Build Bridges not Walls: Reinvigorating Civil society in Belarus

External Actions of the European Union

NEAR-TS/2019/413-467

Guidelines for grant applicants

Version 2023-10-31

ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
GG	Grassroots Group
IFRS	International Financial Reporting Standards
PME	Planning Monitoring Evaluation
TP	Third Party

Contents

1.   Introduction

The following guidelines for Grant Applicants are created to support Belarusian civil society in application process for the sub-granting component of the EU-funded action, called "Build Bridges not Walls: Reinvigorating Civil society in Belarus", taking place from 2021 to 2024. The sub-granting component seeks to support communities and local initiatives to implement strategic activities, promote and support participation in decision-making processes, and cooperate with other local initiatives as part of a shared vision on the ground. Moreover, it also seeks to support collaborations between on the ground initiatives and NGO professionals, in order to have an impact on the policy level in Belarus.

1.1   General objectives and specific goals of the Project

The Project´s Overall (Impact) and Specific (Outcome) objectives correspond to the global objective of the call for proposals which is to promote capacity development of local Civil Society in Belarus in promoting transparent and participatory governance, democratic reforms, and human rights and in ensuring inclusive socio-economic development. The Project addresses Lot 2 of the call. The proposed actions contribute to "Promotion of the provision of the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP), as well as to supporting to pro-democracy actors with a view to enhancing participatory and representative democracy, transparency and accountability". The action also envisions support to human rights defenders at risk, especially in the case of more controversial gender-related questions.

Impact (Overall objective): Rights Holders in Belarus are able to affect decision-making processes and duty bearers' practices through a reinvigorated and more representative Civil Society.

Outcome (s) (Specific objective(s)): Civil Society, represented by grassroots groups (GGs) in collaboration with CSOs and their networks, channel issues affecting rights holders into decision making processes thus making it more participatory and inclusive.

Outputs:

1. Empowerment phase. Unaffiliated rights holders are empowered to develop existing and initiate new GGs.
2. Activation phase. GGs are active in reaching out to communities, organizing and implementing actions to address local issues affecting rights holders.
3. Engagement phase. Linkages between GGs and CSOs are created through networking, mentoring and peer-based knowledge sharing.
4. Collaboration phase. GGs collaborate with CSOs in joint actions to affect change in policy and influence decision-making processes.

2.   Conditions for proposals

These guidelines set out the rules for the submission and selection of the actions financed under this call, in conformity with the practical guide, which is applicable to the present call (available on the internet at this address https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/ExactExternalWiki/ePRAG.

## 2.1   Financial allocation provided by the contracting authority

The overall indicative amount made available under this call for proposals is EUR 400,000. ForumCiv reserves the right not to award all available funds.

The grant scheme is structured as follows:

Type of support	Amount	Type of Partner	Type of Activities (fixed list)
Seed grants	Up to EUR 10,000	Civic leaders and activists, community mobilisers, unregistered local and regional initiatives, who have gone through Pick'n'Choose course and/or Mentoring programme (part of the Output 1 of the current Project)	Activities in the country, on the ground, involving local communities, including activities such as: • participatory needs assessments • civic mobilization into rights-based actions on any locally significant issues, such as collective discussions, petition writing and collecting signatures, local advocacy campaigns community development. • target group engagement into rights-based actions, including by the means of arts and culture
Small grants	Up to EUR 20,000	New and existing Belarusian initiatives and organizations, often registered as non-profit seeking entities outside Belarus	Collaborative activities focused on: • grassroots engagement • rights advocacy • awareness raising of actions and decisions of duty bearers. • civic response to the actions and decisions of duty bearers • when possible, increased citizen participation in the local and regional decision-making

2.2 Procedures and criteria for selecting partners and activities

The steps to select and assess partners and activities
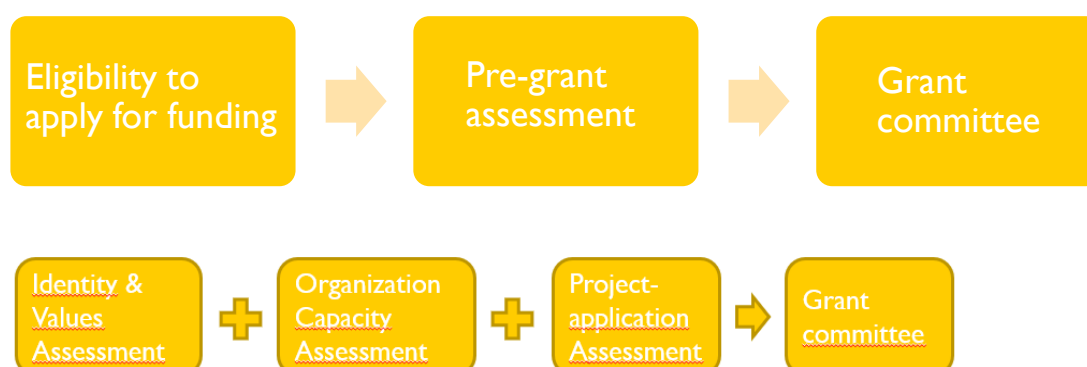
2.2.1 Eligibility to apply for funding

Identity & values assessment

All new applicants must have their eligibility to apply for funding assessed. This assessment includes an identity & values assessment which shall ensure that the applicant's activities, purpose, and aim do not deny or in any way contradict basic values of democracy, respect for the equal value of all people and that they reinforce non-discrimination based on all human rights, by providing enough information and transparency about their work and activities.

This assessment is based on the review of verifiable information that may include official documents and other information taken from external official communication channels (such as web page, official social media accounts of the organization or official individual accounts of acting key representatives, etc.), articles, photos, videos etc. It may also include individual or group on-line interviews or physical visits by ForumCiv.

If an applicant does not have official documents, ForumCiv will require at least two external referees who will be contacted and asked to provide a written reference attesting to the values of the applicant as well as their administrative, managemental, and thematic capacities.

The identity & values assessment is a crucial screening of an applicant to minimize the risk of supporting partners that in any way act against ForumCiv's values.

For any new or unknown applicant, for example newly established ones, or actors that are working in a new or relatively unfamiliar context to ForumCiv, ForumCiv will always conduct an individual or group online interview and will require to provide at least two referees, who will be contacted and asked to provide a written reference attesting to the individual values of the key people, and the standing of the group. Physical visits can also be made.

If a partner or any partner in subsequent step conducts or acts in a way that violates the individual´s fundamental freedom and rights, discriminate or violates the principle of the equal value of all people or uses violence, force, or threats of any kind, ForumCiv has the right to reject their eligibility to apply funds.

ForumCiv cannot collaborate with any partner or any of its representatives that:

1. Exercise violence, force or threats or any other unreasonable way violate the individual´s fundamental freedom and rights
2. Criminate or otherwise violates the principle of the equal value of all people
3. Justify, promote or call for action of the behaviors and/or activities stated in 1 or 2
4. Publicly or privately whitewash the current regime, its representatives, including ideologists, and/or the repressions it carries out
5. Are suspected of, or have a proof of participating in corruption schemes and money laundering activities
6. Has a track record of mismanagement of funds, underreporting on activities and grants received

If any of these actions or behaviors from a partner and its representatives would occur when they have already been granted from ForumCiv, ForumCiv has the right to end the collaboration and request for refund, and this is established in the agreement between ForumCiv and the partner.

The identity & values assessment is not a complete assessment of the partner´s capacity. Nonetheless, in this stage ForumCiv can assess what type(s) of project types that the partner is eligible to apply for. The assessment of what project types that the partner is eligible to apply for should be shared with the partner before submission of any application proposal. This assessment will provide an indication for

the partner and for the one(s) doing the more comprehensive evaluation during the capacity assessment of the partner and proposal.

The programme can choose to decide whether a partner is eligible to apply for several project types, or only one, depending on the aim of the grant support and type of partner and concept note (when applicable). The decision about eligibility to apply for funding is taken by the Programme manager. Decision of the project type, including the granted amount, is made by the Grant Committee (see Decision making below).

Capacity assessment

The capacity assessment provides information of findings of strengths and weaknesses that are essential to include in the risk and partnership assessment. Findings related to shortcomings in the partner capacity should be addressed and the partner assessment will provide guiding in actions needed to be taken by either the partner or ForumCiv. ForumCiv´s assessment can, if relevant and applicable, include suggestions of actions to strengthen the capacities of our partners. The partner assessment has two main purposes:

• **Analysis of risk and control**: the assessment provides ForumCiv with information about what possible risks exist in granting funds to the partner, e.g., the administrative and financial capacity to manage the funds, including the internal control system and their ability to comply with our agreement and requirements.

• **Analysis of agents of change:** the assessment should provide information about the identity of the partner to ensure that they work according to democratic and non- discrimination values. The partner should also be assessed based on their overall capacities, e.g., contextual and/or thematic capacity, networks etc.

This systematic way to assess the partners also enables the programme to extract information to plan and develop capacity development initiatives or other actions that needs to be taken to follow-up the partner´s capacity. It is recommended to include conditions and recommendations in the decision of the grant on how to support and encourage the partner in strengthening of their capacities so it can be followed up by ForumCiv.

The capacity assessment includes available and verifiable information of the applicant's/partner's management systems and documented experience of handling funds as well as execution of resources. This information may have already been submitted by the organization and may be expanded by additional requests as relevant. This systematic way to assess the partners also enables the programme to extract information to plan and develop capacity development initiatives or other actions that needs to be taken to follow-up the partner´s capacity. It is recommended to include conditions and recommendations in the decision of the grant on how to support and encourage the partner in strengthening of their capacities so it can be followed up by ForumCiv.

The Capacity assessment is based on four types of information:

1. Information gathered as a part of eligibility assessment;
2. Information gathered from the application, where applicant is asked to describe their, PME-system and thematic expertise;
3. On a follow up interview with the relevant person or people in the organization or initiative, held to clarify the description of financial and administrative system and management in the application;

4. Any additional documents that the applicant can provide, including financial statements, certifications from other donors, financial manual, PME-manual, anticorruption policy, etc.

And includes four pillars or areas of assessment, see information box below:

Identity
- Contact details
- Statues, policy or other source to verify their identity and values
- External documentation and/or communication that states their vision, mission and/or strategy

Governance and project management
- Leadership, responsibility and delegation principles
- System to do planning, monitoring and evaluation, including how the partner work with gender equality, conflict sensitivity, environment and climate change
- Equipment, material and human resources to implement projects

Financial and administrative capacity
- Internal control
- Staff conditions
- Accounting, bank account and financial statement
- Audit
- Budget and reporting
- Financial and administrative guidelines and manuals

Networks and thematic expertise
- Thematic Expertise and/or special competence to understand their added value in the partnership
- Networking and Advocacy with other stakeholders

Assessment of activists and non-formal actors

The assessment of single activists and community mobilizers is limited to the eligibility for funding assessment, see above. For non-registered groups and yard communities the eligibility for funding assessment is complemented by a Feasibility and risk assessment related to the project application (see project application assessment below). Instead of formal documents, a set of questions are asked to be answered in the application related to vision, decision-making, financial management and anti-corruption followed by an interview with the non-registered group to provide necessary information about the capacity in a systematic way.

2.2.2   Pre-grant assessment

The pre-grant assessment crosscuts information about the applicant/partner and the project application by evaluating both the capacity of the applicant/partner and the proposal itself. The written assessment and decision include both information about the applicant's/partner's capacity and the proposal to be

able to have a holistic understanding of the proposal's relevance and contribution to ForumCiv's overall Theory of change as well as the Programme- or project specific objectives and results framework.

Project application assessment

ForumCiv applies the assessment criteria based on international standards, e.g., OECDs evaluation criteria[1] and the Istanbul principles for CSO development effectiveness[2], and the overarching guiding principles and perspectives of ForumCiv. The standard assessment criteria that ForumCiv is using are Relevance; Efficiency; Effectiveness; Feasibility and Risk; Impact; Sustainability; integration and mainstreaming of the Rights Based Approach, Gender Equality, Environment and Climate Justice, Conflict sensitivity; Partnership and Mutual Learning. Below is a description of the criteria, principles, and perspectives and how they are applied when we quality assure applications and reports from our partners:

Relevance
- Assess the relevance in relation to the demands and needs from the target group, the context and if it is within the frame of the programme that ForumCiv is implementing.
- Assess if there has been an active and meaningful participation of those involved, including opportunities for the target group(s) involved to influence the formulation of problems, planning, implementing and follow-up. Assess if the project responds to needs and constraints of the direct target groups and final target group.
- Assess if there is a good understanding of the role of right-holders and duty-bearers and how they can influence towards the problem/issue that the project wants to address. Assess if the partner and/or project will work/worked towards duty-bearers and other relevant stakeholders. If so, explain how (e.g. methods, strategies etc.).
- Assess possible synergies and interlinkages between the project and other projects carried out within the same programme to see if there is any added value; e.g. specific competence, methodology or geographically location that can contribute to diversity and/or increase impact in relation to other projects.

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[1] Evaluation Criteria - OECD
[2] Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness - CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness

Efficiency

- Assess if the input (funds, expertise, resources, time etc.) to reach the outputs, outcomes and impacts, are used in the most cost-effective way possible, as compared to feasible alternatives in the context. Assess if the timeframe is/has been reasonably adjusted to the demands of the evolving context.
- Check if the partner receives funds from other donors and/or from another programme within ForumCiv. If so, check and assess the level coordination and harmonization within and between ForumCiv and other donors in order to align the requirements, including result management to be able to maximise the contribution from ForumCiv.

Effectiveness

- Assess the logic, strategies and methodology proposed in the application. Are the inputs (resources, activities, methods etc.) directly related and adequate to achieve the outputs and outcomes ("the logic")?
- Assess and check previous collaborations with the partner. Is the project a continuation of a previous one, and are there any learning related to strategy that needs to be revised?

Feasibility and risk

- Assess whether the partner has previous knowledge and experience related to the initiative they want to develop. Assess if the partner has the governance, programmatic, financial and administrative capacity to manage the funds in a transparent way (check the eligibility and pre-grant assessment)?
- Assess the risk analysis and risk management of the partner. Assess if the partner has the capacity and strategies to mitigate any potential risks.
- Assess if the project has been designed and/or been implemented in a conflict sensitive manner (do-no-harm approach).

Impact

- Assess the actual and potential long-term impact and changes (directly or indirectly, intended or unintended) that the partner and project can have in the specific context.
- Analyse if there are significant and potentially transformative effects of the projects on social, environmental and economic level that goes beyond the immediate outputs and outcomes, such as indirect, secondary and potential consequences of the project.

Sustainability

- Assess if and how the project and other support given by ForumCiv (e.g. capacity development) will contribute to any long-term changes on the partner and in the context of implementation.
- Assess if the partner has strategies to ensure the direct stakeholder and/or the final target group will benefit from the project on a long-term perspective. For example, establishment of relationship with key actors that can contribute to changes in state (norms, institutions, systems)

Rights-Based Approach

ForumCiv applies a rights-based approach to all programmes and projects. This approach departs from the assumption that change is only sustainable when determined, implemented, and owned by rights-holders from communities themselves. A rights-based approach means actively working with the fulfilment of human rights, active participation, non-discrimination, accountability, and transparency.

- Active participation entails that rights-holders are the ones leading processes of change. This requires the mobilization of rights-holders to together define the problems they wish to address; the way in which this can best be done; and ensuring that they participate meaningfully in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a given initiative.
- Working for non-discrimination entails challenging unjust power structures and working to ensure that all individuals have full access to their rights.
- Ensuring access to rights requires identifying where accountability lies.
- Transparency is a key democratic component that is needed in governance and partnerships between rights-holders, civil society organizations, duty bearers and other relevant actors.

ForumCiv sees adopting a rights-based approach as transformative; shifting development work from viewing individuals as passive victims or beneficiaries in need, to active agents and rights-holders who are being denied what is fundamentally and legally their rights. It recognizes agency, which is the capacity of individuals to act independently, to make their own free choices and to be active actors in creating the changes they want to see.

Development Perspectives

Guided by a Rights-Based Approach and the 2030 Agenda, ForumCiv implements programmes that align with our three development perspectives gender equality, environment & climate justice, conflict sensitivity & Do-No-Harm.

Therefore, ForumCiv's programmes should consider gender related issues, environmental consequences/impact and conflicts and have a positive impact on gender equality, the environment and climate, and peace on a global level. Based on an analysis, ForumCiv should consider relevant actions (e.g., support the partner through capacity development, close monitoring of the implementation of the work of the partner) to ensure that the programme does not have a negative impact. ForumCiv´s assessment in what and how the programme and partner(s) can improve their work related to gender, conflict sensitivity, environment, and climate justice is important to increase potential positive impact and to mitigate any negative impact. Below are some examples of guiding questions that can be used to integrate these perspectives:

Gender Equality

- Is our own and our partners' work designed so it is possible to disaggregate data based on gender (for example on budget, result framework etc.)?
- Does the programme have a system to use the data in monitoring to respond to any gender differences or inequalities by adjusting methods and strategies?
- Can you see gender differences in the roles and responsibilities of the programme staff and/or the partner(s), and how can this affect the power structures, influence, and participation within the programme? Does the programme offer support activities and considerations that contribute to the participation of all people, for example: are there strategies of accessibility to ensure non-discrimination? Is there a gender analysis that verifies that everyone involved in the programme understands how their work will affect people because of their gender identity and sexual orientation? For example, how will the resources be used? Who has access and control over the

resources? Are there any gender differences in the roles and responsibilities within the programme, project and/or partner(s)? Will or has the programme/project responded to any of these gender differences related to attitudes, behaviors and relationships?

- Does the programme and work of the partner(s) aim to change and improve attitudes, behaviors, norms, and laws that produce and justify the exclusion and oppression of a significant part of society, as a result of a person's sexual orientation and/or gender identity?

Environment and Climate Justice

- Does the programme and the work of the partner(s) contribute towards the goals of climate and environmental justice? For example, does it acknowledge and seek to address the root causes of injustice, does it seek to find localized solutions? Does it address or acknowledge power imbalance structures?
- Does the programme and work of the partner(s) (directly or indirectly) strengthen existing structures and enhance them in a way that empowers local communities' climate and environmental resilience?
- Are we, within our programme and its related activities, seeking to minimize any negative environmental impact? For example, are all flights justified? Is there an awareness and possibility of minimizing resource use? E.g., if there is a possibility of using cleaner energy this should be included, using recycled or reusable materials, buying environmentally friendly and locally sourced goods and services. Check if the budget and activities include sensitivity and thoughtfulness to this perspective.

Conflict Sensitivity and Do-No-Harm

- Does our work and the work of the partner(s) address the root causes of conflict by supporting rightsholders in their work to change discriminatory structures and address the attitudes, behaviors and beliefs that led to those structures?
- Does the programme/project use a conflict sensitive approach? For example, are we aware of our and our partners' influence in the context and any potential positive and negative impact of the conflict dynamics? Check distribution and transfer of resources and any implicit ethical messages and if there are groups that can gain/loose due to how the project is designed and implemented?

Partnership and mutual learning

- Does the Applicant have any strategic or thematical partners in this intervention and overall? If so, who are they, how the roles and responsibilities are divided? What are the power dynamics visible from the interviews/any other sources of information among the partners?
- (During final assessment) How has the project contributed to partner's (and partners in subsequent step) organizational capacities (covering changes in governance and project management, finance, and administrative capacity and/or network & thematic expertise)?

2.2.3 Decision-making of applications

The Grant Committee plays a key role in ensuring ForumCiv has an independent assessment and decision-making procedure for the grant-making.

ForumCiv´s Grant Committee also serves as an instance to have a common overview of a programme by checking common trends and patterns of the quality of ForumCiv's and our partners work; and controlling the overall budget of the programme. The committee has normally a set-up of 3-5 members, always including the responsible Programme manager, a financial controller and a quality support

adviser from the Head Office in Stockholm, sometimes with additional staff member(s) with certain expertise related to the context or a particular thematic area.

The mandate of the Committee is to take decisions on partners' applications, based on a qualified assessment. The Grant Committee can decide to approve, reject, or suggest the applicant/partner to withdraw the proposal. The role of the Committee is also to quality assure the assessment provided by checking:

- The analysis of the assessment of the application; has ForumCiv made a qualitative analysis of the project in relation to the context, the partner and relevant stakeholders, the contribution to ForumCivs programme and overall theory of change, and if relevant, strategies or policies set by the donor.
- The overall project portfolio management of by assuring the relevance, feasibility, risks and the added value of the partnership and project.

After decisions are made by the Committee, certain adjustments in our assessment and/or application might need to be made to be able to fulfil the conditions of approval. Once the adjustments in our assessment have been checked and approved, the decision memo is shared with the applicant/partner. Therefore, it is important that the assessment is clear and consistent, stating the motivation behind the decision of the Committee.

The Secretary of the Grant Committee is responsible to document all decisions made by the committee in a protocol and save it according to ForumCiv´s Archiving Guidelines. In cases of rejection, the communication can also be complemented with a physical meeting/call to clarify the reason behind the rejection. If the partner wants to appeal against the decision, it should be directed to our complaint and response system by writing to the email feedback@forumciv.org. This is also applicable for appeals that are directed and handled by a specific unit of office, as a way to collect and systematize the complaint and response actions taken by ForumCiv in all its programmes.

When all the conditions are fulfilled by the applying partner, one can proceed with the preparation to sign the agreement and first disbursement.

ForumCiv should communicate clearly to the partner what the requirements are to handle the funds before signing off. Apart from the agreement, the partner should also be informed about ForumCiv´s general conditions, audit instructions, anticorruption policy and Procurement Guidelines.

2.3 Funding conditions for applicants

2.3.1 Eligible and non-eligible costs

Eligible costs are costs incurred during the Project Period as specified in the Cooperation Agreement and must be necessary for the implementation and to achieve the objective of the Project. All cost must be identifiable and verifiable through being recorded in the accounting records of the Third Party (TP) and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of the country where the TP is established or according to International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and according to the usual cost accounting practices of the TP.

Eligibility criteria	
Costs are incurred during the implementation of the project	Only costs generated during the lifetime of the project can be eligible. Costs must be actually incurred, i.e., they must be real and not estimated, budgeted or imputed.
Costs are indicated in the estimated budget	Any expenses must be foreseen in advance, analyzed, and shall be included in the initial budget or any approved reallocation of the latter.
Costs incurred with respect to competitive and transparent procurement process	For Procurement Procedures see Annex IV to the Cooperation Agreement
Costs shall be identifiable and verifiable in the accounting records of the Grantee	All costs must be recorded in the accounting records of the Partner Organization and determined according to the accounting standards of the country where the Grantee is established.

The following costs cannot be financed by the Grant:

- Debts and debt service charges (interest);
- provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- items already financed through another agreement by ForumCiv, Sida or other financing agency;
- purchases or construction of real estate (land or buildings);
- currency exchange losses;
- credits or loans to third parties;
- travel costs for business or first-class travel;
- extra allowances, such as sitting allowances in addition to regular per diems, or equivalent in order to finance allowances for participating staff/invited speakers/participants of workshops;
- the build-up of reserves
- Costs that do not comply with the eligibility criteria;
- Costs not included in the approved budget;
- Costs, that cannot be justified to the implementation of the project;
- Costs related to the personal expenses;
- Costs declared or incurred, or reimbursed in respect of another project;
- Fraudulent costs, such as expenses with fake receipts, contracts with fictitious suppliers, contracts involving nepotism between TP and suppliers, other procurement irregularities.

2.3.2   Accounting

The applicant shall keep accurate accounts of the Project's income and expenditure using an appropriate accounting- and double-entry bookkeeping system in accordance with the applicable accounting- and bookkeeping requirements and regulations in the jurisdiction of the applicants and the rules in the country of operation. The Grant shall be recorded as revenue in the Budget and in the accounting records of the Third Party in all types of Projects.

Income and expenditure relating to the project must be easily identifiable and verifiable. This can be done by using a separate account for the Grant funds regarding the Project or by ensuring that

expenditure for the Project can be easily identified and traced to and within the Third Party's accounting and bookkeeping systems.

2.3.3 Visibility

Applicants must comply with the objectives and priorities of the call and follow the EU's communication and visibility requirements as set out in the Requirements for Visibility and Communication for EU External Actions, the operational guidelines on the use of the EU emblem in the context of EU programmes 2021-2027, as well as the visibility guidelines of Sida as a co-financing partner. According to the EU's environmental policy, whenever possible, all the information and/or other communication and visibility measures will be prepared using digital means and in case of need will be printed and produced on the recycled, environment-friendly paper or other material.

However, following the EU requirements on visibility should never be prioritized over or in any way compromise the security of applicants, its staff members, volunteers, affiliated people or any targeted group of the actions. Considerations must therefore be made on a case by case basis by ForumCiv and by the applicants receiving financial support, the conclusion reached by both parties on this issue will be documented and kept on file for follow-up and verification purposes.

3. Procedure for submitting project proposals (for the call in October 2023)

- To apply, the online application form must be filled, either in English or Russian languages.
- The ideas for projects that are relevant for the context of Belarus and priorities of the Programme will be assessed within 3 weeks from the reception of the application.
- All applicants will be notified about the decision on Signal.
- Shortlisted candidates will be invited for an interview.
- Indicative timetable:

	DATE	TIME
1. **Opening the call**	1 November 2023	09:00 EET (UTC+2)
2. **Call closure**	31 December 2023	23:59 EET (UTC+2)
3. **Deadline for submission of concept notes (Wave 1)**	30 November 2023	23:59 EET (UTC+2)
4. **Deadline for submission of concept notes (Wave 2)**	31 December 2023	23:59 EET (UTC+2)
5. **Award notification period (after eligibility check)**	22 December 2023 - 31 January 2024	12:00 EET (UTC+2)
6. **Contract signature (the latest)**	15 February 2024	18:00 EET (UTC+2)