Solidarity Fund PL

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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Basic Information about Solidarity Fund PL

Solidarity Fund PL

Headquarters: Warsaw
Registered and correspondence address:
4 Mysłowicka Str., 01-612 Warsaw, Poland
Website: www.solidarityfund.pl/en
Date of entry into the National Court Register (KRS): 12 July 2001

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Management Board in the reporting period:
Rafał Dzięciołowski – President of the Management Board until 31 May 2024
Henryk Litwin – President of the Management Board until 31 October 2024
Justyna Janiszewska – President of the Management Board from 1 November 2024

Council of the Foundation in the reporting period

- Until 13 February 2024
  Piotr Mieczysław Babinetz
  Władysław Teofil Bartoszewski
  Barbara Halina Bartuś
  Edward Siarka
  Krzysztof Marek Słoń
  Ryszard Jan Wilczyński
- Until 8 June 2024
  Ryszard Henryk Czarnecki
- From 23 April 2024
  Jakub Wiśniewski – Chairperson
  Aleksandra Wiśniewska
  Maciej Konieczny
  Marcin Bosacki
  Maciej Żywno
  Anna Radwan-Röhrenschef
  Krzysztof Stanowski
  Robert Tyszkiewicz
- From 19 June 2024
  Konrad Szymański

Solidarity Fund PL is a State Treasury foundation working to implement tasks in the field of international development cooperation. The Foundation supports democratic transformation, development of civil society, good governance, promotion of human rights, strengthening of local democracy, and sharing of Poland's experience in political and economic transformation.

The Foundation was established in 1997 on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Poland who serves as its honorary patron.

The Foundation's strategic directions are set by its Council chaired by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs responsible for development cooperation who also acts as the National Coordinator for Development Cooperation. Oversight is exercised by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Finance. Solidarity Fund PL cooperates closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland in implementing development cooperation activities.

The Foundation operates based on the principle of international solidarity and is guided by the values of solidarity, responsibility, respect, and empathy. In 2024, Soli-

darity Fund PL carried out activities in countries of the Eastern Partnership: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia. In addition to its headquarters in Warsaw, the Foundation has its branch offices in Kyiv, Chisinau, and Tbilisi.

Solidarity Fund PL's operations are financed by the Polish development cooperation programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, the European Union, and other donors. In 2024, the Foundation's budget amounted to PLN 50 million, more than half of which – PLN 26.4 million – came from Polish Aid to support the goals of Poland's development cooperation. Solidarity Fund PL is one of two Polish institutions that hold a pillar assessment by the European Commission, enabling it to apply for the status of implementing partner in EU development programmes.

Solidarity for Development

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interconnected goals established by the United Nations to address global challenges and promote a more sustainable and equitable world. The SDGs are an important point of reference for Polish development cooperation. The long-term development cooperation programme for 2021–2030, „Solidarity for Development", sets out Poland's priorities for international support in line with selected UN goals.

Through its activities, Solidarity Fund PL contributes to the implementation of Poland's development cooperation goals such as: peace, justice, and strong institutions; equal opportunities (including education, decent work, entrepreneurship, and reducing inequalities); sustainable cities, regional development and rural development; health; and the protection of the climate and natural resources.

Solidarity Fund PL's activities were financed by:

Polish aid

and:

BGK Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego

Council of Europe – Conseil de l'Europe

Mieroszewski Centre

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

European Endowment for Democracy

estDev From the people of Estonia

European Commission

Chancellery of the Prime Minister Republic of Poland

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage

UKaid from the British people

USAID From the American People

II. Ukraine

Introduction

The third year of full-scale war has not broken the spirit of the Ukrainian people, but it has brought new challenges and intensified existing ones. The Solidarity Fund PL (SFPL) continues to expand its activities in Ukraine, supporting our neighbour in several key areas. Our activities are closely tied to Ukraine's EU accession negotiations which began at the end of 2023.

For SFPL, this was another year of engagement in supporting major reforms related to the decentralisation of the state – covering social services, vocational education, and the protection and safety of the population. The Foundation addresses the needs of Ukrainian municipalities (hromadas) helping them acquire the skills necessary to cope with the effects of the war and future reconstruction.

The decentralisation process in Ukraine, actively supported by SFPL, involves transferring authority, control, and responsibility from central government bodies to the local level, primarily to municipalities. Decentralisation brings opportunities but also challenges related to governance in areas that have become the new responsibility of lower-level officials. One of these is safety that the Foundation addresses primarily by promoting the model of volunteer fire brigades and helping to establish such units in communities.

Another important area of work is building a stable and locally accessible system of psychosocial support for war veterans and other people affected by war. This is achieved by implementing the PRO_MentalHealth model in various regions, in close cooperation with local administrations and aid institutions.

SFPL is also active in reforms at the central level. Modernising curricula, promoting vocational education among young people, improving the management system and raising teachers' qualifications, as well as improving infrastructure and the financing system and investing in n educational facilities are all key assumptions of the SFPL's activities in supporting the reform of the Ukrainian vocational education system. In 2024, work continued on a modern registry of museum objects, contributing to the digitization and preservation of Ukrainian cultural heritage.

PROJEKT

Volunteer Fire Brigade drills in the village of Trostianets. Photo: SFPL archive

Firefighters. Strengthening the Resilience of Ukrainian Hromadas Through Local Volunteer Civil Protection Organisations

The „Firefighters" programme focuses on implementing a modern civil protection system at the local level, with particular emphasis on fire safety and crisis prevention. The creation of volunteer fire brigades in hromadas is a key element. Launched in 2023, the project builds on SFPL's experience working with hromadas and the model for establishing volunteer fire brigades developed during the during the first edition of the „Firefighters" project.

In 2024, the project focused on two main aspects: supporting 8 hromadas in establishing volunteer fire brigades and fostering a nationwide discussion on civil protection models. Specialists from SFPL, Polish experts, and representatives of Ukraine's State Emergency Service (DSNS) played key roles in the project's implementation.

Implementation period:
September 2023 — December 2024

Partners in Ukraine: State Emergency Service of Ukraine (DSNS), State Rescue Service of Ukraine, Association of Volunteer Fire Brigades, 8 hromadas: Bilytska (Poltava Oblast), Kamin-Kashyrska (Volyn Oblast), Koretska (Rivne Oblast), Koropska (Chernihiv Oblast), Kurnenska (Zhytomyr Oblast), Pustomytyvska (Lviv Oblast), Trostianetska (Sumy Oblast), Khotynska (Chernivtsi Oblast)

Partners in Poland:
Experts

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland) and the U.S. Department of State

Award value in 2024:
PLN 924,000

Programme website:
vognebortsi.in.ua

As a result of the project:

8 *volunteer fire brigades, ready to respond to emergencies and consisting of 10 to 14 members each, were established in hromadas.*

96 *volunteer firefighters from new units were equipped with personal protective equipment, as well as radio stations, fire hoses, fire extinguishers, hand ladders, axes, hooligans, shovels, dielectric cutters, flashlights, chain saws, power generators, motor pumps, racks for combat clothing, protective masks, gas masks, etc.*

96 *volunteer firefighters received certified theoretical and practical training from DSNS experts.*

28 *fires were extinguished by the newly formed units in the last quarter of 2024.*

Participating hromadas received comprehensive preparation from Polish and Ukrainian experts to support and develop volunteer fire brigades including:

- **5 webinars** on practical issues related to establishing and running volunteer fire brigades, e.g. setting up a non-governmental organisation as a basis for a volunteer fire brigades, managing volunteers and developing a team action plan, formal ways of supporting volunteer fire brigades by local communities, promoting the activities of volunteer fire brigades and engaging residents, risk analysis.

- **15 consultation sessions** on operational aspects of volunteer fire brigades, such as insurance and medical examinations for members, legal aspects of equipment transfers as humanitarian aid, notification systems, recognizing the brigades as critical infrastructure, and evaluating regulations and legal acts.

- **A roundtable discussion** involving all participating hromadas. During the event, a number of important and topical issues were addressed:

    - implementation of hybrid models of operation of volunteer fire brigades: practice of interaction between local and volunteer fire brigades,
    - the potential for transforming the network of local fire departments into volunteer ones,
    - implementation of the European model of volunteer fire brigades based on NGOs,
    - involvement of people with experience in the structures of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence in volunteer fire brigades as an investment in state security,
    - implementation of the stages of the DSNS action plan for the development of volunteer and local fire protection units in Ukraine,
    - organisational and legal challenges on the way to the European model of the fire safety system in Ukraine: project conclusions and vision for the future of the system,
    - integration of risk analysis in the planning process as part of Ukraine's future civil protection model.

As part of promoting the volunteer fire brigade model and debating the civil protection system, in April 2024, the project team took part in the All-Ukrainian Forum *„Public Safety During Wartime. Cooperation between the DSNS and hromadas,"* presenting the topic *„Volunteer Fire Brigades in Ukraine and Europe: Facts and Myths"* that summarized the activities carried out so far. The forum was organised by the Association of United Territorial Hromadas, the Association of Sappers of Ukraine, and the DSNS of Ukraine.

In May 2024, an online roundtable discussion titled *„Development of the Volunteer Fire Brigade Movement in Ukraine. Success Stories"* was held to promote the volunteer fire brigade movement. The event was attended by over 60 representatives of hromadas, government institutions (regional emergency services), NGOs, and academia.

In addition, the project team and experts participated in seven events, both specialist and public, dedicated to promoting the volunteer fire brigade movement in Ukraine and specific changes in legislation, including participation in a field meeting of the relevant committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, participation in working groups at the DSNS as well as security forums, training sessions and thematic film screenings.

The „Firefighters" programme will continue in the coming years.

Volunteer Fire Brigade drills in the village of Trostianets. Photo: SFPL archive

PRO_MentalHealth Model

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry for Veterans Affairs estimate that after the war, up to 15 million Ukrainians (including soldiers, veterans, members of their families and families of those killed, former prisoners of war, survivors of the occupation and internally displaced persons) will need vast support to overcome the negative effects of the war. SFPL has been operating in this area since 2021, and has been implementing a local support model for veterans and other people affected by war called PRO_MentalHealth since 2023. The model involves creating psychosocial support centres at the municipal level with the involvement of regional and central authorities. The centres offer a basic package of services: psychological and psychiatric support, physical rehabilitation, social adaptation as well as legal and career counselling. After the first year of implementation, the municipalities independently maintain the centres while also benefiting from government programmes run by the Ministry for Veterans Affairs and the Ministry of Social Policy. SFPL provides financial support (preparing infrastructure, premises, and equipment) and technical assistance (transferring methodologies for establishing centres and training specialists).

PROJECT

Psychosocial Support in Ukraine. PRO_MentalHealth (Rivne Oblast)

The project implemented in 2024 is a continuation of the pilot activities from the previous year, focusing on further support for four psychosocial rehabilitation centres established in 2023 in the hromadas of the Rivne Oblast: Dubno, Sarny, Volodymyrets, and Zdolbuniv.

The centres operate on the basis of the infrastructure and financial resources of hromadas, but in the initial period of their operation they required substantive support to ensure high quality services and financial support to expand their scope. In 2024, each centre received SFPL funding, which collectively enabled:

- implementing three new services,
- establishing and equipping two new branches of the centres in Radyvyliv and Mizoch,
- Improving qualifications of 14 members of multidisciplinary teams providing psychosocial services,
- organising 78 psychoeducational meetings.

The centres employed a total of 12 psychologists (including 3 psychologists specialising in career counselling), 3 social work specialists, 2 physiotherapists and 1 lawyer.

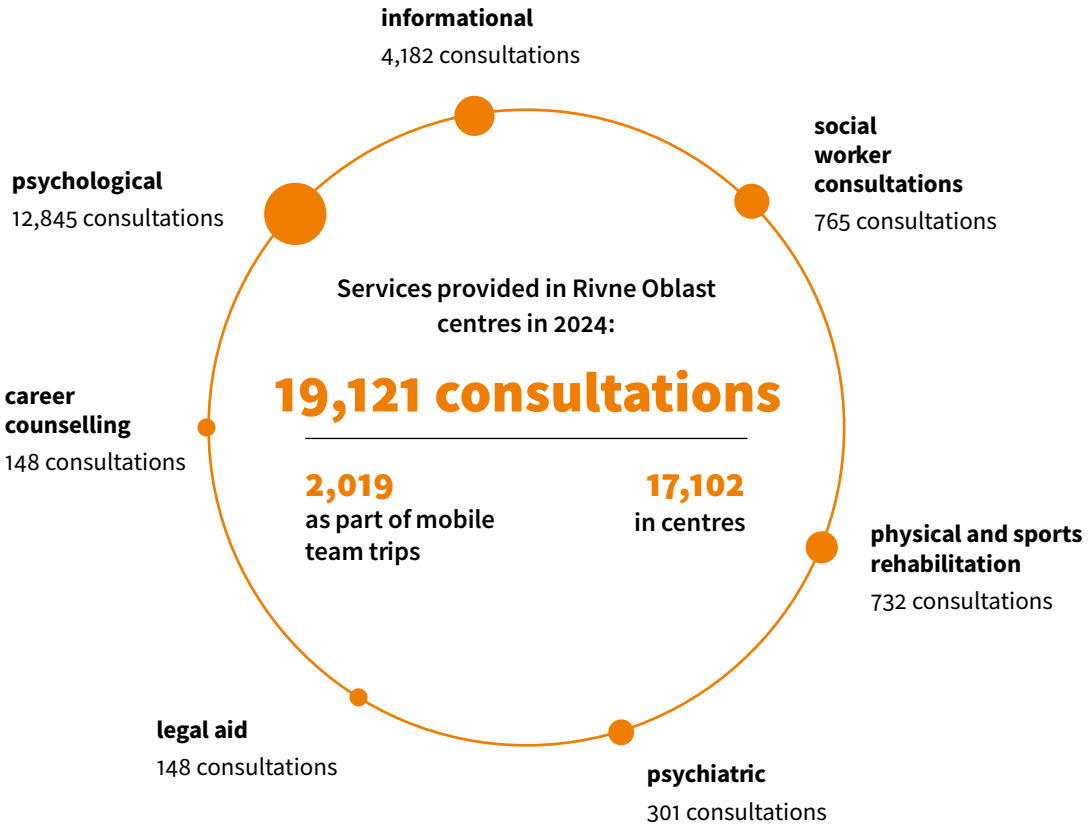
Implementation period:
January — December 2024

Partners in Ukraine:
4 hromadas in Rivne Oblast — Dubno, Sarny, Volodymyrets, and Zdolbuniv, Ministry for Veterans Affairs, Ministry of Social Policy, Veterans Hospital in Klevan, Rivne Regional Military Administration, Rivne Regional Council

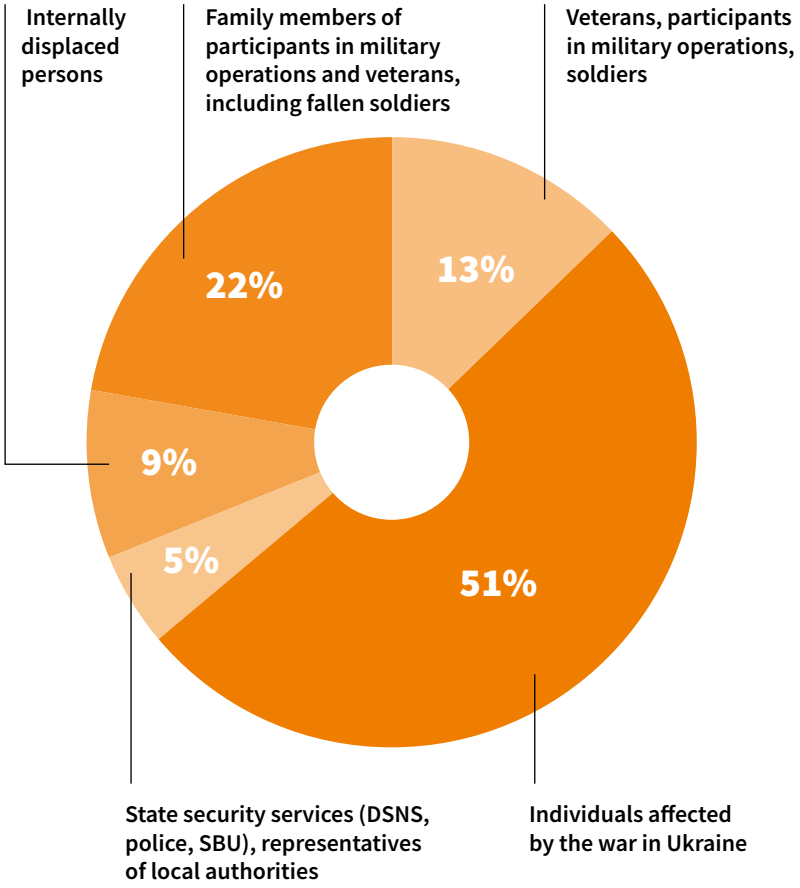
Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland)

Award value:
PLN 1.03 million

Programme website:
promentalhealth.niceua.dev

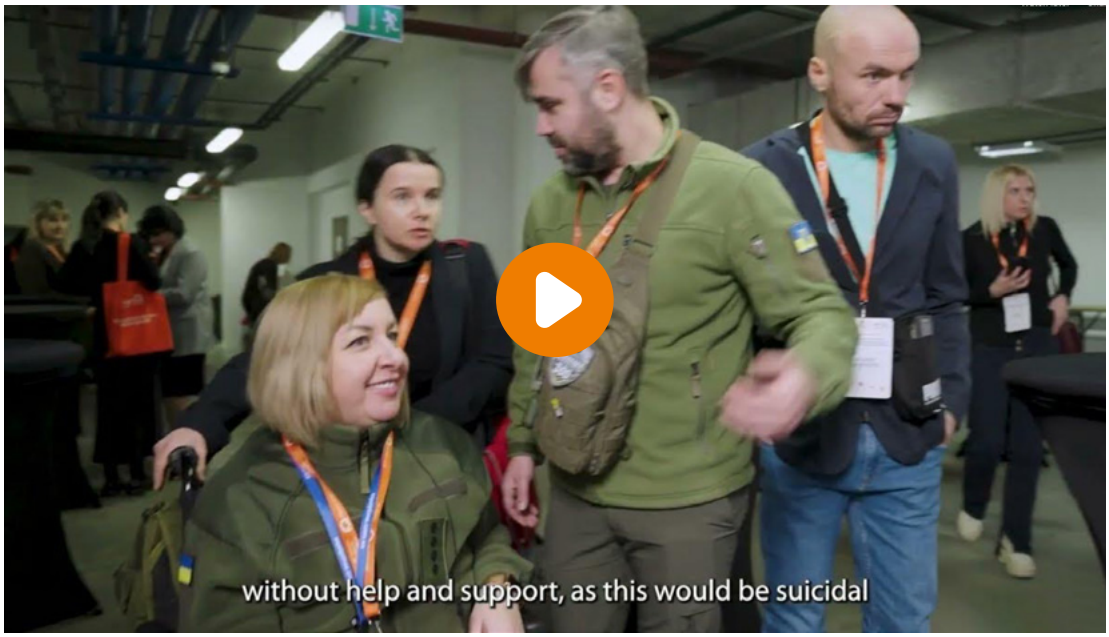


Individuals using the centres' services:



The project team also updated the methodological manual for hromadas interested in establishing centres based on the PRO_MentalHealth model. The publication includes a detailed action plan, recommendations for funding sources, and theoretical and practical guidance for creating centres to support those affected by the psychological impacts of the war. It also includes recommendations on possible sources of funding, as well as theoretical justifications and practical recommendations for establishing centres. The manual also contains references to legal acts regulating this process.

The culmination of the intensive activities carried out in 2024 was the Veterans Forum, organised in December in Kyiv, which was attended by 395 people (152 in person and 243 online). The forum's agenda included four discussion panels with representatives of regional and local authorities, experts, veterans' communities, and international organisations. The event was organised in cooperation with the Mental Health Coordination Centre under the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Ministry for Veterans Affairs. It was opened by Ambassador Piotr Łukasiewicz, Polish chargé d'affaires to Ukraine.



Building on the experience gained in Rivne Oblast, SFPL plans to further implement the PRO_MentalHealth model in other regions of Ukraine, each time in cooperation with central, regional, and local authorities. In the last quarter of 2024, SFPL began establishing four new support centres — this time in **Zhytomyr Oblast**. The project will continue.

PROJECT

Supporting the Decentralisation Process: Professionalisation Hromadas' Competences in the Provision of Social Services

The aim of the „Social Services" programme is to improve the quality and accessibility of these services by developing the competences of local authorities in the field of social assistance, training social workers and increasing the involvement of NGOs in the provision of support services.

When planning and implementing future projects, the Foundation will be guided by the results of a study of the needs and capabilities of hromadas conducted in autumn 2022. The data collected indicates the readiness of the hromadas to cooperate in strategic planning and awareness of the need for systemic change under martial law. Key challenges include tailoring services to the needs of internally displaced persons, providing psychological support and rehabilitation for military personnel and their families, and changing personnel policies and working conditions for social workers which includes measures to prevent burnout. Services are often delivered in crisis conditions.

The project implemented in 2024 was a continuation of activities from the previous year, including support for 13 communities in Cherkasy, Vinnytsia, and Zhytomyr Oblasts. The activities included training for representatives of hromadas in the field of social service planning, internships in Poland, a Small Projects Fund, and a summary conference.

Results of project implementation:

- 13 Long-Term Plans for Solving Social Problems were developed, including a diagnosis of the situation and a programme section while the representatives of the communities participating in their development significantly improved their strategic planning skills,
- 26 representatives from 13 hromadas completed internships in Polish municipalities,
- 12 of the 13 hromadas submitted applications to the Small Projects Fund which confirms the effectiveness of the training and the relevance of the proposed actions to local needs,
- Four hromadas received funding and implemented their projects:
    - Kurnenska Territorial Hromada (Zhytomyr Oblast) — „Socio-Cultural Space in Kurnenska Territorial Hromada."
    - Stepanecka Territorial Hromada (Cherkasy Oblast) — „Sensory Therapy."
    - Chyhyrynska Territorial Hromada (Cherkasy Oblast) — „Adaptive Space ‚We Are Close.'"
    - Ternivska Territorial Hromada (Cherkasy Oblast) — „Social Reintegration of Military Personnel, Veterans, and Their Families."
- 219 people (92 in person and 127 online) participated in the Good Practice Forum in December 2024 in Kyiv, which was an opportunity to present model solutions implemented as part of projects carried out by hromadas within this and previous SFPL projects.

Implementation period:
August 2023 — January 2025

Partners in Ukraine: 13 hromadas in Cherkasy, Vinnytsia, and Zhytomyr Oblasts

Partners in Poland:
municipalities — Sieradz, Zduńska Wola, Błaszki, Kozienice, Grabów nad Pilicą, Głowaczów

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland) and the U.S. Department of State

Award value in 2024:
PLN 1.38 million

The internship visits involved 26 representatives from 13 hromadas in three oblasts:

- Cherkasy (Stepanecka, Bilozirska, Ternivska, Chyhyrynska, Humanska, Mlyivska)
- Vinnytsia (Tulchinska, Barska, Kozatynska)
- Zhytomyr (Horodnytska, Zviahelska, Kurnenska, Semenivska)

The internships were attended by coordinators of teams developing Long-Term Plans for Solving Social Problems, social workers, and specialists in economic and investment development of hromadas.

The internship programme began with a one-day „Design Thinking" workshop followed by visits to Polish municipalities tailored to participants' needs. As part of the programme, participants visited the following municipalities: Sieradz, Zduńska Wola, Błaszki, Kozienice, Grabów nad Pilicą, Głowaczów. Participants visited social welfare institutions in these municipalities (e.g. the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Błaszki, the District Family Assistance Centre in Sieradz), civic organisations and self-help groups (e.g. the Abstinence Association „Przystań w Sieradzu", the University of the Second Age, the Association for Disabled Children „Dary Losu") as well as cultural and recreational institutions (cultural centres, the Municipal Sports and Recreation Centre in Sieradz). During the visits, the participants learned about the activities of these institutions, their model of financing from the local government budget and their programmes of cooperation with NGOs. All this is done so that beneficiaries better understand the mechanism of contracting social services to entities related to local government, but also to those private. The programme concluded with the „World Café" workshop.

In the last quarter of 2024, the Foundation launched activities aimed at professionalising the territorial competences of hromadas in the provision of social services in further regions of Ukraine. Due to circumstances beyond SFPL's control, the project was suspended at the beginning of 2025.

PROJECT

Building Management Competencies in Ukrainian Local Government Units. The „Good Governance" Internship Programme

The purpose of the programme, implemented from 2022, is to strengthen the competences of local governments in the context of Ukraine's accession to the European Union through the exchange of experiences between Polish and Ukrainian local government officials.

As part of the programme, participants from Ukraine can:

- take courses to enhance their knowledge and skills in securing and absorbing funding,
- complete internships in Polish municipalities,
- implement modernisation projects upon returning to Ukraine.

To date, 59 Ukrainian local government officials have completed courses and internships, and five modernisation projects have been implemented under the programme. Additionally, the following were signed:

- 8 cooperation agreements between Polish and Ukrainian municipalities,
- 2 agreements between Ukrainian municipalities.

In 2024, a competition was held for modernisation projects for participants of the previous edition of internships and a new edition of internships in Poland.

The results of the modernisation project competition

Out of 21 initiatives submitted, funding was awarded to 5 projects:

- Poninka Town Council (Khmelnytskyi Oblast) – *„Ecologically Active Youth as the Key to Developing Poninka as an Eco-Community with an Effective Waste Management System."*
- Varash Town Council (Social Services and Services Centre), (Rivne Oblast) — *„Social and educational space for seniors."*
- Smyga Town Council (Rivne Oblast) — *„Improving Emergency Medical Services by Establishing a Social-Medical ‚Public Health Centre.'"*
- Sofiyivka Village Council Executive Committee (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast)— *„Arrangement of a Youth Space in the Mykolaiv Starostvo of Sofiyivka Hromada."*
- Tulchyn Town Council (Vinnytsia Oblast) — *„Improving Waste Management Processes in Tulchyn Municipality Based on Nakło nad Notecią Experience."*

The positive impact of these projects is illustrated in video materials:

- Good Governance — 2023 Projects — Microgrant Competition Results
- Stories of Change in 5 Ukrainian Hromadas Under the Good Governance Programme — 2023 Projects

Implementation period:
January — December 2024

Partners in Ukraine:
hromadas

Partners in Poland:
Association of Polish Cities

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland), U-LEAD with Europe (European Union and its member states: Germany, Poland, Denmark, and Slovenia))

Award value:
PLN 898,000

New edition of individual internships

SFPL conducted another round of individual internships for local government officials. Out of 119 applications, 25 candidates were selected and invited to participate in the preparatory stage which consisted of a series of webinars concerning:

- project cycle management,
- anti-corruption measures in local government,
- local government models in Poland and Ukraine,
- Ukraine's integration with the European Union.

Based on the results of the knowledge test administered during the webinars and attendance, **15 participants** were selected to begin an intensive Polish language course.

At the same time, in cooperation with the Association of Polish Cities, the selection of Polish local governments hosting interns was completed, and mentors were prepared.

Ultimately, **14 individual internships** were completed — one participant was not granted permission to leave Ukraine.

Interns and mentors launched the programme with a joint meeting, which included work-shops on addressing local needs through municipal governance. The programme conclud-ed with a webinar entitled „Project Management — Evaluation in Projects" and interactive exercises on teamwork. In addition, after completing internships, a training course was or-ganised for the participants on project management and leadership well-being that was held in Vinnytsia (Ukraine).

Promotional video of the project (Polish version).

Solidarity Fund PL's Engagement in the Reform of Vocational Education and the Labour Market

SFPL is one of the key international stakeholders engaged in Ukraine's vocational education and training (VET) reform supporting it since 2017. Between 2019 and 2023, SFPL implemented four key areas of VET reform under the „Polish package" of the EU-funded EU4Skills programme:

- improving the planning and management of vocational education and training — contributing to the preparation of strategic documents by the Ukrainian government
- enhancing labour market awareness — conducting large-scale labour market research
- developing career guidance and student engagement — introducing career orientation into the education system
- upgrading curricula — developing VET training courses.

From 2023 to 2025, SFPL, in cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has been reforming Ukraine's occupational classification system to align it with the ISCO-08 standard.

Since 2024, SFPL has been part of a large EU project called Skills4Recovery under which the Foundation directly supports vocational education and training provision and training service providers, contributing to improving the skills and competences of students and increasing the competitiveness of the Ukrainian economy.

The activities of the SFPL are aimed at improving the content of teaching, the management system and the training base (technical infrastructure) which translates into higher quality education, its compliance with the needs of the labour market and an increase in the attractiveness of the educational offer.

PROJECT

Continued Support for Ukraine's VET System Reform and Development of New Assistance Programmes

The project consisted in providing expert support to the Ukrainian authorities in preparing a strategic document entitled *„Building Skilled Human Capital for Ukraine's Recovery 2023-27"* — a part of the operational component of Ukraine's National Education Strategy. The activities completed by SFPL in 2024 are part of the long-term Skills4Recovery project implemented by the consortium of institutions from several EU countries.

In November 2024, two study visits took place in Warsaw and Poznań, involving representatives from Ukraine's Ministry of Education, regional education authorities, the National Qualifications Agency, and employers' associations. Their purpose was to familiarise Ukrainian partners with Poland's VET support mechanisms, including:

- grant projects supporting VET under the operational programmes of the European Social Fund, (ESF),
- support for vocational internships and apprenticeships through financial incentives for employers.

Implementation period:
January — December 2024

Partners in Ukraine: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Economic Development, State Employment Service of Ukraine, Federation of Employers of Ukraine, Subcommittee on Vocational Education of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, regional education departments, National Qualifications Agency

Partners in Poland: The Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy, Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, Teacher Training Centre, experts

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland)

Award value:
PLN 1.12 million

One of the basic assumptions when developing the visit programmes was to present the structure of the Polish VET support system at each of its levels — from the design of general mechanisms and instruments in the relevant ministries, through provincial authorities organising grant competitions for schools financed from EU funds to educational facilities implementing projects.

During the visit, participants visited the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy, the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, the Main Headquarters of the Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP), the Poznań University of Technology (where a meeting with representatives of the Marshal›s Office of the Wielkopolska Province was organised), the Teacher Training Centre in Poznań, the Wielkopolska Chamber of Crafts, and three school complexes in the Wielkopolska Province where projects financed by the ESF have been successfully implemented. Both learning about Polish systemic solutions and seeing the effects of implemented projects in practice will facilitate the implementation of the support model created by SFPL in Ukraine.

The first effects of these measures could already be seen in November and December 2024 during consultations on the scope of S4R grant programmes when the Ministry of Education of Ukraine and the National Employment Service fully supported the SFPL›s proposals regarding the integrated nature of grant projects and the inclusion of vocational training expenses in the list of eligible costs.

PROJECT

Assistance to Updating of the National Classifier of Occupations and its harmonisation with ISCO-08

The project, launched in 2023, was a response to the problem of an outdated occupational classification system which was based on the 1988 ISCO standard and reflected the economic and educational realities of the Soviet era. Partner institutions have often cited it as a major obstacle to pursuing a data-driven strategy, benchmarking Ukraine's labour market internationally, and integrating Ukraine's economy into the European Union and international systems.

The update of the occupational classification system was carried out in dialogue with employer representatives. The project team took advantage of opportunities created by the National Qualifications Agency's ongoing work on updating occupational standards (i.e., descriptions of occupations for educational purposes) and worked with the 16 sector employer working groups established by the Agency.

As a result of the project work, the content of the proposed new occupational classification system was developed. The new occupational classification system is based on ISC0-08, the current version of the International Standard Classification of Occupations, and has been partially adapted to ESCO — the European classification of skills, competences, qualifications and occupations. The classification system developed was adapted to labour market data to reflect the actual situation and consulting it with employers from relevant sectors. In particular:

- more than 9,200 records (occupations) of the old occupational classification system were reviewed which resulted in the development of a occupational classification system covering 4,400 occupations,
- 446 obsolete occupations were removed, and 1,300 were redefined as job positions rather than distinct professions.

Implementation period:
October 2023 — May 2025

Partners in Ukraine:
Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Economic Development, State Employment Service of Ukraine, Federation of Employers of Ukraine, Subcommittee on Vocational Education of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, regional education departments, National Qualifications Agency

Partners in Poland:
Experts

Funding:
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland)

Award value in 2024:
PLN 621,000

- 400 professional standards were also reviewed and revised.

Regarding the implementation and further management of the occupational classification system, the draft act was adopted by the Ukrainian government in September 2024 and approved in the first reading by parliament in October 2024. Draft act No. 9630 of 2024 provides for the transfer of responsibility for managing the classification (administering and updating its content on the basis of social dialogue and evidence from the labour market) from the Ministry of Economy to the National Qualifications Agency. The draft also introduces significant changes, in particular deregulation of the use of the occupational classification system by employers. In December 2024, due to changes introduced by parliament to a number of more general laws, the provisions governing the operation of the previous classification system were completely abolished.

PROJECT

Skills4Recovery — Supporting Vocational Education in Ukraine Project

Skills4Recovery project is a joint initiative by the EU, Poland, Germany, and Estonia for the benefit of Ukraine. It aims to support Ukraine's labour market by modernizing vocational education to improve the availability of skilled labour and contribute to the recovery of Ukraine's economy.

The following is planned as part of Skills4Recovery:

- supporting vocational schools — enhancing education and internship quality,
- funding at least 5,000 vocational training courses,
- developing new tools for changing career paths,
- supporting the reform of the vocational education system.

The preparatory phase of the project included a series of meetings with key partners and experts, as well as the preparation of project documentation.

The project team, together with experts, developed the „Concept of Grants for Vocational Schools," including, among other things, definitions of eligible activities and expenses, criteria for evaluating applications, etc. The prepared document was used to develop guidelines for applicants and the project application form. The project's experts developed a report on the labour market and a list of occupations supported under the two competitions which is attached to the competition documentation.

Following THE arrangements with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, a study of the fate of graduates was conducted in December 2024 to provide basic and necessary sources of information for career counsellors. The study, conducted in the form of an online questionnaire, covered 18,979 graduates from all 500 vocational schools. The study report and an electronic database with the results were submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science as the first of the planned recommendations in the area of career guidance concerning the use of data on the fate of graduates in the work of counsellors and as the first SFPL product developed under S4R

Preparation phase:
February — April 2024

Implementation period:
September 2024 — June 2026

Partners in Ukraine:
Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Economic Development, State Employment Service of Ukraine, Federation of Employers of Ukraine, Subcommittee on Vocational Education of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, regional education departments, National Qualifications Agency

Partners in Poland:
The Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy, Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, Teacher Training Centre, experts

Partnerzy zagraniczni:
GIZ Gmbh (Germany), Mondo (Estonia)

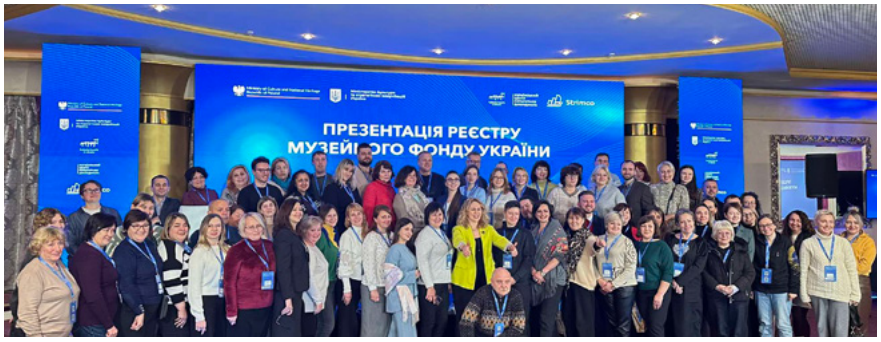
Funding:
EU, Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), ESTDEV — Estonian Centre for International Development.

Award value in 2024:
PLN 117,000

PROJECT

Implementation of the Electronic Registry of the Museum Fund of Ukraine – Phase II

The project aimed to implement an electronic data management system for Ukraine's museum holdings by creating a platform to support the digitization and inventory of museum exhibits.



Conference summarising the creation of the Ukrainian Museum Fund register.
Photo: SFPL archive

The State Museum Fund of Ukraine has over 12 million items, but until recently it did not have a single electronic system for their centralised registration, and documentation existed only in paper form. Meanwhile, according to UNESCO data, since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, 33 museums and a total of 485 cultural sites have been destroyed as a result of bombing and shelling. Along with them, the records of exhibits are destroyed.

Digitization of Ukraine's museum resources is aimed at gathering knowledge about them, facilitating management and monitoring the movement of artworks. Ultimately, the system will be integrated with international databases that track the fate of works of art in terms of storage, restoration, transport, and loss. This will enable the detection of cases involving the trade in illegally obtained items. Currently, the Ukrainian border guard, customs authorities, and police already have access to the system.

As a result of the project, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine has a system for digitizing museum resources — the electronic Register of the Museum Fund of Ukraine. The Register enables:

- more effective protection against illegal trade and smuggling of artefacts,
- increasing the availability of information about collections to experts and the public,
- facilitating international cooperation, especially in the context of searching for and returning seized items,
- simplification and automation of bureaucratic processes,
- standardization of the Register for different museums,
- including institutions in the information flow system regardless of their status or size,
- authorised institutions to independently transmit data on museum items along with information on their status (e.g., stored, restored, transported, lost).

Implementation period:
April 2023 — November 2024

Partners in Ukraine:
Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, Museum Fund of Ukraine, Agency for Sustainable Cultural Development (NGO), STRIMCO (IT company)

Partners in Poland:
Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, OBMIN Foundation (NGO)

Funding:
Aid fund — Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland (Phase II)

Award value in 2024:
PLN 2.13 million

Website:
museum.mcsc.gov.ua

In addition, as part of the project:

- 131 museums belonging to the Museum Fund of Ukraine received 225 computers and infrastructure enabling them to use the electronic register,
- 997 museum employees were trained in the use of the register, they were also provided with the RMFU manual and two instructional videos,
- 449 museums joined the Registry,
- a publicly accessible website for the Register of the Museum Fund of Ukraine has been launched where museum collections and individual museum items can be browsed as they become available.

Conference summarising the creation of the Ukrainian Museum Fund register
Photo: SFPL archive

Ambassador Piotr Łukasiewicz,
Polish chargé d'affaires to Ukraine

The conference summarizing the project took place in November 2024 in Kyiv with the participation of over 150 people. During the event, the Register of the Museum Fund of Ukraine was presented, the benefits and challenges associated with its operation were discussed, and the annual achievements of the support group for museums that had joined the Register by that time were presented.

Special guests of the event included: Anastasiia Bondar — Deputy Minister for Digital Development, Digital Transformation, and Digitization (Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications of Ukraine), Marta Cienkowska — Undersecretary of State (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland), and Ambassador Piotr Łukasiewicz, Polish chargé d'affaires to Ukraine.

III. Belarus

Introduction

For several years now, Solidarity Fund PL has consistently prioritised support for Belarusians who face repression by the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. This includes human rights defenders, independent educational institutions, civic organisations, pro-democracy movements, and initiatives promoting freedom of expression.

Value of funding from Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland) PLN 13.75 milions

The wave of repression following the 2020 protests made it impossible for the independent democratic movement to continue operating openly in Belarus. Numerous organisations were banned and either forced to cease their activities, continue them underground, or relocate abroad — primarily to Poland, Georgia, Lithuania, and, before the full-scale war, to Ukraine. Repression continues to affect representatives of NGOs and media, cultural actors, and national minorities. Fundamental human rights are being violated. Family members of activists who left the country are harassed, subjected to searches, and accused of extremism. Today, anyone not cooperating with the repressive system faces serious personal risks.

The regime has cut Belarusian society off from independent sources of information. Independent media outlets have been dismantled, and journalists are being persecuted. Public information is controlled and manipulated through state propaganda. Social media platforms are monitored by the security services, and users who follow, like, or share content labelled as „extremist" by the authorities face legal consequences.

Belarus is growing increasingly dependent on Russia — in terms of economy, energy, and politics — while continuing its involvement in the war against Ukraine. This, along with international isolation and ongoing repression, defines the current state of the country.

SFPL supports Belarusian civil society through grants awarded to organisations working in three key priority areas: — human rights and democratic institutions; — civil society and social services; and — free media and access to information.

38 *projects implemented*

430 *Over 430 events promoting a positive image of Belarusians*

18,400 *Over 18,400 articles, videos, and other materials about Belarus*

14,600 *Over 14,600 people reached through various forms of support*

In 2024, Solidarity Fund PL continued its cooperation with **two radio broadcasters**: Białoruskie Centrum Informacyjne Sp. z o.o. (Belarusian Information Centre) (Radio Racyja) and Europejskie Radio dla Białorusi Sp. z o.o. (European Radio for Belarus) (Euroradio). These initiatives aimed to improve access to independent information while minimising risk for listeners. Unlike digital media, radio listening does not leave a digital trace allowing audiences to stay informed without drawing the attention of the Belarusian security services.

As part of the partnership, Euroradio has produced and broadcast **218 episodes of the EuroZOOM** programme and published **654 informational materials**. Radio Racyja has operated on a **24/7** basis throughout the year.

The Belarus International Implementers Meeting 2024 (BIIM)

In the first half of 2024, Warsaw hosted the annual Belarus International Implementers Meeting (BIIM), a forum for donors and implementers supporting Belarusian civil society. The event was organised by Solidarity Fund PL in cooperation with the East European Democratic Centre (EEDC), the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Belarus Beehive. Its aim was to enhance coordination of support efforts, exchange experience, and jointly reflect on current strategies and future directions.

PROJECT

Supporting the leaders and reformers of the New Belarus

Implementation period:
September 2022 — November 2024

Partners:
Free Belarusian University Foundation

Funding:
European Union

Award value in 2024:
PLN 623,600

Between 2022 and 2024, Solidarity Fund PL implemented, in partnership with the Free Belarus University Foundation, an on-line educational project aimed at developing and strengthening the competencies of future civil servants, civic activists, managers, and other professionals who will be engaged in driving democratic reforms in Belarusian institutions and society. Equipped with forward-looking expertise and leadership skills, these individuals will play a key role in the democratic transformation of Belarus and its integration with broader changes in Central and Eastern Europe.

In 2024 alone, 450 people participated in 16 co-financed courses. Over the two years of the project, 31 on-line courses were implemented on a wide range of topics in cooperation with the University of Łódź, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the Higher School of Management Personnel in Konin, and the Zbigniew Pełczyński School for Leaders. A total of 920 participants attended the programme free of charge.

The project also supported the creation of the WUB Forum — a safe platform for students and alumni of the Free Belarus University. The Forum serves as a space for open dialogue, discussion, networking, and organising events. WUB Forum guests included prominent figures from the worlds of politics, culture, and academia — such as Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Krzysztof Zanussi, and Professor Nikolai Ivanov.

IV. Moldova

Introduction

In Moldova, in 2024, Solidarity Fund PL continued to prioritise local development — empowering communities, strengthening their engagement in decision-making processes, and enhancing resilience at the local level.

Solutions aimed at improving quality of life become more effective thanks to the involvement of residents, local authorities, and civil society organisations. This in turn encouraged people to remain in the country and build their future in Moldova — helping fight depopulation, a problem the country had been facing for many years. Moldova has been struggling with this issue for years, and the war in Ukraine has posed additional challenges in terms of security and the functioning of public institutions.

The confirmation of Moldova's European aspirations by the European Union gave new momentum to cooperation — including legal alignment and the implementation of EU standards. In 2024, Solidarity Fund PL continued to promote the LEADER approach — a key rural development tool in the European Union. Moldova remains the only non-EU country implementing this model. The programme already covers half of the country and, in 2021, the government decided to integrate it into national policy. SFPL efforts in this area were recognized by the European Commission in the „Enlargement Report" (Chapter 11) published in November 2023 as an example of EU solution implementation. Similar principles were applied in the urban revitalisation and development programme, where both public institutions and civil society partners took ownership of strategic development planning and implementation.

The war in Ukraine and increasing disinformation efforts have created new challenges for Moldova, requiring enhanced state resilience and stability. SFPL launched a comprehensive civil protection programme, including the establishment of volunteer fire brigades and cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to enhance the capacities of uniformed services. In partnership with the Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK), the Foundation also launched activities aimed at increasing the energy efficiency and independence of Moldovan SMEs — another key component of the country's long-term stability.

PROJECT

EU4LC: EU4Moldova: Local Community Development

In 2024, the pilot phase of the National LEADER Programme was concluded. As part of the second national edition for 2024–2025, 31 LAGs were selected for funding. Conditions for the programme's sustainability were ensured: appropriate legal frameworks (including executive regulations) were adopted, funding was secured, and IT tools for programme management were implemented.

The project is implemented under the Team Europe Initiative in partnership with Germany (GIZ) and Austria (ADA).

SFPL activities focused on:

- Strengthening the capacities of institutions and organisations co-creating the LEADER ecosystem (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, AIPA, National LEADER Network and LAGs) to enable independent programme management;

Implementation period:
September 2021 — December 2024

Partners in Moldova:
Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, Agency for Intervention and Payments in Agriculture (AIPA), Local Action Groups (LAGs), National LEADER Network of Moldova

Partners in Poland:
experts

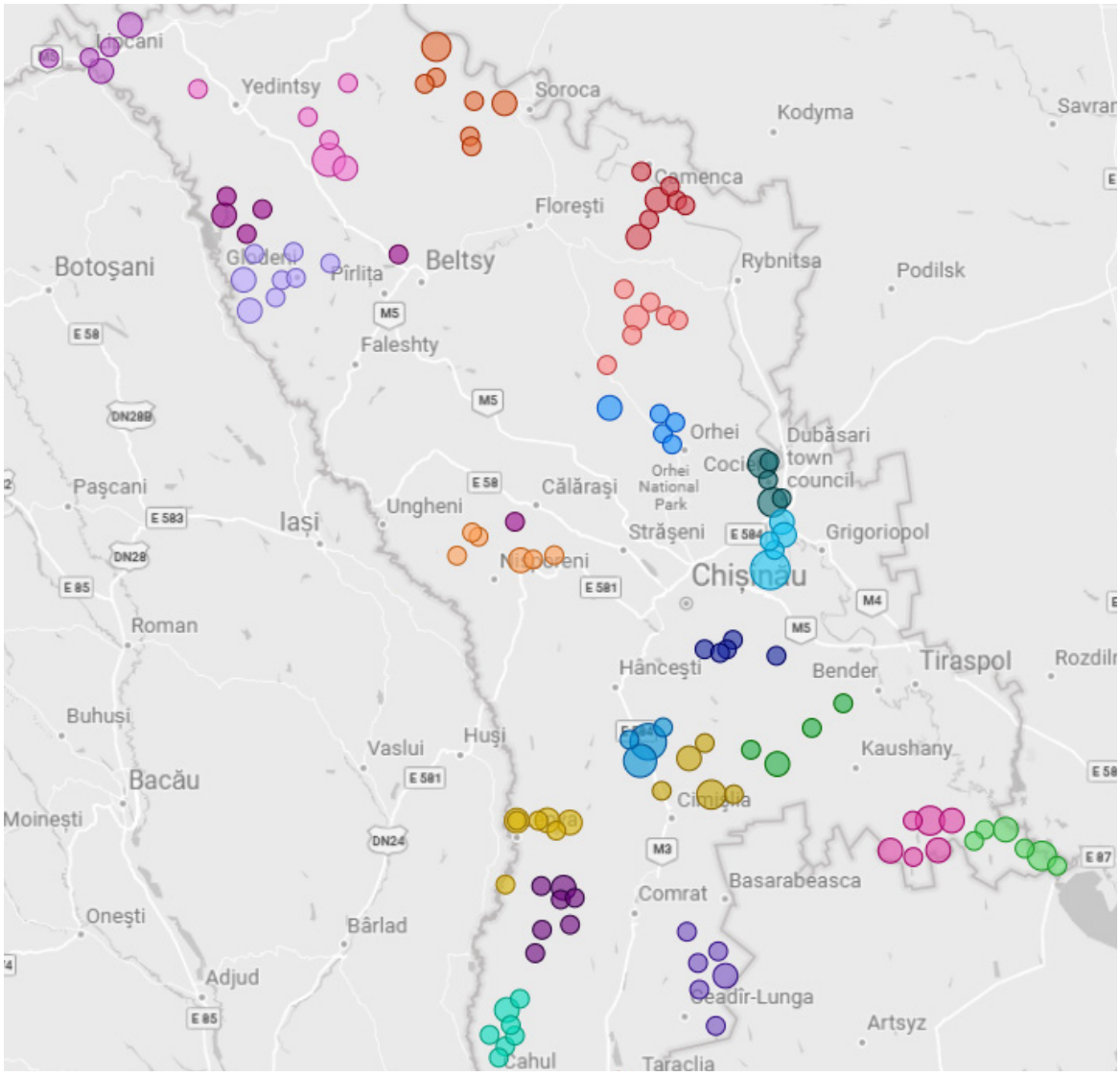
Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), European Union, Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV)

Award value in 2024:
PLN 1.48 million

- Establishing a monitoring and digitalisation system for programme operations;
- Aligning rural development policy and the LEADER model with EU standards — essential in the context of Moldova's EU candidate status granted in June 2022.

SFPL provided funding to 24 LAGs which — through competitive procedures — supported the implementation of 198 local development initiatives with a total value of PLN 5 million (including beneficiaries' own contributions). The results of these actions included:

- Creation of 8 new businesses,
- 135 localities were directly engaged in project implementation,
- 430 communities benefited from project outcomes,
- approximately 119,430 people were reached,
- Creation of 149 new jobs.



Map of all projects implemented under RDF 3.0

In October, SFPL and the YardSale Platform co-organised a local product fair in Chisinau under the „DAY Foială! YardSale pentru comunități" slogan. The event brought together over 40 LAG-based producers who had the opportunity to present and sell their products to a broad audience. The fair attracted over 3,000 visitors.

An impact assessment *(Impact study)* of the pilot LEADER phase in Moldova was conducted by LEADER France. The evaluation report highlighted the program's significant added value, particularly its impact on improving the quality of life in rural areas and increasing social participation. However, challenges were also identified, such as:

- Insufficient funding.
- Excessive administrative burdens.
- Gaps in monitoring and evaluation.
- Limited human resources.

Recommendations include increasing the program budget, simplifying procedures, professionalizing entities involved in implementation, improving communication, and focusing on sustainable development.

To improve programme monitoring and coordination, the MLIS database system was introduced for Moldova's LEADER network. The system is owned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry and administered by the Payments Agency (AIPA). The platform enables real-time data collection on LAGs and the management of public funds under the National LEADER Programme.

In autumn 2024, SFPL carried out a nationwide public awareness campaign which included:

- Five video materials showcasing LAGs and program beneficiaries.
- Participation in radio and TV broadcasts.
- Three exhibitions presenting the program's effects and its impact on local communities.

Materiały wideo: 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 .

The National LEADER Network of Moldovareceived an institutional development grant from SFPL. Under this grant, a training cycle for over 50 LAG representatives was organized, covering operational planning, project accounting, human resource management, conflict of interest prevention, risk management, and LAG documentation.

In spring, three regional forums were held, followed by a national congress in June 2024 focused on sustainable development and long-term strategies for LAGs.

Under the Academy of Local Animators of the National Network, 10 local leaders were trained to identify and develop the potential of their communities in collaboration with residents.

In December 2024, a project summary event gathered over 120 participants: beneficiaries, local authorities, experts, and partners. A summary video was presented, highlighting the achievements of the EU-LEADER 3.0 Rural Development Fund.

PROJECT

MRLP: Moldova Rural LEADER Project — USAID

Since 2020, this project has provided crucial support for the development of a stable LEADER network in Moldova.

In 2024, a call for proposals was announced for the LAG-Civil Society Partnership Fund resulting in the funding of four projects. These efforts engaged over 75 volunteers, underscoring the strength of civil society organisations.

SFPL supported the National Network in developing a monitoring and learning framework and an organisational development plan. Cooperation with selected localities under the Smart Village initiative—intelligent villages based on innovative and digital solutions—was also initiated, and the Innovators 3.0 Fund for innovative ideas continued.

The activities included:

- institutional grants awarded to two local groups.
- Implementation of four pilot projects, including testing an innovative tourist destination management model (DMO) and developing beekeeping and herb-growing cooperatives.
- Training and study visits, including abroad.

To enhance LEADER stability and efficiency, the Moldova Moldova LEADER IT Soft. information system was introduced. Concurrently, a comprehensive mentoring and training programme on digitalisation was launched, featuring six training sessions and a study visit to Estonia where participants learned about e-governance practices and innovative approaches to rural development digitalisation.

Implementation period:
2020 — 2024

Partners in Moldova:
Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, Agency for Intervention and Payments in Agriculture (AIPA), Local Action Groups (LAGs), National LEADER Network of Moldova

Funding:
USAID

Award value in 2024:
PLN 2.39 million

PROJECT

Strengthening Capacity for Effective Coordination of Regional and Local Development Policies, Including the Synergy Fund and Urban Communities

The project was a part of the process initiated by SFPL in 2017, evolving from developing urban area revitalisation methodologies in Moldova to institutionalisation in 2020. At that time, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development adopted the developed methodology and secured public funding for revitalisation through the National Regional Development Fund.

In 2024, the priority was to finalise the long-term process of building the capacity of local and regional institutions for more effective implementation of regional and local policies and national programs, particularly in the new context of European integration. Simultaneously, integrated urban area development was promoted through collaboration with the National Regional and Local Development Fund (Synergy Fund).

The Synergy Fund continued four projects initiated in 2023 (Soroca, Anenii Noi, Ceadâr-Lunga, Drochia). Additionally, a mural was created in the revitalisation zone of Bălţi city.

Implementation period:
January — December 2024

Partners in Moldova:
Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)

Partners in Poland:
Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IRMiR)

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland)

Award value:
PLN 1.12 million

As a result of the project:

1. The Institute of Urban and Regional Development conducted a study on the potential of cities and regions, developed the Capacity Building Programme for local government units and organised workshops for 15 RDA employees on integrated project management.

2. Four urban initiatives received financial and substantive support:

- **Nisporeni:** The project focused on creating the city's visual identity and enhancing its positive image. Eight murals were completed, a brand book and identification materials were developed. Five laptops were purchased for three kindergartens and a library along with 24 sets of educational puzzles.

- **Anenii Noi:** The project aimed to improve urban infrastructure and strengthen social integration. A playground for children with equipment suitable for various age groups and a recreational space for seniors with small architecture and sports equipment were created. Courtyards of five apartment blocks were renovated, access roads were paved, and a security system was installed at the playground.

- **Rîşcani:** The project included modernising urban infrastructure: renovating a tourist footbridge, constructing a new pedestrian crossing, clearing a section of the riverbed of sediments, planting 20 chestnut trees, and installing three benches.

- **Chisinau Bicycle Federation** – In collaboration with partners, a pump-track was built, and the first Open Chisinau Pump-Track Championships for children and youth were organised.

3. The foundation also provided funds for initiatives in urban revitalisation zones, complementing infrastructure projects funded by the National Regional Development Fund. These activities aimed to stimulate civic engagement, build neighbourhood bonds, and strengthen local identity.

- **Anenii Noi:** Six neighbourhood initiatives in the urban revitalisation zone were co-financed, and the playground and sports field were equipped. Nine folding tents and portable furniture were purchased to facilitate local events such as a concluding neighbourhood picnic.

- **Ceadîr-Lunga:** Mini-grants were awarded for ten neighbourhood initiatives that improved living conditions in residential buildings. A total of 209 people participated in the activities. An outdoor projection screen was also purchased, enabling cultural events and increasing the attractiveness of the revitalisation area.

- **Drochia:** the „Civic Initiative Budget in the Revitalisation Zone" competition was held to fund three resident ideas: renovating the conference room at the Stefan cel Mare High School, developing public space, and modernising kindergarten infrastructure. As part of the „Closer to the Community" campaign, a fir tree symbolising commitment to sustainable development was planted. Additionally, two public transport stops with retail points were installed to support local mobility and entrepreneurship.

- **Soroca:** Four mini-grant projects in gastronomy, cleaning, and physiotherapy were funded, creating five jobs, including for young Roma. The Roma Festival in November 2024 celebrated Roma culture and traditions with dance performances, exhibitions, and traditional food tastings. Simultaneously, modernisation work was carried out around a kindergarten building to improve the quality of public space available to the local community.

Additionally, in Bălți, in collaboration with local authorities and the Polish Institute in Bucharest, a mural project was implemented in the revitalisation area.

PROJECT

EU4MR: EU4MOLDOVA Resilience: Secure State, Resilient Communities

The comprehensive EU4MR project aims to strengthen state institutions in protecting critical infrastructure, identifying and responding to threats, and informing citizens about risks. At the same time, it supports the efforts to enhance social resilience through local initiatives that build social cohesion and trust in the EU integration process.

Key activities implemented in 2024 include:

- Launch of the renovation of the training complex of the „Dinamo" Central Sports Club, including modernisation of the shooting range used by uniformed services.
- An information campaign on the benefits of European integration — seven video clips were published, reaching over 700,000 views on social media.

  Selected clips on Facebook:

  Clip 1 Clip 2 Clip 3
- A study visit to Sweden focused on critical infrastructure.
- Selection of 10 locations for the construction of Volunteer Fire Brigade stations: Văl-cineț, Rădeni, Pepeni, Selemet, Sadaclia, Gura Bîcului, Sofia, Izvoare, Mateuți, and Călinești.
- Selection of five localities to implement the „Smart Villages" module — these will re-ceive over EUR 1.3 million in total for local investments.
- Co-financing of five urban revitalisation projects (Rîșcani, Ceadîr-Lunga, Nisporeni, Cimișlia, and Hîncești) with their representatives attending the Smart City World Expo 2024 in Barcelona.

Implementation period:
May 2024 — November 2025

Partners in Moldova:
Ministry of Internal Affairs and its subordinate services: Police, Fire and Rescue Service, Border Police, Migration Service, and Carabineers, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development

Partners in Poland:
Ministry of the Interior and Administration and its subordinate services, Volunteer Fire Brigades, Institute of Urban and Regional Development, experts

Funding:
European Union

Award value in 2024:
PLN 9.09 million

As part of the project, nine Moldovan journalists were invited to Poland for a study visit focused on EU integration processes. The programme included meetings with politicians, civil servants, and experts from institutions such as the College of Europe in Natolin, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Centre for Eastern Studies, the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, and editorial offices such as TVP World, Belsat TV, and Dziennik Gazeta Prawna.

Upon their return, the journalists published articles and video materials presenting Poland as an EU member state and sharing integration experiences that may serve as an inspiration for Moldova.

The renovation and construction of fire stations is just one aspect of activities targeting volunteer firefighters.

A total of 47 volunteers took part in emergency response training sessions organised at the Training Centre of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations of the State Fire Service in Răzeni (Ialoveni district). The training covered both theory and practice — fire suppression, traffic accident victim evacuation, and first aid.

In November, the third edition of the Volunteer Firefighter Festival took place in Zubrești to bring together over 500 participants, including 140 volunteer firefighters from 23 localities. The event included competitions, awards for distinguished firefighters, networking, and knowledge exchange.

As part of the „Smart Villages" module, selected localities received expert support. Two workshops were held in November and December with the participation of an international expert. The first workshop introduced the concept of smart villages, methods for data collection, and community engagement. The second focused on developing a vision, objectives, and specific actions within local smart village development strategies. Participants included local authorities, community members, and central administration representatives.

Additionally, the Foundation supported the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry by providing knowledge on EU practices in the implementation and financing of Smart Villages.

The selected localities also attended the Smart City World Expo 2024 in Barcelona where they explored new technologies and solutions addressing local development challenges.

In 2024, work also began on new project modules including photovoltaic installations and a grant scheme for small-scale food producers. Both components will be fully developed and implemented in the following year. As part of activities aimed at building the capacity of public administration in regional and local development policy, cooperation with the Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IRMiR) was initiated.

PROJECT

Support for MSMEs sector — Technical Assistance for Access to Loans

The EU integration process opened new opportunities for Moldova in the field of energy transition. In December 2023, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego signed the EUR 5 million loan agreement with the Moldovan government, financed by the EU. These funds were allocated to the Moldovan Entrepreneurship Support Fund and will be distributed to selected entrepreneurs through chosen banks in the form of low-interest loans.

Solidarity Fund PL is responsible for supporting the implementation of the project in the following areas:

- advisory services for Moldovan partners on conducting energy audits
- training on manners to access the fund and improve energy efficiency
- support for entrepreneurs in preparing credit applications.

The Foundation's involvement in the programme began in autumn 2024. By the end of the year, preparatory work was completed, including the selection of implementers for individual modules and the development of an information campaign targeting entrepreneurs. Full project implementation is planned for the coming years.

Implementation period:
October — December 2024

Partners in Moldova:
Organisation for Entrepreneurship Development and the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology and Digitalisation

Partners in Poland:
Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego

Funding:
European Union and Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK)

Award value in 2024:
PLN 40,000

V. Georgia

Introduction

The year 2024 brought a worrying shift in Georgia's political direction. The adoption of the so-called „foreign agents" law in the spring triggered justified concerns among civil society organisations about their ability to operate freely and hindered cooperation with foreign and international entities. Following the October parliamentary elections, the administration — until recently open to EU integration — decisively rejected this path of development. The election results were contested by the opposition and questioned by the democratic international community. Months of protests erupted in Tbilisi and other cities.

Solidarity Fund PL focused on supporting local development and modernisation by implementing, among others, projects on energy efficiency and launching the full-scale implementation of a multiannual programme to improve Internet quality in rural areas. We also organised competency training for Georgian journalists.

PROJECT

Energy-resilient Mountain Communities in Georgia

Implementation period:
January — December 2024

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland) and USAID

Award value:
PLN 289,000

As part of the project, energy-efficiency packages were introduced in six kindergartens located in the villages of Tsinubani (Akhmeta Municipality), Kvesheti (Dusheti Municipality), Sioni (Kazbegi Municipality), Khichauri and Purtio (Shuakhevi Municipality), and Kvatia (Khulo Municipality).

The packages included the installation of photovoltaic (PV) systems, ceiling insulation, and replacement of traditional bulbs with energy-saving LEDs. Smart meters were installed in 17 kindergartens in Shuakhevi (5) and Khulo (12), allowing the Kindergarten Management Units to monitor energy consumption in real time.

In June 2024, workshops focusing on the operation of solar power plants, monitoring energy bills, and installation maintenance were held in each of the six kindergartens for staff, parents, and representatives of local authorities. The facilities received panel cleaning kits and user manuals. Educational packages on energy efficiency were also distributed to the children. In total, 129 people participated in the workshops.

In November, the summarising workshop was held in Tbilisi: „Sustainable energy skills for kindergartens: monitoring PV systems and planning reinvestment". Certificates were awarded to 12 most engaged participants representing all six highland villages.

See project summary

PROJECT

Energy Efficiency for Better Living Standards: Chokhatauri Municipality on a Path Towards a Sustainable Energy Future

Implementation period:
January 2023 — June 2025

Partners in Georgia:
Progress House (NGO)

Funding:
European Union

Award value:
PLN 224,000

The project continued activities launched in 2023 aimed at improving the quality of municipal services in selected rural communities of Chokhatauri through the introduction of energy-efficient solutions in kindergartens and public spaces.

Ten kindergartens (Kvesheti, Sioni, Tsinubani, Sameba, Amaghleba, Bukistsikhe, Zemo Erketi, Buknari, Sachamiaseri and Zemo Surebi) were modernised. Based on technical audits, Polish and Georgian specialists developed thermal modernisation packages, and local communities actively participated in implementation. The scope of work included insulation, installation of double-glazed windows and doors, wood-burning stoves, LED lighting, PV panels, and smart meters.

In summer, two smart solar benches featuring WiFi were installed in Chokhatauri Park along with an EV-charging station next to the municipality hall.

The partner organisation, Progress House, conducted two open calls under the small grants scheme. 25 projects were selected from among the submitted proposals and implemented in 2024. Their authors were invited to a study visit to Poland.

Study Visit to Poland

In November, 10 participants of the small grants scheme visited Skawina Municipality and various NGOs and institutions in Małopolska. They learned about: grant programmes for residents to replace inefficient heating systems with energy-efficient solutions; incentives for local enterprises to adopt energy-saving production methods; unified monitoring systems for emissions from industrial, transport and household sources (Skawina Municipality) tech-based social innovation (Aston Kawasaki Robotics Centre) local smart solutions such as a multifunctional centre with reading rooms, co-working spaces, educational clubs for children, and a community café (Skawina Municipality Public Library) the Kraków Community Gardens programme allowing residents to apply for public space in their neighbourhoods to develop gardens.

New partnerships were established during the visit, followed by two on-line meetings with Polish partners. In December, the visitors shared their insights with around 50 residents of Chokhatauri Municipality.

PROJECT

Local Government Association of Kindergartens as an Example of an Energy Cooperative

In Tkibuli, a community energy initiative was launched, bringing together 18 public kindergartens, the local government, and civil society organisations. The initiative was set up by local authorities in consultation with the project team and a Polish energy efficiency expert. Its goal was to enhance energy efficiency, reduce electricity costs, and generate social and environmental benefits across all 18 public kindergartens in Tkibuli Municipality. To support the creation of the community and the achievement of its goals, the following tasks were also carried out as part of the project:

- Technical condition assessments of 15 kindergartens
- Installation of PV systems in two kindergartens (estimated annual reduction of 20,439 kg CO_2)
- Installation of smart meters in the entire kindergarten network
- Conducting two workshops on PV technology, financial instruments, and community planning.

Tkibuli authorities committed to reinvesting energy savings into further photovoltaic installations, aiming for full energy self-sufficiency of local kindergartens. To support this process, a Polish expert developed a complete technical documentation.

Promotional video on the benefits of the energy community:

Implementation period:
January — December 2024

Partners in Georgia:
NNLE Association of Pre-School Education Institutions of Tkibuli Municipality and Tkibuli District Development Fund

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Award value:
PLN 294,000

PROJECT

Local Community Accelerator

In October and November 2024, in cooperation with the Mieroszewski Centre, a series of workshops was held in Tbilisi for 15 journalists from the regions of Adjara, Imereti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi, Lower Svaneti, and Kakheti.

The participants gained practical skills in:

- countering disinformation
- fact-checking
- cybersecurity
- data-driven and visual storytelling
- basics of digital marketing and AI in journalism.

The workshops also provided a space for networking. In March 2025, a follow-up study visit to Poland was organised by the Mieroszewski Centre.

Implementation period:
November — December 2024

Funding:
Miroszewski Centre

Award value:
PLN 120,000

PROJECT

Internet Access Flagship: Rural Empowerment through Digital Inclusion (REDI)

The project aims to improve access to the Internet and digital infrastructure in rural areas across Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti, Imereti, and Kakheti. It also promotes the use of digital services by local businesses and communities in up to 200 locations.

In 2024, the pilot phase was carried out: the needs and technical infrastructure were assessed, and WiFi hotspots were installed in six villages: Tkhinvali, Zemo Natanebi, Bzholieti, and Khevi in Guria, and Nikortsminda and Tsesi in Racha. A grant competition was conducted for civil society organisations; two were selected to implement local activities in the communities hosting hotspots. These initiatives lay the foundations for full-scale implementation in the coming years.

Implementation period:
December 2023 — November 2027

Partners:
e-Governance Academy (eGA, Estonia)

Funding:
European Commission

Award value in 2024:
PLN 2.44 million

VI. Armenia

PROJECT

Court cases monitoring and fostering youth engagement in civic activities in the Syunik region

The project was a continuation of an initiative implemented in Armenia since July 2021. Between 2021 and 2023, activities focused on establishing youth groups monitoring court proceedings in four provinces of Armenia (Lori, Shirak, Syunik and Yerevan), and on strengthening the monitoring capacity of the partner organisation HAHR. The findings on the accuracy of court proceedings were shared with relevant institutions. The project was part of the EU's *Resilient Syunik Team Europe* initiative.

In 2024, training activities were primarily concentrated in Syunik — a region of particular geopolitical significance, bordering Nagorno-Karabakh — while court monitoring was carried out in all target regions of the project.

Implementation period:
January — December 2024

Partners in Armenia:
Helsinki Association for Human Rights (HAHR)

Partners in Poland:
Court Watch Poland Foundation

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland)

Award value:
PLN 284,000

As a result of the project:

93 *young people from the Syunik region who participated in the trainings gained knowledge of human rights*

155 *young people (including 91 from Syunik) observed 609 court hearings in the following locations: Syunik — 109 observations (59 in Goris, 50 in Kapan), Yerevan — 148 observations, Vanadzor (Lori region) — 126 observations, Gyumri (Shirak region) — 226 observations.*

Helsinki Association for Human Rights (HAHR), with the support of experts from Court Watch Poland Foundation, developed improved digital monitoring tools, including an online court observer registration system and a digital monitoring data registration form. In the autumn, HAHR representatives participated in a conference held in Toruń, Poland, summarising citizen court monitoring efforts in Poland, during which they presented their activities and the project itself. They also attended workshops organised by Court Watch Poland focused on advocacy and the analysis of monitoring data.

A report on the regularity of judicial proceedings in 2024 in the regions of Armenia covered by the project has been submitted to judicial institutions and other interested institutions in Armenia. In addition to highlighting positive findings and good practices, the monitoring identified several areas for improvement regarding the transparency of legal communication, the accessibility of court proceedings to the public, and the overall effectiveness of court case management.

Volunteers from Syunik received not only initial training but also had the opportunity to participate in meetings with police and judiciary representatives, which attracted considerable interest:

Meetings with police officers on citizens' rights and duties in relation to the police:

- Goris, 29 August — 26 participants
- Kapan, 30 August — 57 participants
- Meghri, 22 October — 14 participants

Meetings with judges on the practical aspects of the judiciary's work:

- Goris, 21 October — 29 participants
- Kapan, 23 October — 33 participants

The 2024 edition marked the culmination of a four-year joint programme of SFPL and HAHR that prepared the Armenian organisation to independently conduct court monitoring in the future.

VII. Election Observation Missions

PROJECT

Election Observation Missions

Free elections are the foundation of democracy, and their conduct is an important test of the functioning and durability of democratic procedures in every country. Since 2012, a total of 765 short-term observers and 69 long-term observers have participated in 37 missions co-organised by the SFPL.

The presence of international observers during elections increases public confidence in the results, enables the detection and documentation of irregularities, and helps prevent or at least limit possible abuses and manipulation. Observers document irregularities, report on the conduct of the elections and assess compliance with international standards, including freedom of choice, political pluralism, transparency, and equal access.

Election observation missions are organised by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (ODIHR/OSCE). In cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Solidarity Fund PL is responsible for recruiting, training, and deploying Polish observers.

Implementation period:
Since 2012

Foreign partners:
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Partners in Poland:
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland

Funding:
Polish Aid (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland)

Award value:
PLN 493,000

STO
Short-Term Observation

- lasts approximately one week
- focuses on election day proceedings, including voting, counting and transmission of the results to higher-level electoral commissions.

LTO
Long-Term Observation

- lasts about six weeks
- covers a broader electoral process including candidate registration, voter list preparation, campaigning, electoral administration, complaints and appeals, as well as coordination and supervision of STOs during election day.

Missions in 2024

The organisation of observation missions depends on the changing political calendar of the countries where elections are held. In 2024, the Foundation participated in three OSCE observation missions:

- Moldova: The mission focused on the presidential elections and a constitutional referendum. The first round was held on 20 October 2024, and the second round of the presidential election on 3 November (as no candidate received the required 50% majority in the first round). The first round was observed by 17 Polish short-term observers while the second one by five. Additionally, one Polish long-term observer was deployed to Moldova.
- Georgia: The mission covered the parliamentary elections held on 26 October 2024. Solidarity Fund PL deployed two long-term observers and 28 short-term observers.
- Uzbekistan: 11 Polish short-term observers took part in the parliamentary elections held on 27 October 2024.

Each mission was preceded by mandatory training covering the political context of the respective country and logistical arrangements. After each deployment, a debriefing session was held with the participation of observers, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and subject-matter experts.

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Solidarity Fund PL

4 Mysłowicka Str.,
01-612 Warsaw,
Poland

www.solidarityfund.pl/en/