



Thematic fund civil society in Bulgaria and Romania

**STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN BULGARIA AND ROMANIA**



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Promoting civil society activities is important for democracy in Bulgaria and Romania.

Switzerland funds social and environmental projects in Bulgaria and Romania for a total amount of CHF 24.8 million. The projects promote and enhance the involvement of civil society in the economic and social development of their respective countries.

NGOs have become increasingly important in Bulgaria and Romania in the past 20 years. But they still face major challenges, including very low membership and scant influence on political decision-making processes. Moreover, the financial and economic crisis of recent years has weighed heavily on the NGO sector in Bulgaria and Romania.

**NGOS – THE KEY PLAYERS**

The problems facing the NGO sector are particularly worrying, as socially disadvantaged groups rely on their support for social services. Furthermore, NGOs contribute to an active civil society, which in turn fosters democracy, a strong civil society having an important control function over state authorities.

Switzerland supports over 120 individual social and environmental projects in Bulgaria and Romania through its NGO fund. In certain cases, including

Swiss project partners enables the NGOs to benefit from expertise and experience specific to Switzerland.

Cooperating with organisations in the partner countries allows Swiss organisations to expand their networks and their specialist knowledge. What is more, Switzerland itself benefits from the NGOs' work, as it frequently has an international or even global impact, for example in the areas of migration or environmental protection.



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A centre in Bulgaria partially funded by the enlargement contribution provides social services for traumatised families and children like Ivan, 7 years old.

**ACTIVE CIVIC INVOLVEMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND NATURE CONSERVATION**

The NGO fund in Bulgaria and Romania comes under the thematic fund civil society which Switzerland uses to support other projects aimed at strengthening civil society, in addition to its support for the NGO funds. Most of these projects are in the area of environmental protection. In Bulgaria for example CHF 4.2 million goes to supporting the project entitled Linking Nature Protection and Sustainable Rural Development. The aim of this project is to get the civil society more actively involved in the sustainable development of agriculture, nature conservation and environmental protection. It involves working closely with Swiss partner organisations, for example Pro Natura and the Réseau Echange Développement Durable (REDD), both of which bring invaluable experience to the table. The sustainable cultivation, distribution and marketing of organic produce also

make up an important part of the project. The project leader, Dr Stoilko Apostolov, sees the project as an important example of how nature conservation and sustainability can bring added value to local products and services.



**Sustainable agriculture is promoted through the effective marketing of organic produce and local brands.**

## THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

### OBJECTIVE

Strengthening civil society

### THEME

Thematic fund civil society

### COUNTRY

Bulgaria and Romania

### PARTNERS

Swiss NGOs (in particular associations, federations and foundations)

### STARTING POINT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

An NGO sector emerged in the new EU member states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But compared with the other EU member states this sector remains limited in size, especially in Bulgaria and Romania.

### PURPOSE

- Strengthening civil society in Bulgaria and Romania
- Co-funding of over 120 individual projects

### ACTIVITIES

- Exchange of expertise in specific areas through partnerships
- Exchange of visits to share experiences
- Joint evaluation and drafting of reports
- Creating long-term international relationships in the specialist area

### TARGET GROUPS

Direct: NGOs in the respective countries

Indirect: civil society in Bulgaria and Romania

### COSTS

CHF 24.8 million

(Bulgaria: CHF 8 million, Romania: CHF 16.8 million)

### RESPONSIBLE FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Bulgarian and Romanian NGOs, partly in cooperation with Swiss partners

### DURATION

2011–2019

*My dream's come true: I can finally deliver my farm produce directly to the people.*



**Ivan Atanasov, farmer and milk producer from Berkovitsa**

SWISS ENLARGEMENT CONTRIBUTION

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[www.swiss-contribution.admin.ch](http://www.swiss-contribution.admin.ch)