promotion) on communications channels

Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Mainstreaming

Gender equality and non-discrimination mainstreaming is a core horizontal priority of the PLATO programme. All proposed projects under this Open Call should integrate an inclusive approach that recognizes and addresses systemic inequalities and power imbalances affecting individuals based on their social identities. These intersecting factors often contribute to marginalization and vulnerability, making it essential for initiatives to actively promote equal rights, opportunities, and participation. Applicants are expected to embed gender equality and non-discrimination principles throughout their project design, implementation, and evaluation, ensuring that all activities foster inclusivity, challenge biases, and contribute to a more equitable and just society.

Child Protection Policy

According to the European Commission Directives, funded organizations that will implement activities involving direct contact with children are required to have a Child Protection Policy. Therefore, at the application stage, any organization (both the lead applicant and the partner, if applicable) proposing projects that include activities involving direct contact with children must submit their current Child Protection Policy.

CSOs (both the lead applicants and any partners) selected for funding that their project will include activities involving direct contact with children should be guided in their work and philosophy by the best interests of the child, do no harm and respect the rights of the child as outlined in European and international legislation, including [the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).



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More information on what a Child Protection Policy should include will be available in the "Application Guidelines".

Eligible Lead Applicants and Eligible Partners

Eligible lead applicants and partners are **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** with legal status in Greece and the Republic of Cyprus that fall under the following definition:

'A civil society organization is an organizational structure which serves the general interest through democratic processes, and which plays the role of mediator between public authorities and citizens, including all non-state, non-profit, independent structures, which oppose all forms of violence and promote and protect the fundamental rights and values on the basis of which the EU was founded'⁴.

Specifically for **Greece**, eligible lead applicants and partners are the following: **(i)** Civil Society Organisations, as defined in the relevant Greek Law 4873/2021, i.e. associations (in Greek: "σωματεία/σύλλογοι") and civil non-profit companies (in Greek: "αστικές μη κερδοσκοπικές εταιρείες"), and **(ii)** public benefit foundations provided under Greek Law 4182/2013 as in force from time to time.

Specifically for the **Republic of Cyprus**, eligible lead applicants and partners are Civil Society organisations based in the Republic of Cyprus and established in accordance with the relevant Law 104(I)/2017 and its amendments (non-profit associations, foundations, federations and/or associations), the Companies Law (Cap. 113) (for non-profit companies), the Charitable Foundations Law (Cap. 41), and non-governmental, non-profit organisations that have been established by special law.

Eligible lead applicants and partners (if applicable) should also be independent of local, regional and national governments, other (including public) authorities and political parties.

In addition, the funded projects must not be of a religious, political or trade union/commercial nature.

In addition, to be eligible, lead applicants and partners must:

- be based in Greece for applications received in Greece and in the Republic of Cyprus for applications received in the Republic of Cyprus.
- be a Civil Society Organization that falls within the above definition and criteria.
- have been in operation for at least twelve (12) months since their legal establishment before the deadline for submission of applications.
- have the ability to submit financial data for at least a period of twelve (12) months (calendar year).
- be in no conflict of interest (even potential conflict of interest) due to personal, family, financial, political, professional or other relationships between the members, partners, members of the management bodies, legal representatives, employees and associates in general of the lead applicant and its partner. Indicatively but not exhaustively, the participation of the lead applicant in the partner and *vice versa* as well as participation of a person in the management body of both the lead applicant and the partner constitute cases of conflict of interest.

Natural persons are not eligible.

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/civil-society-organisation.htm>.



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Eligible lead applicants and partners (if applicable) must respect the principles of democratic and human rights and the fundamental rights and values on which the EU is founded. In addition, eligible applicants and partners (if applicable) must not promote, approve or support in their projects, communication strategies or public messages of any kind of physical or psychological violence, including against women, children and other groups at risk.

Projects must also comply with the highest ethical standards, and any other applicable EU, international and national law, including the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Applications for large grants can involve one (1) lead applicant or one (1) lead applicant and only one (1) partner. The project partner (if any) must share a common goal and actively contribute towards achieving the project objective(s), as defined in the proposal. The role and specific obligations undertaken by the partner must be clearly defined and justified in the project proposal.

For more information on the partnership framework as well as the eligibility criteria please consult the "Application Guidelines".

Size of Grants

The 1st Open Call for Project Proposals offers two types of grants: **small and large**.

The grant amount for **small grant** projects ranges from a minimum of **€20,000** to a maximum of **€30,000** per project. For **large grant** projects, the funding ranges from **€30,001** to a maximum of **€60,000** per project.

Applications for **large grants** may be submitted by either **a single lead applicant alone or a lead applicant with one partner organization**. Applications for **small grant** projects must be submitted by a **single small organization⁵ without a partner**.

The budget will include and account for costs from both the lead applicant and the partner (if applicable). Applicants must use the **budget template** provided on the programme's webpage.

Grants for the selected projects will be issued as **lump sums**, in accordance with the European Commission's procedures and guidelines. This approach aims to **reduce the administrative burden and simplify project management**. Additional details can be found in the "Application Guidelines".

Duration of Projects

For **small grant projects**, the implementation period must be between **10 and 12 months**. An extension of up to **two (2) months** for approved projects may be granted only **in exceptional circumstances**, subject to approval by the Project Management Team. This extension will not increase the grant amount awarded.

For **large grant projects**, the implementation period must be between **12 and 14 months**. An extension of up to **one (1) month** for approved projects may be granted only **in exceptional**

⁵ A small CSO, for the purposes of this programme, is defined as one whose average turnover over the past two years does not exceed €40,000.



circumstances, subject to approval by the Project Management Team. This extension will not increase the grant amount awarded.

The project duration, including start and end dates, will be specified in the grant agreement for each project. Projects are expected to commence between **January-February 2026**.

Location of Projects

All project activities must take place in Greece for applications from Greece and in the Republic of Cyprus⁶ for applications from the Republic of Cyprus, with the exception of activities that support learning and exchange with CSOs in other EU countries, which may also take place in other EU Member States.

Deadline for application submission

Applications must be submitted online via the [Bodossaki Foundation's Programme Portal](#) by the application submission deadline of **17.00 local time on 12th June 2025**.

How to apply

In order to submit an application for the 'Protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law through an open civic space' programme, organizations will need to create an account at the [Bodossaki Foundation's Programmes Portal](#). After selecting Sign Up, the person creating the account will be asked to fill in his/her full name (First Name, Surname), an email address (Email) and a password in order to register on the Programmes Portal.

Once the creation of the account is completed, organizations can click on the 'Programmes' option and from the available programmes, select 'Protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law through an open civic space' and then 'Create Application'.

Organizations that already have an account on the Bodossaki Foundation's Program Portal do not need to repeat the registration process. They can log in using their existing username and password and select the program "Protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law through an open civic space."

Evaluation process and criteria

During **phase one** of the evaluation each project application will be checked to comply with the **administrative criteria and the eligibility criteria** of the application.

Organizations will have five (5) working days to submit any supporting documents that they may not have submitted, following a relevant request from the Bodossaki Foundation (Greece) or the NGO Support Centre (Republic of Cyprus). Supporting documents include financial and legal documentation, the Declaration of honor (of the lead applicant and its partner, if any) and the Child Protection Policy (for projects whose activities have direct contact with children). A detailed list of the supporting documents can be found in the 'Guidelines for Applicants'.

⁶ Areas of the Republic of Cyprus under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.



The project budget is not considered a supporting document but a core document and therefore, in cases of missing budget form, applications will be automatically rejected, and organizations will not have the opportunity to submit it within five (5) working days.

The templates of the budget form and the Declaration of honor will be available on the programme webpage.

Organisations whose applications are rejected in phase one for not complying with the **administrative and eligibility criteria of application** are informed directly via email and have the right to appeal within five (5) working days as of their notification with such email. The right of appeal may be exercised **only** once at this phase. The appeal must be fully justified and submitted electronically to the email addresses given in the Contact Information section, no later than 17:00 local time on the fifth and last day of the deadline.

Appeals will be examined by the Appeals Committee and the organizations will be informed of its decision within ten (10) working days after the deadline for submitting the appeal. The decision on the appeal is irrevocable.

In phase two, each project application that meets the **administrative and eligibility of application criteria** shall be scored by two (2) impartial evaluators, appointed by the Consortium members. At least one (1) of them will be independent (external) of the Bodossaki Foundation and the NGO Support Centre and will have been selected through an open call procedure. Evaluators will be required to sign a declaration of no conflict of interest in relation to the organizations whose applications they will be asked to evaluate.

The evaluators will individually and independently evaluate the project application according to the Evaluation Criteria set out below. The average score of the two (2) evaluations will be taken into account for the evaluation of the application. For further consideration of the application, a minimum average score of sixty (60) points is required.

If the difference between the scores is greater than 30% of the higher score, the application will be evaluated by a third evaluator appointed by the Bodossaki Foundation and the NGO Support Centre, who will be independent of both institutions.

In such a case, the average of the two (2) closest scores will be the final average score and will be taken into account for the ranking of the application. Applications with a minimum score of sixty (60) points will be ranked according to their score, without any change in the order of ranking.

The shortlisted applications and at least an additional 10% of the shortlisted applications will be checked for the legal eligibility of the lead applicants and partners as described in the previous section.

Organizations whose applications are rejected due to non-compliance with the legal eligibility criteria of the lead applicant and the partner (if applicable) will be informed by email and will have the right to lodge an appeal within five (5) working days from the date of notification. The right to appeal may be exercised only once at this phase.

The appeal must be fully justified and submitted electronically to the email addresses given in the Contact Information section, no later than 17:00 local time on the fifth and last day of the deadline.



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Appeals will be examined by the Appeals Committee and the organisations will be informed of its decision within ten (10) working days as of the deadline for submitting the appeal. The decision on the appeal is irrevocable.

The application evaluation criteria and the maximum score per criterion are as follows:

Evaluation Criteria	Maximum score
1. Capacity and relevance of the applicant and the partner (if applicable) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Financial Capacity</i> <i>Organisational Skills & Expertise</i> <i>Demonstrated Relevant Experience</i> 	20
2. Relevance and justification of the activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The described aims, objectives, activities, deliverables and results of the proposed activity are relevant to the goals and priorities of the Open Call and of each priority.</i> <i>The proposed activity is fully justified as necessary and beneficial to the proposed target groups.</i> 	25
3. Quality, impact and sustainability of the proposed activities - taking into consideration gender equality & non-discrimination mainstreaming	25
4. Involvement of grassroots⁷/ small⁸/ rural-based⁹ CSO* (*for small grants – which are reserved for small CSOs - only ‘Involvement of grassroots or rural-based CSOs’ will be assessed)	5
5. European Collaboration	5
6. Value for money (<i>based on submitted project budget</i>)	20
OVERALL RATING	100

The Selection Committee will examine the shortlist of applications based on the scores awarded and the evaluators’ comments. The Selection Committee may modify the ranking only in justified cases if this is necessary for the achievement of the goals of the project.

⁷ A grassroots CSO for the purposes of this programme is a non-governmental organization that originates and operates at the local level, usually driven by community members who are passionate about a particular cause or issue. These organizations often work to address social, economic, and environmental problems within their own communities, without the influence or support of larger organizations or governments. They are typically formed by volunteers who are directly impacted by the issues they seek to address, and they rely heavily on the participation and support of the community to achieve their goals. They may focus on a wide range of issues, such as poverty, education, health, environment, human rights, and community development. They often use community mobilization and empowerment strategies to bring about change, and they may engage in advocacy and public education to raise awareness about their cause.

⁸ A small CSO, for the purposes of this programme, is defined as one whose average turnover over the past two years does not exceed €40,000.

⁹ In Greece, all areas are considered rural and remote areas, except all the municipalities of the prefecture of Attica (except the islands) and all the municipalities of the prefecture of Thessaloniki. In the Republic of Cyprus, rural areas are considered all areas except the municipalities of the cities of Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca.



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The Selection Committee will ensure that at least 30% of the call budget will be reserved for small organizations to implement small grant projects. In the event of a low number of eligible applications or underutilisation of funds under one Call, the Selection Committee may decide to reallocate the corresponding unutilised budget to the other Call. Similarly, if an insufficient number of applications are submitted by small organisations, the corresponding funds may be reallocated to large-scale grant projects, following the ranking list of applications received. The reasons for any such readjustments will have to be clearly justified and documented in the Selection Committee minutes.

Moreover, the Selection Committee will also determine the exact amount of financial support for each third party, which will be based on the submitted project budget, with adjustments only made in case any proposed activities are deemed by the evaluators and/or the Selection Committee to be ineligible or over-budgeted. In the last case, the Bodossaki Foundation/NGO Support Centre will request clarifications from the organizations.

The final decision will be communicated directly to the organizations and the approved projects will be published on the programme website within four (4) months of the deadline for submission of applications.

Organizations will have the right to request feedback on their applications following a relevant announcement.

Contact Information

Questions may be submitted no later than ten (10) working days before the deadline for the submission of project proposals, indicating in the subject line of the email the open call under which you are applying.

The questions must be sent by email to the address below:

- helpdesk@bodossaki.gr (for applicants in Greece)
- helpdesk@ngo-sc.org (for applicants in the Republic of Cyprus)

The answers will be posted on the 'Frequently Asked Questions' form on [the programme webpage](#). No individual answers will be given. Organizations are therefore encouraged to consult the webpage regularly.

Questions relating to the completion of the application form can be submitted through the Bodossaki Foundation's Programmes Portal in the relevant section "Contact a Programme Representative", after the organization has created an account on the Portal.

More information on this open call is also available at the [EU Funding and Tenders Portal](#).

Complaint Mechanism

All complaints related to the implementation of the PLATO Project will be directed to and processed by the Project's **Complaints Committee**. The Complaints Committee is responsible for the processing and deciding on complaints about suspected non-compliance with the principles of good governance in relation to the implementation of the programme.



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The Complaints Committee will examine complaints received either directly via the dedicated email account cerv-complaints@bodossaki.gr or indirectly by the European Commission - European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

The Complaints Committee will make a decision within thirty (30) days from the submission of the complaint.

To ensure transparency and accountability, in cases of fraud, it is possible to report cases of fraud to the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) [via the programme webpage](#). More information on how to file a complaint through OLAF can be found [here](#).

Personal Data Protection

Regarding the data protection policy applied in the context of the implementation of the programme, please consult the general policy - information of the Bodossaki Foundation available [here](#), the general policy - notice of the NGO Support Centre [here](#) and the specific information on the policy applied by the Bodossaki Foundation and the NGO Support Centre available [here](#).

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