



Resilient



Stronger

The Carpathian Civil Society Platform in mountainous rural areas of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine



SUMMARY

The Carpathian Civil Society Platform (CCSP) is an initiative to strengthen the capacities of rural civil society organisations (CSOs) in the remote mountainous areas of the Carpathians in Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine, which face similar challenges, such as increased social exclusion of vulnerable groups. The platform has created supporting networks at two levels. At the local level, networks of CSOs from each of the countries have been formed to address issues within each territory. At the transnational level, the hub operates through an online interregional platform and a series of international meetings between all members of the Carpathian region. Over a hundred CSOs in rural areas of the Carpathians have already benefited from this initiative through access to funding, information and capacity building.



CONTEXT

Despite language and other differences, the most underdeveloped rural border areas of Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine share some similar characteristics, such as being at a considerable distance from the country's capital, ethnic diversity and a common cultural heritage.

They also face similar challenges such as poor infrastructure, increasing poverty, and social exclusion, particularly among vulnerable groups such as refugees, Roma people, the elderly or people with disabilities. **CSOs operating in remote rural areas of the Carpathian region do not possess sufficient assets** (funding, information, tools for development, etc.) to carry out effective interventions for such complex and cross-cutting problems.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the CCSP are to strengthen collaboration between CSOs in rural areas and between these and other public and private institutions, and train them to exchange experiences, knowledge and good practices on inclusive and sustainable rural development in mountain areas, including social innovation initiatives that can deal with the challenges they face in a more efficient way.

Themes: Democracy and participation, social inclusion. **Rural revitalisation**

Countries: Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine (the Carpathian Region). Romania joined in 2023.

Organisation(s): Carpathian Foundation Hungary, Brama Karpat Poland, ETP Slovakia, Carpathian Foundation Ukraine (NGOs)

Start & end date: 03/18 - Ongoing

Budget 374,000 €

Funding sources: European Regional Development Fund, INTERREG 2021-2027, CE0100083. Project name: Central Mountains For the period 2018-2022, co funded by: Robert Bosch Stiftung, Open Society Foundation, International Visegrad Fund, Swedish Embassy to Hungary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Netherlands, Carpathian Foundation Hungary

Website: [Carpathian Civil Society Platform](https://carpathiancivilsocietyplatform.org)

Contact: Sandor Koles, President of the Board, Carpathian Foundation, sandor.koles@cfoundation.org





ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The first CCSP meeting took place in Kosice, Slovakia, in 2018. Subsequently, local workshops were organised in all countries involved in the hub to engage CSOs, identify their needs and create partnerships. These local workshops are called local “hublets” and bring together CSOs in the rural area of each of the countries. For each country, there is a partner organisation that acts as the country support organisation for the local networks and which is, at the same time, the main representative of that country in the interregional hub.

After the needs assessment, the platform organised a series of capacity building training for its members. A significant activity has been the mobilisation of different public funding by the hub. CSOs in this area do not have the capacity to apply for and manage funds to help finance their activities. Thus, the hub has secured funding through various sources (INTERREG, ERDF, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Open Society Foundation, etc.) and has organised a micro-grant scheme for local hub members through a series of calls for proposals. In 2020, the hub published its good practice brochure as a result of the knowledge transfer conducted among partners of the region.



RESULTS

Thanks to the support of the CCSP, **local networks of grassroots rural CSOs** have been created in each border region, **with around 20 to 30 CSO members in each of the four countries**. Since 2018, the local networks organise regular meetings and events to share experiences and seek mutual support. After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the local network of this country does not organise physical meetings but continues to be active remotely.

The interregional events have been a great opportunity for CSOs and other interested stakeholders in rural areas to discuss issues related to rural revitalisation and develop transborder cooperation, joint projects and exchange of experiences. The mini-grant scheme has allowed support for implementation of 15 local projects, including transnational study visits, mentoring sessions for CSOs and volunteers, creation of websites, videos and other communication materials, and the organisation of a music festival performed by Roma gospel bands in a rural area of Slovakia. The platform has involved over a hundred organisations in the period 2018-2022 and aims to expand this number not only in the four existing countries but also to scale it up to Romania in 2023.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

The success of the CCSP lies in the fact that it has been created with and for rural CSOs that want to respond to the needs of communities in the region. The initiative started small and has grown step by step with the continuous involvement of CSOs and other stakeholders to ensure ownership of the process. It has been able to weather different crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the hub's physical meetings, and the war in Ukraine, which required the rapid mobilisation of humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees arriving in the Carpathians.

Another major challenge the platform is responding to is the difficulty of accessing funding to support rural CSOs. Given the expertise required to apply for funding and the temporary nature of the funds, which mostly last 1-2 years, the hub has tried to **diversify funding sources** from year to year to overcome the unpredictability of having enough resources. This initiative recognises the **added value of cross-border cooperation** in responding to common challenges and finding common solutions.



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info@rural-pact.eu



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