

TRIENNIAL REVIEW 2022 — 2024



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Foreword

Dear readers,

Reviewing this 2022-24 period has been a stimulating exercise for taking stock, reflecting on our developments and sharing the challenges and lessons learnt in growing our collaborative funds. During this period, our operating budget increased by more than 50% to reach a total spending figure of around 15 million euros for 2024.

In times of scarcity, it is even more important to manage projects efficiently. This is why NEF's own operating budget accounts for only 4% of total spending. Historically, our funding has spanned two main domains of action: democracy and social inclusion in Europe. The bad winds blowing over the continent and beyond increase the need for, and value of, philanthropic collaboration and instruments like NEF. These domains of action remain as relevant today as when NEF was established. Together, the philanthropic sector can influence the key societal debates of our rapidly changing times:

- Will Artificial Intelligence mark the end of our democracy, with it being replaced by a 'hypnocracy'? A 'hypnocracy' in which we will not be able to distinguish reality from virtuality, with virtuality saturating text and image algorithms? Would this 'post-real' world be characterised by a breakdown of trust and the loss of democracy?
- Will our social fabric withstand the economic and social crisis, with the widespread political tendency to retreat and reduce support for essential causes, such as progress towards gender equality and migrant inclusion?
- In a civic space that is shrinking year on year, will civil society and independent public interest media be able to participate in and shape the public debate, and fulfil their role as a check and balance?

Collaborative funding is not set to decrease, nor are our flagship collaborative projects. The Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe, Civitates, the European AI and Society Fund, and European Philanthropic Initiative for Migration (EPIM) are here to stay. These projects play a key role in mobilising larger groups and forming coalitions, amplifying the voices of alternative civil society groups.

As Nelson Mandela said, 'None of us, acting alone, can achieve success'; only through community efforts will we be able to change the tides. NEF is unique among philanthropic infrastructure support organisations in that it is owned by its funders. It serves as a learning and re-granting space for foundations, as well as an incubator for foundations' collaborative endeavours. NEF's governance structure and frameworks facilitate efficiency and accountability in decision-making, supporting the efficient launch of collaborative projects. Collaboration is not easy. It requires a blend of soft and strategic skills, as well as the ability to nurture resilience and diplomacy, since setbacks and highs are inevitable.

With nearly 50 years' experience of facilitating and implementing collaborative philanthropic projects, NEF is one of Europe's foremost infrastructure support organisations. The NEF will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2027. We can be proud of our journey so far, and we will continue to honour our motto, 'Partnering for Impact'.

As we embark on a new chapter, we are looking ahead with fresh energy and feeling ready for the challenges that the challenges before us. Our new board is committed to European collaboration within their own foundations and across their work. We have also adopted a new strategic organisational compass and welcomed talented new team members to the NEF and its collaborative projects. We hope to stay firm in our trajectory as the bad winds blow.



Alexandre Giraud
NEF chairman



Peggy Sailler
NEF Executive Director

NEF Hub

Catalysing Cooperation and Amplifying Impact:

A New Era

NEF was founded on the belief that Europe's philanthropic sector needed to work more collaboratively to increase its societal impact. As a launch pad, NEF enables funders to initiate collaborative projects swiftly, efficiently and effectively, thereby strengthening democracy and social inclusion in Europe. Drawing on decades of experience in collaborative funding, NEF allows foundations to engage in a strategic, equitable and cooperative manner. NEF stands unique in the European philanthropy space as a foundation-driven platform.

Europe has increasingly faced waves of challenges to its democratic values. These challenges have spread geographically and across our social fabric. Supporting donor collaboration is needed now more than ever, as it can boost resources available for civil society in a time of accelerating risks and challenges.

As a philanthropic actor in the field of democracy, it is crucial for NEF to track its impact. This impact is expected to occur on three levels: by building expertise on the issues we address, by receiving feedback from our grantees about the support we provide, and by collaborating with partners.

From Host to Hub

In order to track its impact and as part of its growth trajectory, NEF recently addressed the following important strategic questions: What is our organisational vision for the coming years? What types of projects should we incubate or partner with? How do we better communicate our unique support and adequately resource our backbone?

In response to these questions and to remain true to its purpose, NEF refined its operating model, enhancing the interplay between its hosting functions, partner foundations, and its collaborative funds. NEF as the host organisation with ultimate responsibility provides both a foundation and an umbrella, collaborative teams lead the implementation of fund strategies, and the contributing philanthropic partners provide direction and vision - the North Star to a fund's work. Each actor brings a unique set of expertise and experience, working in complementarity and subsidiarity as much as possible.

Thus, NEF is now best seen as a hub, transitioning from a linear to a holistic perspective. As a hub, it provides a space to develop and catalyse collaborative initiatives, with a ready-made architecture that offers financial, administrative, programmatic and legal support.

The Hub Approach

Solidarity and European progressive values are central to NEF's work. As a hub, we foster mutual support between projects, foundations and grantee partners and cultivate a culture of learning and experimentation, sharing perspectives on successes and setbacks and adjusting along the way. Alongside operational excellence and programmatic support for each individual project, the hub unlocks access for members to a community of practices and projects.

Collaborative Funds within the NEF Hub are:

- Collaborative: Involve multiple funders.
- Pan-European: Work across multiple countries in Europe.
- Grantmaker: Combine grantmaking with a Funding Plus approach.
- Action-oriented: Strengthen democracy and social inclusion in Europe or support international development.
- Ethos: Committed to NEF's values.
- Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion: Committed to the journey.

Focus on NEF's Funding Plus

NEF collaborative funds also deploy a **Funding Plus framework** that extends beyond simple financial support and encompasses a range of financial and non-financial (capacity development) assistance to grantees and civil society organisations.

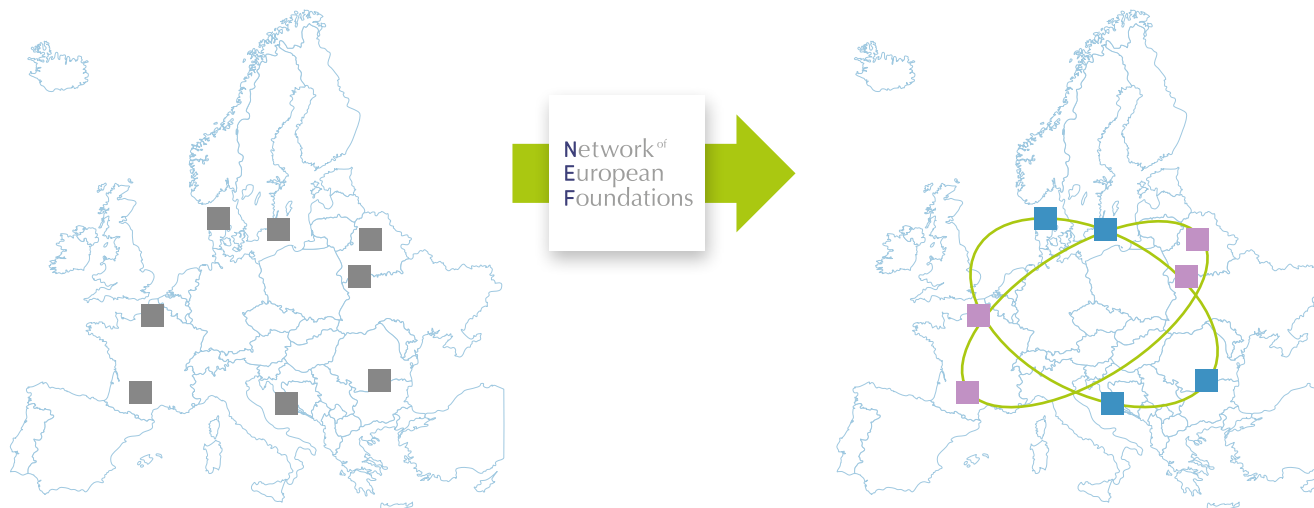
The Funding Plus approach is built on three pillars: **strengthening organisational capacity, supporting the professional development of key staff, and shaping advocacy efforts**. Funding Plus also offers a space for practitioner reflections and recommendations to shape collaborative projects drawing on their own current practice and experiences.

The Funding Plus framework also provides practical insights and recommendations from within the NEF HUB, helping new collaborative projects start on a stronger footing, as well as allowing funders to be part of a shared European two-way learning space in which donors and grantees exchange ideas and tackle large-scale challenges together. In summary, the approach enhances grantee partners and collaborative funds confidence, capacity, and reach, contributing to a thriving civil society.

Our vision for the Nonprofit Sector

From fragmentation

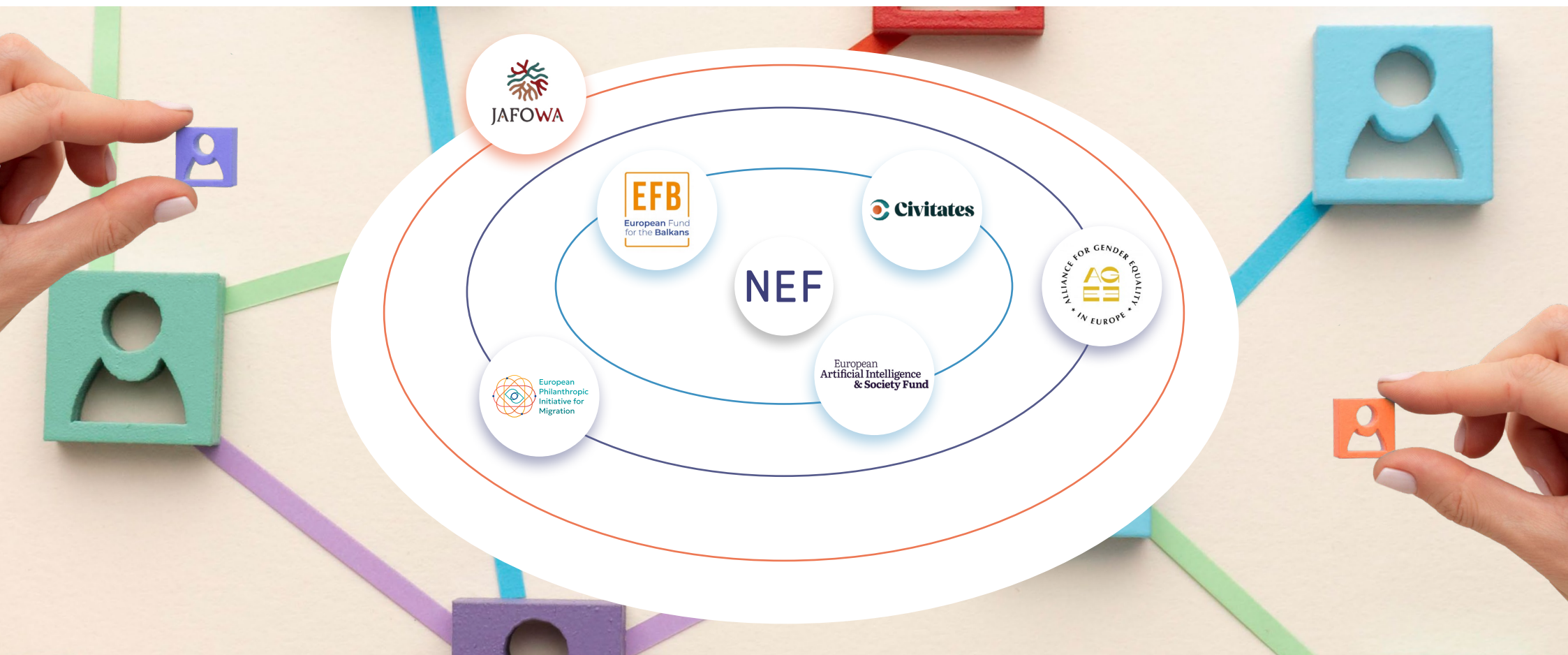
To coalition



Highlights from 2022-2024

Over the past three years, NEF's total operating budget has increased by 78% reaching 15 million€ of spending in 2024. The share of funding from NEF members now accounts for 50% of the NEF total operating budget.

Hub concept



- **Celebrating a Vision** – NEF was originally conceived as an educational vehicle for the philanthropic community, fostering collaboration and joint efforts at the European level for greater impact. Nearly 50 years later, the significant growth in collaborative funding across Europe highlights the enduring relevance of this vision. What began as a “club” of like-minded philanthropists co-funding projects, has evolved into a much broader story that is shaping entire ecosystems and Europe’s shared history.



- **Strengthening Our Community - The Success of NEF Collaborative Day:**

Every Spring, NEF gathers its extended community of funders and collaborative staff for a day of exchange and connection in Brussels. In 2022, we explored the different purposes of our collaborative funds and their shared challenges as ‘advocates at the European level’, allowing the community to gather for the first-time after Covid. And in 2024, the group looked at the importance of strategic communication and narrative change in collaborative funding strategies.

- **Growing and Diversifying:** The NEF team has grown larger and is constantly diversifying. What began as a cohort of small collaborative projects led by a single programme-manager has expanded to a portfolio of full-fledged funds with teams of three to five. The NEF family includes 30 collaborators with core staff based in Brussels and Belgrade and others working remotely from Annecy, Barcelona, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Dakar, London, Paris, Prague and Wuppertal. This flexibility is an important feature of our work culture. NEF continues to innovate in our leadership, with the introduction of a co-leadership model at EPIM. We also recently embarked upon a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) - journey in our rather than its workplace and within grant making practices.

- **NEF as Europe’s Premier Collaborative Innovation and Launch Pad:** Over the past three years, NEF launched or housed several new collaborative projects, including Healthy Food Healthy Planet in 2023 and the Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts in 2024, confirming NEF’s importance within the European landscape. NEF brings a wealth of expertise in facilitating programmatic and strategic discussions and allows the Projects to find common ground and move swiftly from ideation to implementation. Collaborative projects are built upon NEF’s key pillars: governance, systems, resource management, knowledge and risk management providing a robust foundation, to start operating successfully. NEF is also constantly innovating with digitisation and investments in new tools for collaboration. The share of investments in NEF’s budget allocated to digitalization is 8%.

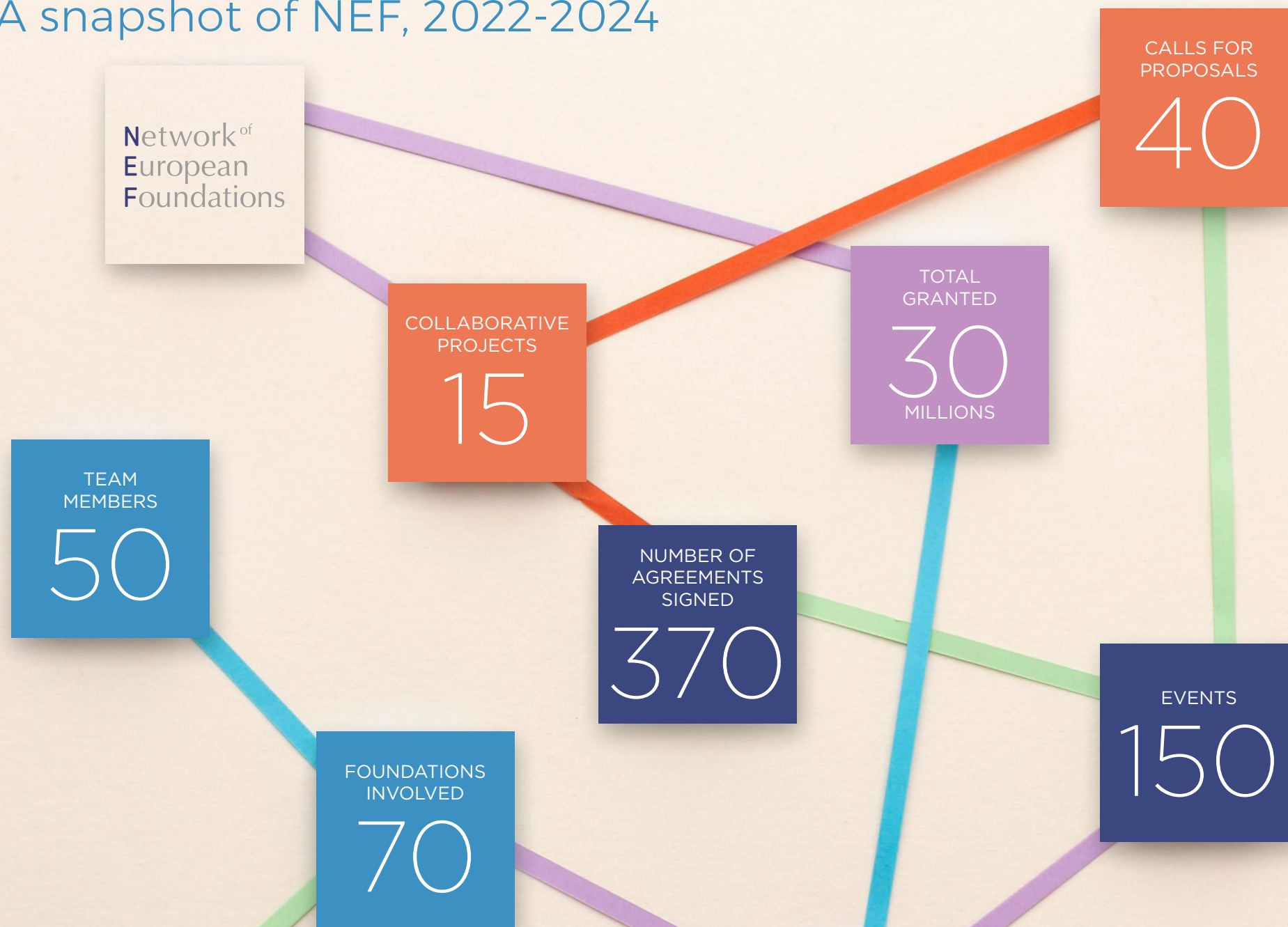


Lessons Learned

NEF's Executive Director Peggy Sailler reflects on lessons learned over the past three years – both from NEF's work and that of its collaborative funds.

- 1. Commitment to Democracy and Social Cohesion:** NEF's approach reaffirms the importance of working across these two key pillars amidst the backdrop of extreme polarisation spreading across Europe. Our grantmaking is united around the pursuit of the common good: values and norms, citizen engagement, civic agency, respect for human rights, truth in information dissemination and adherence to democratic practices.
- 2. Long-Term Vision and Funding:** Grantee partners across all our collaborative funds require a long-term vision and sustained funding, especially in times of political and financial instability. We are happy to see that our Collaborative Fund budgets are increasingly designed on a three-year cycle to ensure a longer-term commitment to our field partners, independent of each individual donor's commitment. Overall, NEF Funds regrant around 75% of their total budget.
- 3. Not Just Granting but Building Ecosystems:** Our collaborative funds aim to build specific ecosystems by providing more than just financial support, through a Funding Plus approach, that allows grantee partners to connect, share ideas, learn from each other and plan together. This requires buy-in and long-term support from philanthropic partners.
- 4. Advocacy:** Advocacy must be nuanced, informed and contextualised. Through the European AI and Society Fund and Civitates, we have seen how collaboratives can play a critical role in current legislative developments around tech and AI. By providing resources and facilitating collaboration between grantees and policy experts, they can help navigate the complexities of these evolving challenges. And as a result, NEF has produced guidelines on supporting advocacy projects.
- 5. Strategic Communication:** In the coming years, managing portfolio and reputational risks will be a key focus for our collaborative funds and NEF. Thus, strategic communication will be a key pillar as we seek to demonstrate our relevance to a wider community, including funders, grantee partners, and the public. We are delighted to have attracted new talent in communications, and will continue to focus on this.
- 6. Moving Away From traditional Monitoring & Evaluation:** NEF's collaborative projects have wisely moved away from traditional MEL frameworks and are instead looking at their impact and influence through a series of key strategic research questions and endeavours.
- 7. Learning is Key:** And relatedly, NEF's focus has turned to shared learnings with endeavours involving funders, grantee partners, and project teams. The NEF Hub's focus on specific peer-led communities of practice (grantmaking, communications etc.) is a great example of this, as the needs and expectations for different NEF stakeholders are diverse and evolve over time. Learning is not a given; it requires intentional cultivation amidst this complexity.
- 8. Shifting Power:** NEF continues to aim to shift and redistribute power, and our Shifting Power guidelines provide an insight into our approach. Given NEF's decentralised governance model involving even more stakeholders in decision-making while setting boundaries, An increasing number of stakeholders are involved in decision-making in NEF's decentralised governance model. With the setting of necessary boundaries, this presents an interesting challenge. The EPIM Forum, in which funders, civil society partners and other ecosystem actors are equally represented, will provide a test case for this.
- 9. Functioning Collaboration:** For NEF's operating model and its protective mission to succeed, NEF relies on multiple levels of strategic collaboration – between the NEF team, its funds and its funders – all of whom need to work with and play their part in decision-making. This alignment is complex and requires navigating the natural tensions between the three spheres. The NEF Hub concept helps create this alignment allowing NEF's staff to develop dual loyalty to their own leadership and to NEF.
- 10. Robust Backbone:** A robust backbone is a necessity for the flourishing of collaborative funds and NEF's role must be recognised, strategically planned, and adequately resourced. Consequently, NEF has adapted its revenue model and strengthened its operations team and will need to do more of the same in the coming years.

A snapshot of NEF, 2022-2024



Total of organisations and grants in the world

Year	Countries	Organisations	Total
2022	27	160	€ 7,892,546.00
2023	34	210	€ 11,247,398.00
2024	27	194	€ 10,424,337.00
Total	36	326	€ 29,564,281.00

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NEF's three domains of action

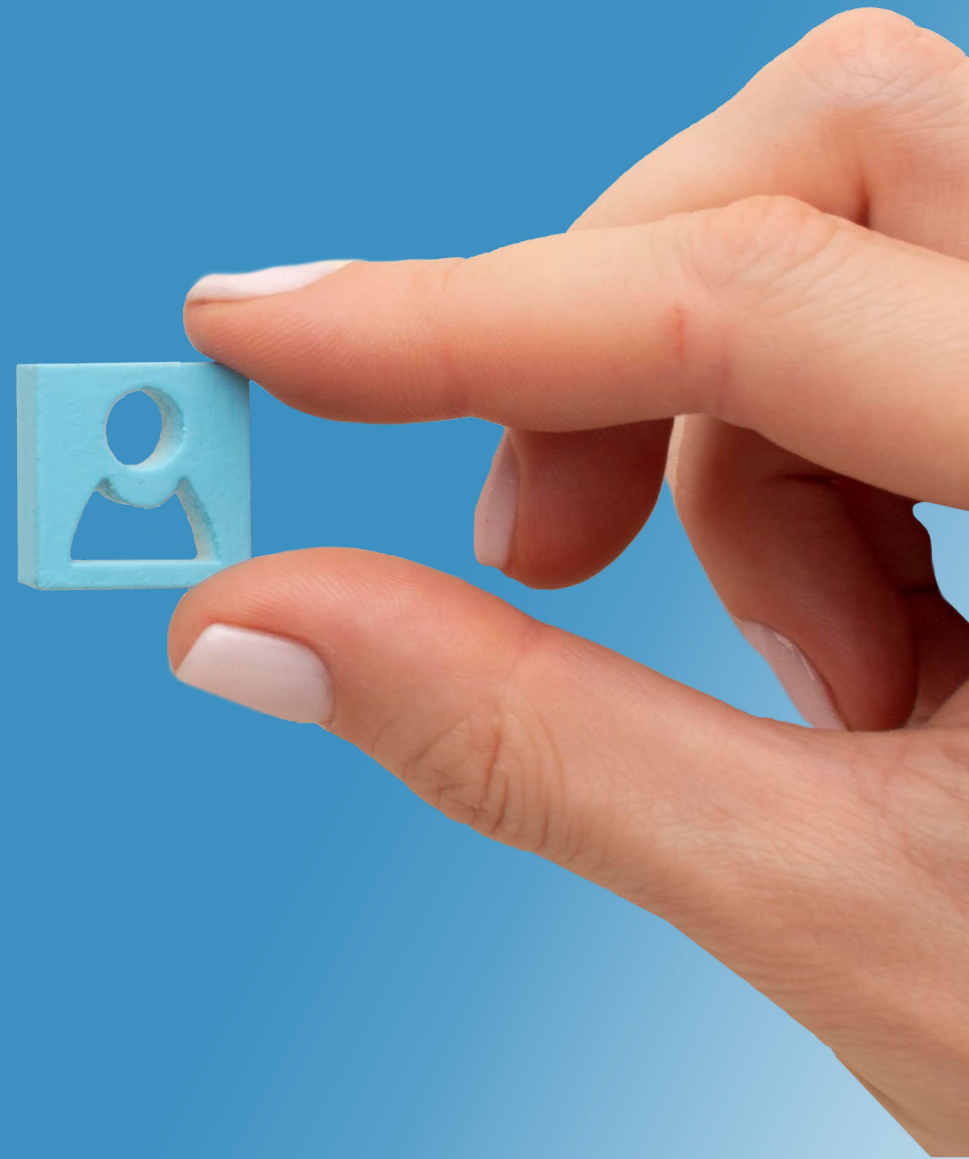


Democracy

In an era marked by growing polarisation, rising authoritarianism, and shrinking civic space, democracy stands at a crossroads. NEF's work in this area is grounded in the principles of solidarity and the protection of human rights in the digital age.

Through our collaborative projects, we support organisations working to strengthen independent media and civil society, shape AI governance in the public interest, and empower citizens to build democratic societies across Europe, including in the Balkans.

As Europe's political landscape evolves, our initiatives help build networks and coalitions to foster resilience and democratic resistance. In times of crisis, collaborative projects are uniquely positioned to deploy nimble and rapid responses and to strategise proactively when resources are pooled and collective action must be prioritised.



CIVITATES

Civitates was originally established to stand in solidarity with civil society organisations, leaders and journalists battling the growing tide of illiberalism in central and eastern Europe. From its outset there were indications of shrinking civic space seeping into western countries too. A few years later, those waves are now lapping at the pillars of democracy across the continent, and the assault on fundamental freedoms cannot be seen as confined to any one region or country.

One third of Civitates' grants go to groups in western Europe. Democracy cannot be taken for granted. Several countries across the EU have seen an uptick in the criminalisation of human rights defenders, the heavy-handed policing of protest and regressive laws targeting foreign funding of civil society. The arrival of more U.S. foundations to the collaborative fund indicates a growing donor fight back against the emergence of shared transatlantic threats.

By focusing on funding cohorts and coalitions, Civitates' trio of sub funds seeks to encourage innovation and cross-border cooperation while buttressing the civic architecture to withstand current and future shocks. To ensure a healthy digital public square, tech and democracy partners have been relentless pursuers of accountability in algorithms that govern our lives, determined proponents of human-centred tech solutions, and forceful advocates in shaping the process of landmark EU legislation on digital services and its enforcement at national level. While false and malicious information continues to be weaponised, media partners have been busy building sustainable platforms for in-depth reporting and investigations, fulfilling public interest news needs and confronting the abuse of power in exposés of global significance.

And through relentless campaigning first in their own countries, then taking the fight to the EU institutions, civic power partners have been unlocking and dispersing resources for civic initiatives across Europe, pushing back and even regaining the civic space. Through myriad examples, Civitates' sub funds and partners are showing civil society's indispensability and putting it firmly on the political agenda as a key component of safeguarding democracy.

CIVIC POWER

Partner spotlight

European Civic Forum

Background

Between 2022-3, Civitates' targeted call for proposals on 'Europeanising civic space' generated six new grantees – including European Civic Forum (ECF) – which deployed their policy expertise and advocacy skills to influence EU decision making. ECF is a twenty-year-old pan-European network of nearly 100 associations and NGOs across 29 countries that seeks to protect and expand civic space.



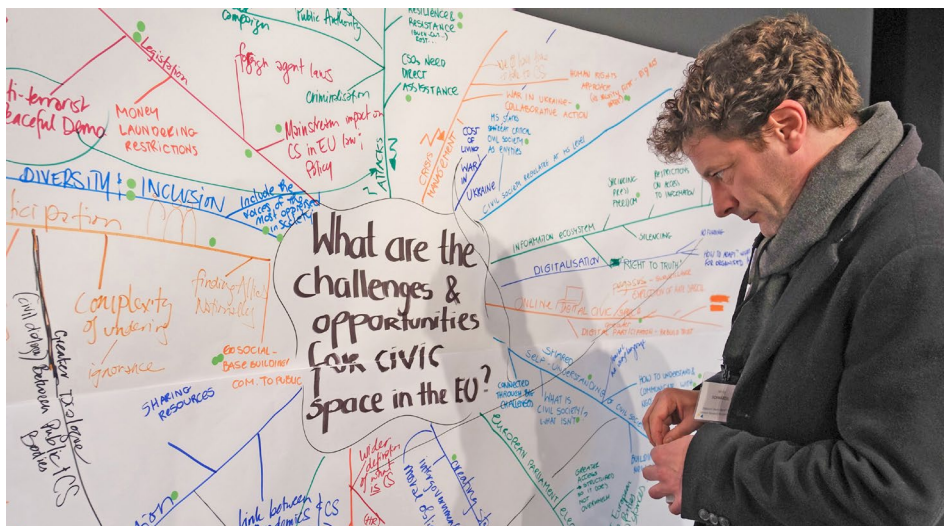
Giada Negri, Research and Advocacy Co-ordinator

Why is it important to 'Europeanise' civic space?

Some national governments are in a way 'Europeanising' their efforts to narrow civic space, learning and copying restrictive practices from each other and sometimes attempting to scale them up at the EU level. So, we need to do likewise; learning from each other's victories and failures, and urging policymakers to see civil society not only as a subject of and implementer of EU legislation but as a holder of rights and a crucial partner in developing it.

We see our role as facilitating dialogue between national CSOs and European institutions, and 'Europeanising' the mobilisations happening in our members' respective countries. Though it has been a tough few years for activists – ECF's Civic Space Watch platform draws on its wide membership and broad network of partners on the ground to monitor emerging threats to civil society and raise the alarm in Brussels - recent victories against illiberal governments in Poland and Slovenia owe their success to well-coordinated civic movements.

Some of our members who are now also regranters inform us that it has allowed them to support civil society in remote and rural areas of their respective countries. Though it cannot substitute private funding, and must improve its accessibility, the fact that it is now operational demonstrates the impact of connecting and giving visibility at EU level to the important work happening on the ground every day across Europe.



Bellingcat



Dessi Damianova, *Chief Operating Officer*

In early 2024, a member of Bellingcat's Discord community informed us of their discovery that one of the world's most-wanted drug traffickers had been posting online reviews of everything from hotels, restaurants and cafes, for years. This online activity allowed us to reveal new insights about his business operations, associates and luxurious lifestyle. The subsequent story was our most read article of that year, received global media coverage, and the treasure trove of data continues to inform new Bellingcat stories about the elusive narcotics kingpin and his crime empire.

This is an example of how crowdsourcing has been key to Bellingcat's work since one of our first groundbreaking investigations — into the shooting down of the MH17 civilian airliner by Russian-backed forces in 2014. Bellingcat maintains a core operational and project management staff, a wider team of researchers and investigators, but a key element of our model is our Global Authentication Project – the online volunteer community who are constantly monitoring, locating and verifying key strands of information that fuel our work. From a handful of people in

a chat room over a decade ago, the community has now grown to over 30,000 investigators of all backgrounds and is actively expanding to include data scientists and software developers who can create new tools. Bellingcat works on a diverse range of issues worldwide from war crimes, illegal wildlife trade, illicit finance and online ideologies. Many of its investigations have underscored violations to the rule of law in Europe by domestic and international actors, ranging from highlighting allegations of pushback operations to drive away refugees trying to enter the EU via Greek waters, unmasking far-right extremist meetings in Hungary and documenting Russia's use of weapons against civilians in Ukraine. In addition to cultivating our own community, Bellingcat also helps to strengthen others.

By transparently showing and sharing our methods, we hope to inspire the wider open-source investigator community. Our rigorous compilation of human rights violations enables the community to also develop standards and methodologies that can feed into justice and accountability mechanisms in a legal setting. And through publishing partnerships and training opportunities with leading international newsrooms as well as under-resourced media outlets in Latin America and Africa, we strive to increase the reach and impact of the wider journalistic community.

TECH AND DEMOCRACY

Partner spotlight

EU DisinfoLab

Background

EU DisinfoLab (EUDL) has received €455,000 in Civitates support since 2021 for their cross-country coordination work and EU-level advocacy.

Their mission is to detect, tackle and prevent manipulative content endangering European institutions and society.

Alexandre Alaphillipe, Executive Director



How can European civil society fight disinformation?

Dismantling disinformation helps prevent attacks on vulnerable groups, bolster national security and build trust for institutions, while preserving fundamental rights like freedom of speech across Europe. Recent years have seen the proliferation of disruptive AI tools and renewed malign interference campaigns by hostile governments that pose risks not only during election periods but throughout public life. In 2022, EUDL - partnered with the Swedish non-profit foundation Qurium Media Foundation - exposed a sophisticated Russia-based influence operation coined 'Doppleganger'.

By blending our skills in identifying the content and tactics of disinformation, with Qurium's expertise in researching the technical infrastructure behind it, we revealed the cloning of media outlets and establishment of fake social media profiles to disseminate and amplify Kremlin narratives (e.g. manipulating public support for Ukraine through false stories) to millions of Europeans. Despite the global media coverage prompted by the findings, the levying of US and EU sanctions against alleged perpetrators and investigations into tech firms' conduct, there is evidence that propaganda from the 'Doppleganger' operation continues to target European social media users.

In 2023, EUDL also investigated how an influential Indian news agency was promoting quotes from defunct or fictitious sources to push anti-Pakistan and anti-China messaging.

This kind of work underscores the need for effective regulation. During a strong civil society push to guide the legislative process of the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), EUDL led specific campaigns; securing an effective complaint handling process for social media platform users and removing a clause exempting the media sector from content moderation which would have acted as a backdoor to disinformation.

In the latter successful campaign EUDL was supported by Nobel Peace Prize winning journalist Maria Resa and colleagues from European Digital Rights (EDRI). The DSA is landmark legislation but it must be backed up by the punishment of infringements.

We see how accelerating attacks on NGOs and limiting civic space leads to the weakening of the rule of law and a lack of compliance by tech platforms. EUDL and partners will continue to scrutinise the enforcement of EU-wide legislation, cooperate with our wider network across the EU27 to monitor disinformation tactics and provide evidence to policymakers, and convene experts from activism, academia, media, tech and government to build a trustworthy and transparent digital environment.



EUROPEAN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE & SOCIETY FUND

Until recently, the idea of establishing a dedicated fund for AI-related projects might have been considered of niche interest. The technology's dramatic reshaping of entire industries and societies has proved it a highly prescient and impactful decision.

The European Artificial Intelligence & Society Fund (EAI SF) was founded with the view that, while AI can be leveraged to play a positive role in many aspects of life, the nature of its current development fuels inequalities and vested interests.

Whether it is determining a gig worker's shift pattern, unfairly targeting minorities with overbearing surveillance, or contributing to rising carbon emissions, AI developments are having a profound impact on our societies, the implications of which are still largely unknown or underestimated. EAI SF partners continue to push back against industry capture of AI technology and recalibrate the balance of power in society's favour. This was most evident in the involvement of so many partners in the development of the EU AI Act – the world's first comprehensive regulation framework for AI systems – who fought for safeguards around intrusive biometrics, predictive policing and surveillance of asylum seekers.

Against significantly more powerful interests, important contributions were made from civil society towards shaping this legislation, and now grantees' focus shifts to ensure effective oversight and enforcement. With AI influencing so many facets of life, EAI SF continues to invest in helping specialised and diverse coalitions of organisations to leverage the collective power of civil society and help it steer a rights-focused and human-centred conversation around AI in Europe. With seventeen partner foundations now on board, EAI SF can continue scaling up its work.

Two new initiatives launched in 2024 saw over €2m granted to 21 organisations working with communities affected by AI misuse – migrants, people with disabilities, sex workers – and supporting them in their advocacy, as well as funding groups who can deploy strategic litigation and advance a positive policy agenda. The advance of AI presents a fast-moving challenge for our societies but, with partners rooting concerns over transparency and social justice firmly into the public consciousness and EAI SF's growing role as mobiliser and catalyst, its misuse will face strong opposition.

AI & MIGRATION JUSTICE

Partner spotlight

Background

EAI SF supports several migrant rights groups which formed the #ProtectNotSurveil coalition, a group of activists, organisations and researchers challenging key EU policies and legislation around digital technologies to campaign for the rights of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented people, and their safety against the discriminatory use of AI systems.

The coalition includes:

European Digital Rights (EDRi), Equinox Initiative for Racial Justice, Access Now and Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM).

#ProtectNotSurveil was named because of the need to structurally shift EU policymaking's priorities, to reclaim the narrative around the definition of protection, and call on the EU institutions to treat human mobility with care, not surveillance.

The coalition observes the mutually reinforcing relationship between technology and migration policies; the EU increasingly relies on a sprawling ecosystem of tech and data-driven tools to achieve their

migration management objectives which, combined with its broader political agenda, exacerbates human rights violations and enables a violent and discriminatory system. Members argue the need to recognise linkages between surveillance and technology and issues of racism and Members argue that the linkages between surveillance and technology and issues of racism and discrimination should be recognised.

#ProtectNotSurveil emerged as civil society groups sought to influence the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act by analysing various case studies in which AI was instrumental in migration-related harms, drafting amendments to the Act and a range of advocacy. This work featured a significant amount of coordinating, sharing knowledge between organisations, attempting to break NGO silos, getting to know each other, and drawing out political alignments. The position of the European Parliament reflected many of the coalition's demands to regulate or ban harmful use of tech in the migration context.

Though ultimately the final text of the AI Act did not meet a number of expectations, coalition members not only accomplished an impressive collective lobbying effort but developed a shared vision and a common framing that facilitated connections between the migration context and wider campaigns on biometric surveillance and predictive policing. The campaign made a strong case that migration is a digital rights issue to be prioritised and laid significant groundwork for stronger advocacy efforts going forward. Coalition members consider it important to analyse and contest migration control technology as part of a wider discussion on the systemic harms of European migration and border policies.

The coalition will continue to document the harms stemming from AI misuse, challenge the discriminatory nature of the AI Act and call for it to be applied equally, while widening their network of civil society organisations and grassroots movements, particularly migrant-led organisations working alongside communities on the ground.



EUROPEAN FUND FOR THE BALKANS

In a region already embroiled in multiple challenges, the Western Balkans have multiple challenges, in recent years the Western Balkans have been confronted with been confronted with a multitude of obstacles on their path to hopeful EU membership: political paralysis and entrenched illiberal democracies, an embattled civil society, migration and emigration pressures, struggles to implement a sustainable green agenda, and flashes of political tension that raise fears of renewed conflict. Meanwhile, as the EU grapples with its own democratic backsliding, faltering economies and war in Ukraine, it struggles to maintain a consistent focus on the region. This adverse backdrop has made the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB)'s role in reinforcing regional cooperation and local democratic practices even more crucial than ever.

Ongoing democratisation of the region remains a core focus, backed up by the Engaged Democracy Initiative (EDI) which loops in local civil society initiatives on decent work, public space, media, civic rights and the environment to build strong networks primed to confront what are shared regional concerns. EDI issues regular rounds of micro-grants across the region through its Response Hub and provides its community of change-makers with access to an online safe space - the Engaged Balkans platform. By identifying common issues, the EFB activates a renewed spirit of regional solidarity, which has been particularly evident in the area of nature conservation.

Intertwined with the EFB-initiated 'Balkans United For Clean Air' campaign running across Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia, partners like the Foundation Atelier for Community Transformation (ACT) have been harnessing the mobilising potential of cross border environmental issues and safeguarding some of Europe's most pristine rivers by pushing back against damaging hydropower projects.

While EU membership remains a key ambition for societies in the Western Balkans, slow accession progress and other geopolitical actors' increasing influence are straining public enthusiasm. The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG), a joint initiative of EFB and the University of Graz, has widened its advocacy strategies by deepening their relationships with EU policymakers and opinion formers to make the positive case for keeping the region's enlargement aspirations front and centre. Recent widespread protests across the Balkans have served as a powerful reminder that there is a growing informed and engaged citizenry demanding functional institutions and accountable governments. EFB intends to continue capitalising on this momentum and furthering a collaborative ecosystem that can deliver long-awaited transformations for the whole region.

FOUNDATION ATELIER FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION (ACT)

Partner spotlight

Background

ACT supports local activist and artistic communities and grassroots organisations in the western Balkans through campaign support, legal assistance, and resilience building. ACT partnered with EFB on designing the Engaged Democracy Initiative and was a Response Hub grantee.



Lejla Kusturica, Director

How has the environment become a focal point for civil society collaboration in the Balkans?

The quality of the rivers that rush through the mountains, canyons and forests of the Balkans are so highly rated that the region has earned the nickname 'The Blue Heart of Europe' and they contribute to a rich ecosystem of plant and animal species, as well as providing employment through tourism and conservation. ACT was founded in 2020 amid the first organised social movement for the protection of rivers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the wider western Balkans, and two years later we celebrated with our members the passing of a law banning future construction

of small hydroelectric plants in the larger of BiH's federal entities. In 2023, Albania's Vjosa River – one of Europe's last natural, wild rivers – was designated a national park ensuring its protection from future construction projects. And in 2024 the halting of a small hydro plant in neighbouring Croatia, which threatened the biodiversity of the Una River spanning both countries, was an example of vibrant cross border activism that brought in the local communities, a broad spectrum of civil society organisations, and international musicians and actors.

We believe that through the alliances and collaborations made through the invigorated campaigning to save rivers in the region, a wider spirit of activism is flourishing and coalescing to challenge powerful interest groups and defend people and nature. But rivers face numerous other risks, and we are always poised to respond to the immediate needs of local grassroots movements on the ground when they request support for the latest environmental outrage or after being targeted

by authorities or corporate actors. Eco activists in BiH have recently been hit with legal action bearing the hallmarks of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which are increasingly used to intimidate campaigners into silence.

On these occasions ACT can jump in to offer support for legal costs and psychosocial resilience, as well as raising the alarm in the media and calls for solidarity among the wider network of environmentalists and human rights defenders.

The accelerating race to extract critical minerals through mining projects will present new challenges not just nationally but globally, and ACT and its partners will continue to grow the movement to promote an ethical use of natural resources that protects nature, respects workers' rights and listens to the needs of local people.



Social Cohesion

Social cohesion remains a key challenge for our European societies, where diversity and inequalities continue to increase. While democracy relies on the power of the people to promote public well-being, it is social cohesion that preserves and reinforces it.

As collective bonding declines, promoting active citizenship becomes increasingly vital in political, cultural, and public spheres so that they reflect diverse interests and perspectives. Fostering civic engagement requires investing in inclusive growth and developing a shared vision for a future shaped by social, economic and environmental challenges.

Given its proven ability to initiate and strengthen grassroots movements, as well as identify scalable best practices, collaborative philanthropy is essential in mobilising communities and setting agendas for European societies for all.





THE ALLIANCE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN EUROPE

From the moment that the Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe was launched in 2021, there was both a sense of urgency and hope to get funders around the table and drive resources to organisations working to advance equality, following the surge in gender-based violence and economic inequalities accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On a broader level, the Alliance was designed to address the gap between the outsized impact made by frontline organisations working on gender issues and the scarce resources they work with. The Alliance has risen to the challenge; over the last four years it has supported 55 grassroots gender equality organisations with over €5 million in project, core, and organisational development grants. The challenges to gender equality are numerous. From unequal pay, harassment in the workplace and lack of investment in women and LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs, there is still much to be done to create societies where everyone can thrive.

Controversial legislation that harms women's sexual and reproductive health, the rights of same-sex families, and the inclusion of trans and non-binary people, persists in several EU countries. A small, but well-funded and co-ordinated, anti-gender movement continues to gain traction, threatening hard-won progress. In the meantime, drastic aid cuts both in Europe and the US imperil the financial health of organisations supporting women and marginalised groups.

Today, the wider movement requires even more resources and opportunities to connect, strategise, and collaborate to achieve a large and lasting impact. To meet the current moment, the Alliance strengthens small and medium frontline organisations that enable individuals to enjoy their human rights, live free from violence, and exercise social and economic freedoms.

It also reinforces constructive collaboration across the sector, supercharging their impact. In an era of democratic backsliding and rapid societal shifts, the Alliance is also providing emergency funding for groups to respond to new threats, improve their operational security, or seize an unexpected opportunity.

Despite the uncertain and challenging environment, Alliance partners are making meaningful advances across Europe whether it is securing legislative change on workplace violence in Romania, operating safe and inclusive spaces for the LGBTQ+ community in Croatia, or negotiating fair pay for care and social workers in the Czech Republic.

ASSOCIATION FOR LIBERTY AND GENDER EQUALITY (ALEG)

Partner spotlight

Background

A.L.E.G. is a Romania-based NGO with over twenty years of experience combatting and preventing violence against women and promoting gender equality.



Camelia Proca, founder and director

What gender equality advances have been made in Romania?

In 2024, after a three year campaign spearheaded by A.L.E.G. and involving dozens of civil society organisations and trade unions, the Romanian Parliament voted to ratify the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention on Violence and Harassment. Those international legal standards will now be applied nationally - an outcome of A.L.E.G.'s advocacy around a variety of related issues, including updating the legal definition of what constitutes the 'workplace'.

Many women whose testimonies we collected suffered harassment outside the actual office (during work-related travel, at conferences, in accommodation units or via messaging apps), and it failed to

meet the legal definition of workplace harassment. In order to escape violence, some of those employees ended up quitting their jobs. Now that the legislation is changing, and more situations of harassment can be reported, sanctioned and compensated for, our work moves to ensuring that employers establish proper reporting mechanisms and, more importantly, focus on prevention, not just response.

As a result, A.L.E.G. is increasingly contacted to deliver training and strategic advice for employers around the country, helping them fulfil their new responsibilities for preventing violence and harassment in the workplace. This allows the organisation to expand its geographical reach while ensuring that services for beneficiaries can remain free of charge, contributing to its long-term sustainability.

Since 2022, A.L.E.G. has also worked with some of the thousands of refugee women who fled from neighbouring Ukraine, and included them in workshops and training on self-defence, assertive communication and mindfulness techniques. Building on A.L.E.G.'s two decades of experience delivering counselling online and offline, we are also increasingly raising awareness around the issue of economic control and how it can constitute a form of violence.

We work with women on financial education and mentorship and with men, focusing on gender stereotypes as a root cause of coercion, violence and other toxic masculinity behaviour. A.L.E.G. will continue emphasising the benefits of maintaining equality on the European public policy agenda, because progress in the field can be quickly reversed, particularly in a new age of authoritarianism and misogyny.





EUROPEAN PHILANTHROPIC INITIATIVE FOR MIGRATION

Over the last three years EPIM has embarked on a new approach to decision-making, financing and organisational structure as part of its ongoing quest to reshape the migration ecosystem. Migration was traditionally treated as a standalone topic, but EPIM has redesigned its way of working to better reflect how migration intersects with a broad range of societal issues; from dignified work to healthcare to civic participation. EPIM played a leading role in the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, drawing on its extensive network of foundation partners to raise up to €5m primarily for central and eastern Europe.

This then evolved into a more long-term effort to support the region to include refugees effectively and sustainably into their societies, bringing together civil society and various levels of government to negotiate the inevitable challenges of housing, employment and education. Three years on and levels of sympathy and funding for Ukraine's refugees are strained, and increasingly restrictive border and asylum policies are being waged against asylum seekers.

The EU electoral map has also shifted to show several political parties brought to prominence after employing hostile anti-migrant rhetoric. EPIM's vision – that sees migration as an intrinsic part of Europe's story in which migrants can shape their future – remains crucial in these turbulent times, as does its mission to forge new alliances that can shape the narrative. From confronting the exploitation of migrant workers in the Italian agricultural sector, breaking barriers to higher education for exiled people in France or taking the Hungarian government to court over pushbacks, EPIM's partners are continuing to challenge the weaponisation of migration and nurture partnerships that can change the way the phenomenon is addressed and perceived.

In 2024 the inaugural EPIM Forum gathered in Brussels, representing a unique and diverse collaboration between a variety of actors in the migration ecosystem. Leveraging insight from professionals spanning the fields of civil society, activism, philanthropy, media, government and the private sector, the Forum is a dynamic ideas laboratory that will encourage a shared purpose and stimulate better collaboration by crowdsourcing ideas for the future of EPIM's strategy. As Europe's longest standing philanthropic collaborative working on migration and inclusion, EPIM has transformed from a grant issuer to a curator and catalyst.

HUNGARIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

Partner spotlight

Background



The Hungarian Helsinki Committee is a non-governmental watchdog organisation founded in 1989 that protects human dignity and the rule of law through legal intervention and public advocacy.

Aniko Bakonyi, director of the Refugee Programme

“Asylum seekers have extremely limited access to Hungary's territory due to a policy of pushbacks by the police, and externalisation of the barely functioning asylum procedure. Our activities around migrants' rights are not supported by the authorities, and we are frequently subject to smear campaigns, but despite these adverse circumstances we are still able to support asylum seekers and refugees gain or maintain their legal status, access services and legally reunite with their family members.”

Our strategic litigation work has seen several successful challenges to the Hungarian government at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and at the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). In 2024 alone we won twelve cases against the unlawful detention of

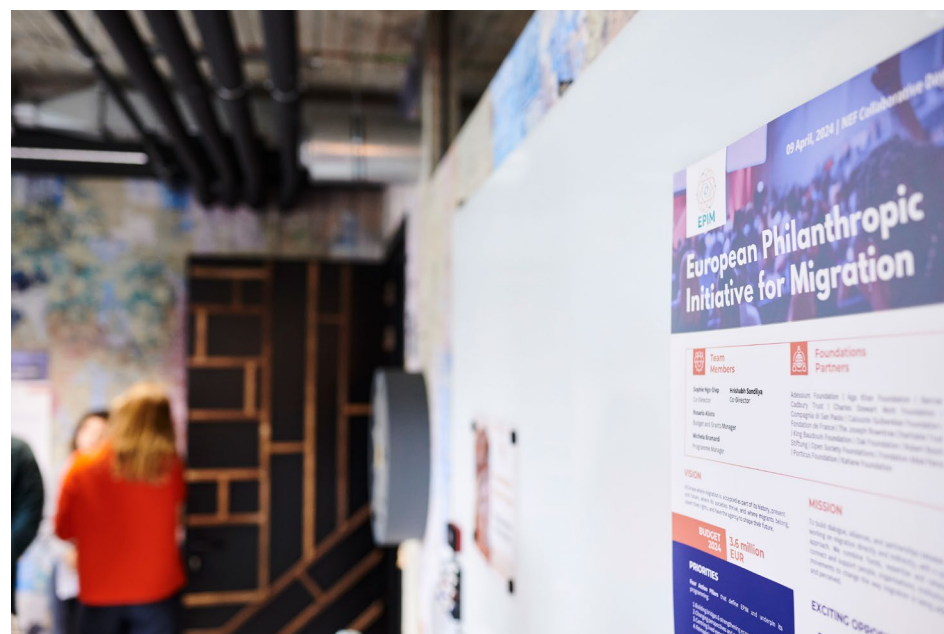
migrants in the transit zone on the Serbian border as well as several cases against collective expulsions – one involving a minor and another a six-member family with four children.

This kind of work is a marathon not a sprint, and sometimes the court judgments happen long after the original violation, but it is important to show that justice can be and is delivered. Three years into the war next door in Ukraine and we are now seeing the government imposing restrictive measures on the beneficiaries of temporary protection, based on arbitrary assessments of the security situation. This has led to several Ukrainian refugees being denied accommodation leading to homelessness and, in some cases, even returning to Ukraine.

With EPIM's support we have also conducted comparative pan-European research on how national security concerns are often used for adversarial migration procedures and to deny migrants, asylum seekers and refugees the right to defence. Civil society is constantly under attack in Hungary, and there is a huge power imbalance between us and the government, so it is important to keep up a spirit of solidarity and cooperation and stand by our values.

In 2016, when the government started to crack down on organisations working on migration, we asked colleagues in Russia and Turkey to tell us about their experiences and strategies. Now we are being asked by colleagues across Europe how to respond when their governments take an illiberal turn.

Going forward, HHC will be ramping up our work defending attacks on the rule of law more widely. We will also be closely cooperating with groups in other countries in monitoring how the EU Migration Pact is being implemented. Hungary has indicated it may opt-out of the pact altogether, so the oversight role of independent organisations has become even more important.



International Development

At NEF, international development is rooted in collaborative projects that reflect Europe's commitment to international solidarity.

However, the significant decline in international public aid signals a troubling shift in the global context, which is increasingly defined by humanitarian crises, deepening inequalities and climate change.

Our work in international development is characterised by the thematic diversity of philanthropic engagement. One standout project, JAFOWA, has supported farmers' organisations in West Africa for over a decade.

This collaboration between foundations promotes the growth of a strong and equitable farmers' movement, demonstrating the potential of long-term, cooperative efforts in global development.





JOINT ACTION FOR FARMERS' ORGANISATIONS IN WEST AFRICA (JAFOWA)

The recent upsurge in global instability, energy prices and climate change-related turbulence has exacerbated an already precarious global food security situation, highlighting more than ever the critical role of smallholder farmers, who produce one-third of the world's food (and nearly 80% of sub-Saharan Africa's).

In this context, Farmers' Organizations (FOs) play a vital role in representing smallholder farmers and securing their economic future. Through supporting smallholder farmers, pastoralists and fishermen, JAFOWA seeks to reinforce a resilient and collaborative farmers' movement in Senegal and Burkina Faso, that can benefit communities in ecologically sustainable ways. JAFOWA envisions that agroecological practices will promote local and regional solutions, improve yields for family farms, and ensure their long-term sustainability.

In recent years, JAFOWA has therefore been supporting farmers and food producers in their transition to agroecology - an interdisciplinary approach that aims to achieve environmental, economic and social sustainability in the food system. Such an evolution requires fostering the continued economic empowerment and leadership of women and youth within farmer organisations to inspire change in broader communities, a cause JAFOWA has championed for many years.

To accompany this robust farmers' movement in West Africa, JAFOWA also supports FOs to further expand their membership, professionalise their staff, and develop their role as mobilisers by cultivating partnerships with research institutes, private companies, and local authorities. With JAFOWA funding, smallholder farmers are strengthened in their agroecological practices through

a range of activities: on the supply side, by improving seed varieties, enhancing soil fertility and promoting more efficient management of water resources; and on the demand side, by diversifying practices and expanding market access. In the years ahead, JAFOWA will continue to build momentum to create a more fertile environment for sustainable local food products and systems.

FONGS

Partner spotlight

Background

FONGS is a Farmers' Organisation that supports the economic development of family farms by mobilising 32 associations representing over 120,000 members in villages across Senegal to improve living and working conditions in rural areas. FONGS has been partnering with JAFOWA since 2019.



Mouhamed Nassy Ba - FONGS' technical assistant for the project «Agroecological Transition dandé maayo 2»

As part of FONGS' strategy to facilitate the sustainable transformation of family farms by introducing agroecological practices in different contexts, we focused on the Senegal River Valley - an area with an agro-sylvo-pastoral tradition. In the first phase of our project, which ran from 2019-2022, we worked with a small number of family farms in an area where transhumance - the seasonal movement of herders with their livestock - is deeply rooted.

We encouraged transhumant families to develop stabling practices and a food security strategy; to grow fodder crops such as maralfalfa, while making the most of the animals' organic manure to promote crop diversification; and to produce milk to improve their children's nutrition. FONGS has also sought to enhance the role of women and young people in the management of farm resources by encouraging and accompanying family dialogue.

After having increased the number of beneficiary families from 18 to 360, thanks to several exchange visits where they could learn about the different ecological practices adopted by their peers, the ongoing second phase, which runs until 2026, aims to reach a critical mass of up to 800 families committed to agroecology.

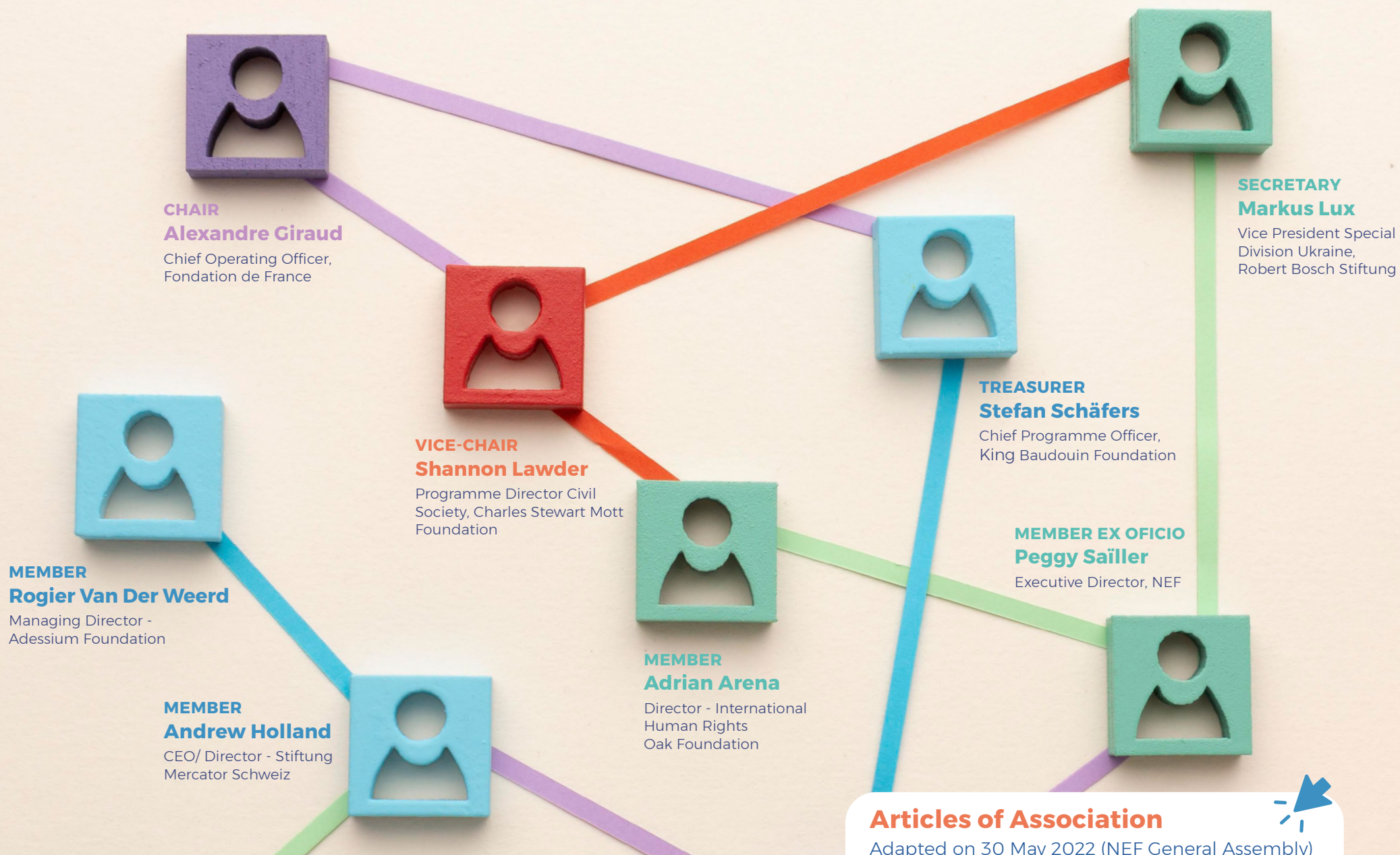
By continuing to promote farmer-to-farmer exchanges and developing key research partnerships with institutions such as the Senegalese Institute of Agricultural Research (ISRA) - to study the results of the first agroecological plots - FONGS is leveraging both local and scientific knowledge.

During the first phase, we also developed tools to support a number of community initiatives to manage ponds and forests in this area of the valley. In the second phase, we will strengthen these efforts and see how they can be scaled up by continuing the dialogue between the various initiative leaders and the authorities, as well as ensuring social and political cohesion at the local level.

Through this collaboration, we aim to strengthen the resilience of family farms by integrating them into a more competitive economy in a way that allows both farmers, their communities and society, and the environment to thrive in the long term.



NEF Board of Directors



Annual accounts - Balance sheet

ASSETS	2022	2023	2024
FIXED ASSETS	0	0	0
EQUIPMENT	0	0	0
Equipment	0	0	0
Equipment depreciations	0	0	0
FURNITURE	0	0	0
Furniture	0	0	0
Furniture depreciations	0	0	0
CASH GUARANTEES	0	0	0
CURRENT ASSETS	16 077 084	16 748 700	21 269 591
DEBTORS	1 967 316	921 121	1 019 800
ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE	8 850	0	540
BONDS, SECURITIES & DEPOSITS	948 274	948 274	948 274
CASH & BANK	13 133 738	14 823 801	19 295 473
ACCRUED INCOME	0	0	0
DEFERRED CHARGES	18 906	55 503	5 504
TOTAL ASSETS	16 077 084	16 748 700	21 269 591

LIABILITIES	2022	2023	2024
EQUITY	2 174 776	2 233 921	2 428 197
CAPITAL	150 000	150 000	150 000
Starting funds	150 000	150 000	150 000
RESERVES	1 145 088	1 199 906	1 361 306
General reserve	305 629	308 448	308 448
Social reserve	111 459	116 459	156 459
EASIF reserve		35 000	70 000
AGEE reserve		30 000	60 000
EPIM reserve	460 000	460 000	460 000
Civitates reserve	250 000	250 000	250 000
Infrastructure PH Meeting Booth	18 000	0	0
Provisions for risks/ EFB	0	0	56 400
ACCUMULATED RESULTS	879 688	884 015	916 891
CURRENT LIABILITIES	13 902 307	14 514 778	18 841 394
SUPPLIERS & COMMERCIAL DEBTS	613 122	889 841	1 045 780
OTHER DEBTS	0	0	0
FISCAL & SOCIAL DEBTS	122 182	153 905	182 599
Taxes	0	0	9 519
Social charges and wages	122 182	153 905	182 599
ACCRUALS & DEFERRED INCOME	0	0	0
DEFERRED CHARGES	18 906	55 503	5 504
Deferred charges	0	0	0
Deferred incomes	0	120 000	0
Funds projects to carry forward	13 167 003	13 351 032	17 613 015
TOTAL LIABILITIES	16 077 084	16 748 700	21 269 591

Annual accounts - Profit and loss statement

INCOME	2022	2023	2024
MEMBERSHIP FEES	175 626	200,732	264,676
RECUP. NEF STAFF COSTS	678 742	611 554	983 834
FINANCING OF PROJECTS	11 525 314	15 351 226	15 463 148
COST CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PROJECTS	229 359	257 986	463 148 859
OTHER OPERATING ITEMS	0	482	1 432
FINANCIAL INCOME	0	42,212	85 428
EXCEPTIONAL ITEMS	0	0	0
TOTAL INCOME	36	326	326

EXPENDITURES	2022	2023	2024
NEF RUNNING COSTS	113 700	181 147	197 000
RENT PH	16 918	22 340	30 471
STATIONARY & OFFICE MATERIALS	1 526	4 116	5 599
POSTAL CHARGES	169	362	405
PHONE AND INTERNET	1 214	1 944	1 142
COSTS OF SOCIAL SECRETARIAT	6 588	12 342	6 950
INSURANCE	2 370	3 319	3 122
TRAVEL COSTS	7 083	7 083	6 593
FOOD COST	5 108	5 516	6 656
NEF GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING COSTS	2 506	2 000	0
PUBLICATIONS	9 645	9 104	3 116
SERVICE PROVIDERS (Accounting, IT, legal, auditors,...)	50 854	100 251	110 348
NEF COLLABORATIVE DAY	7 302	0	8 780
OTHER COSTS	2 417	4 024	4 184
TRAINING / NEF Staff	0	14 138	4 244
STAFF (Incl. social charges)	912 393	908 601	1 604 598
DEPRECIATIONS	0	0	0
PROVISIONS	18 000	5 000	96 400
PROJECTS SPENDINGS	11 525 314	15 351 226	15 463 148
RUNNING TAX EXPENSES	2 417	12 617	9 519
FINANCIAL COSTS	4 874	13 890	3 836
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	12 574 282	16 459 865	17 374 502

PROFITS/LOSSES	34 760	4 327	32 875
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Members



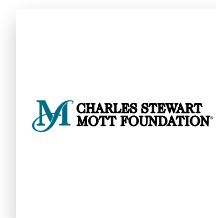
• Oak Foundation



• Adessium Foundation



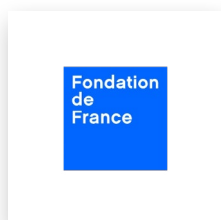
• Compagnia di San Paolo



• Charles Stewart Mott Foundation



• Erste Stiftung



• Fondation de France



• Fritt Ord Foundation



• Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation



• King Baudouin Foundation



• Open Society Foundations



• Robert Bosch Stiftung



• Stiftung Mercator

Observer



• Philanthropy Europe Association



Foundation partners



- Adessium Foundation
- Bodossaki Foundation
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- Erste Stiftung, European Cultural Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- Fondation de France
- Fritt Ord Foundation
- King Baudouin Foundation (Chair)
- Mercator Switzerland
- Oak Foundation
- Limelight Foundation
- Luminate, Isocrates Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Philanthropy for Impact
- Porticus
- Robert Bosch Stiftung
- Rudolf Augstein Stiftung
- Sigrid Rausing Trust
- Stefan Batory Foundation
- Veronika Foundation
- Schöpflin Stiftung
- EFC Foundation



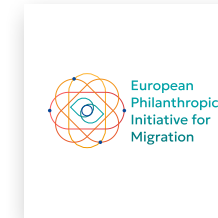
- Ai Collaborative
- Luminate (Co-Chair)
- Stiftung Mercator (Co-Chair)
- Adessium Foundation
- Ai Collaborative
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo
- Fondation de France
- Ford Foundation
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- King Baudouin Foundation
- Limelight Foundation
- Mozilla Foundation
- Oak Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Porticus
- Robert Bosch Foundation
- Hewlett Foundation
- Isocrates Foundation



- King Baudouin Foundation (Chair)
- Robert Bosch Stiftung
- ERSTE Stiftung
- Austrian Parliament and German Ministry of Foreign Affairs



- Fondation CHANEL
- L'Oréal fund for Women
- King Baudouin Foundation
- Bodossaki Foundation
- JPMorgan Chase
- Fondation de France
- Fondation RAJA



- Adessium Foundation
- Barrow Cadbury Trust
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- Compagnia di San Paolo
- Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
- Fondation de France
- The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- King Baudouin Foundation
- Oak Foundation,
- Robert Bosch Stiftung
- Fondation pour le logement des défavorisés
- Porticus
- Kahane Foundation
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Fred Foundation



- Compagnia di San Paolo (Chair)
- Fondazione Cariplo
- Fondation de France
- King Baudouin Foundation





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Foundations