

CSO Initiatives Mechanism
Financing initiatives
by civil society organizations in countries eligible for French
public development assistance

2024 Call for Expressions of Project Intentions for
Locally Governed CSOs
For financing in 2025

Partnerships Department
Civil Society Organizations Division (MPN/OSC)

AFD is launching its annual Call for Expressions of Project Intentions (AMI) in order to shortlist projects to be co-financed in 2025 led by CSOs in countries eligible for official development assistance according to the list established by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).¹

This call for projects falls within the scope of the French ***Orientation and Programming Law on Development and International Solidarity*** passed on August 4, 2021 by the French parliament and the goals of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs' strategic document "**Civil Society and Civic Engagement**" 2023-2027.

The strategic orientations of this call are based on the conclusions of the **Presidential Council for Development (CPD)** and the **Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development (CICID)**, both held in 2023. As well as on the AFD's **Strategic Orientation Plan (POS V)** which will shortly be presented to the Board of Directors, and on the **AFD and CSOs roadmap, currently being renewed for the period 2024/2027.**

Within this framework, the target for the concentration of the financial effort of French ODA is at least 50% for the least developed countries (LDCs) in 2024-2027. The following themes are the priority objectives of French official development assistance:

- **Combating climate change;**
- **Preservation of biodiversity, in particular forests and oceans;**
- **Youth, education and vocational training;**
- **Primary health and resilience to health risks;**
- **Innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly between young people in Europe and Africa;**
- **Food sovereignty, particularly in Africa;**
- **Human rights, democracy and the fight against disinformation;**

¹ [List of ODA recipients established by the OECD - DAC \(oecd.org\)](https://oecd.org/dac/oda-representatives/)

- **Equality between women and men, in particular by supporting feminist organisations and those promoting women's rights;**
- **Migration, in particular combating human trafficking.**

As of 2022, the AMI has fallen within the scope of Article 2 of the above-mentioned law, which states in its preamble that *"policy for inclusive development and combating global inequalities is defined and implemented in the framework of multi-stakeholder partnerships. In this respect, France fully recognizes the role, expertise and added value of local and regional authorities, civil society organizations, both from the North and the South, involved in the policy for inclusive development and combating global inequalities, and of all non-governmental stakeholders."*

The law therefore stipulates that **civil society organizations (CSOs) in countries eligible for official development assistance may benefit from direct financing from AFD** if they meet various conditions. Implementing Decree no. 2022-571, published on April 19, 2022, explains the application of this article.

CSOs registered in countries eligible for official development assistance according to the list established by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) **may now, under certain conditions, apply for direct co-financing from AFD for their projects through the CSO Initiatives (CSO-I) mechanism:**

- ✓ This year, **locally governed CSOs (including unions) are eligible as long as they have been financed at least once for a completed project (either directly or via a French or international CSO) by an entity of the AFD Group** (DPA/OSC, Operations Department, and Expertise France) regardless of the amount received. **Or by a French embassy as part of annual funding of more than €100,000** (Fonds Equipe France (ex-FSPI) projects, for example).
- ✓ **Projects to structure local CSO sectors (SMA) and projects focusing on sustainable development and global citizenship education** (sometimes referred to as global education) carried out in the countries will be encouraged and may therefore be supported.
- ✓ AFD respects the respects **the right of initiative accorded to CSOs**, allowing them to propose projects that they have defined themselves.

Local CSOs may submit **a single project intention** (on their own or as part of a consortium) with two possible options:

- ✓ **A new phase of a project already supported by the AFD group** if the implementation of the previous project is considered satisfactory by the AFD group, with a geographic and thematic scope that is stable over time, and may be renewed once where appropriate.
- ✓ **A new project**, with a different geographic or thematic scope from the previously-funded project, which may be renewed up to twice.

The maximum project duration is three years, and is renewable.

Project intentions submitted to AFD for this call **must promote and strengthen local stakeholders and contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**

Moreover, project intentions aimed primarily at: i) gender equality, transforming gender-based social relationships and strengthening feminist civil society organizations, ii) amplifying young people's voices and empowering them to take action, iii) climate and biodiversity issues will be given priority in the final decisions of the Call for Expressions of Project Intentions. AFD will also pay particular attention to the project's communication component in order to increase the visibility of actions and impacts for beneficiaries.

The maximum AFD co-financing rate is set at 90% of the total project budget.

- The procedure for submitting a project intention is explained in Appendix 1.
- CSO eligibility criteria and assessment criteria for submitted project intentions are explained in Appendix 2.

Procedures for submitting project intentions:

Projects must now be submitted online only via the Oscar portal.

CSOs who wish to seek financing for projects in 2025, through the 2024 Call for Expressions of Project Intentions of the CSO Initiatives Mechanism, must submit their project intentions and administrative documents online.

Timetable for submitting project intentions:

From Friday March 15 to 6 pm CET on Monday May 13, 2024

on the Oscar website - <https://oscar.afd.fr>

An Oscar user guide is available in Appendix 2.

PROCEDURE

- A. CSOs and the projects they submit must meet the selection criteria outlined below (Appendix 2). CSOs must refer to these criteria before responding to this call. They are also asked to refer to the Methodology Guide for further information: "AMI Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) attached to the Call for Expressions of Project Intentions (AMI).
- B. Through the CSO Initiatives mechanism, AFD provides co-financing for development projects that **aim to contribute to strengthening local civil society partners and to achieving sustainable development goals**.
- C. In addition to the eligibility criteria set out in Appendix 2 of this document, AFD reserves the right to assess each project based on any other qualitative criteria deemed relevant, for example:
 - Reviewing a CSO's project intention based on the quality of the implementation of projects led by the French CSO or partner already supported by DPA/OSC or an entity of the Group, and the financial amounts passed on
 - Reviewing projects based on their innovative and timely nature
 - Decreasing the requested grant amount
 - Shortlisting projects based on geographic guidelines set by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (*60% Africa and countries in crisis, 20% the Mediterranean, 20% other geographic areas*) and their contribution to SDGs
 - Not shortlisting a project if its intention note seems to suggest that it is not completely gender-blind based on the OECD-DAC marker (<https://www.oecd.org/fr/cad/femmes-developpement/Manuel-Marqueur-CAD-Aide-Egalite-HF.pdf>).

D. Use of OSCAR portal:

a) Creating an account:

CSOs that wish to submit a project for the Call for Expressions of Project Intentions must i) send AFD via oscar_admin@afd.fr the documents required to assess their eligibility: name of the AFD Group entity or partner who has already financed the CSO, date of financing and amount granted ii) log onto the Oscar portal and request to create an account by **Monday May 1, 2024** at the latest (See Appendix 2 - Oscar User Guide and Appendix 1 - Authorization for Use of Oscar).

b) Submitting documents related to the CSO ("CSO Information" tab):

CSOs enter the requested information and upload the following required documents:

- **The organization's accounts for 2021, 2022 and 2023** (or 2020, 2021, 2022 if the 2023 accounts have not yet been approved: in this case the 2023 financial year must be entered in the financial years menu by checking the draft budget box)
 NB: The accounts must have been approved by the General Assembly and, as appropriate, approved by a statutory auditor in accordance with the legislation in force in your country

- **The three most recent activity reports/Chairman's reports for 2021, 2022 and 2023** if it has been approved in the General Assembly, and if not, the reports from 2020, 2021, 2022.
- **The articles of association**
- **Make-up of the Board of Directors**

c) Sending the project intention

The Project Intention outline must be downloaded on the AFD website <https://www.afd.fr/fr/les-financements-des-projets-des-ong> or directly in Oscar. Once it is completed, the project intention must be uploaded to Oscar in French or in English.

- The CSO may save the information it has entered and return to it later.
- **Important: the “Send project intention” button validates the project submission and the CSO information entered; you must therefore click on this button to validate your project intention submission. Once you have clicked on this button, you will no longer be able to make changes to your information or documents.**
- An automatic acknowledgment of receipt is sent by Oscar: you will not be sent an email confirming your submission. If you encounter a technical problem with the Oscar platform, please send an email to oscar_admin@afd.fr.

E. During the period the Call for Expressions of Project Intentions is open, it is not advisable for CSOs to contact DPA/OSC by phone or email to discuss the project selection process.

F. Communicating the results of the Call for Expressions of Project Intentions:

Submitting an application does not mean that it has been shortlisted by AFD. Each application is reviewed in accordance with AFD's shortlisting procedure.

AFD will inform CSOs directly of whether their project has been shortlisted **by July 16, 2024 at the latest**. This information will be sent by email, addressed only to the CSO contact person designated as the Oscar user (declared in Appendix 3).

A project being shortlisted does not mean that it has been approved. All shortlisted projects will subsequently be examined by AFD based on the complete file (detailed administrative file and CSO Initiative Note - NIONG), as specified in the procedures,

The CSO may submit the complete file between the 1st of December 2024 and the 30th of April 2025. Only projects shortlisted in this Call for Expressions of Project Intentions will be appraised in 2025.

APPENDIX 1: CSO ELIGIBILITY AND PROJECT ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

A. CSO Eligibility Criteria

Articles of association

Co-financing requested from AFD is granted to CSOs founded under one of the following legal forms:

- **Associations or non-governmental organizations (including unions) founded in accordance with the legislation in force in the country concerned**, that are non-profit and work in the field of sustainable development, already supported by the AFD group, directly or through a French partner.
- **Non-profit national, regional or international platforms** that work in the field of sustainable development and whose headquarters are located on a long-term basis in one of the countries affected by their work, in accordance with the legislation in force in the country, already supported by the AFD group via a French partner.

NB: foundations are not eligible

CSO founding and governance

- The founding date of the CSO **must be at least three years before the date of grant awarding by AFD bodies**; this rule may be waived in exceptional cases where organizations have changed their articles of association or name in the last three years, but have been carrying out the same missions using the same means for at least three years.
- There must be no majority control by one or more public entities (ministries, public institutions, public companies, decentralized services) or by representatives of public entities on the CSO's Board of Directors.
- There must be no majority control by local authorities or local government representatives on the CSO's Board of Directors.
- There must be no majority control by one or more private companies or representatives of private for-profit companies on the CSO's Board of Directors. Only cooperatives and mutuals, which are part of the social economy, do not fall into this category, but they may not, alone or together, have majority control over the CSO's Board of Directors.
- Qualified persons who are members of the CSO's governance bodies and who, by virtue of their mandate, represent one or more public entities, local authorities or private entities of any type, will be counted in the college of public entities, of local authorities or of private entities.
- For CSOs that operate a blended model, entities representing public institutions (excluding local authorities) and entities representing private enterprises (excluding mutuals and cooperatives) must not together have majority control over the CSO's Board of Directors.
- The CSO's headquarters and management must be located in the country of registration. The CSO must demonstrate that its structure is truly independent (with its own governance, management, strategic directions, etc.) from the public and/or private entities that support it.

AFD will assess the CSO's eligibility based on the documents submitted to it and the criteria set out here. Furthermore, AFD reserves the right to exercise its discretion in assessing the CSO's eligibility.

CSO operations

The applicant CSO must demonstrate that its internal operations comply with the following criteria (depending on the legal obligations in the country):

- The CSO holds regular general meetings and the governance bodies provided for in its articles of association meet regularly.
- The CSO produces annual documents, including financial documents, approved by the General Assembly, as provided for in its articles of association.

CSO activities

- **The CSO's major social missions must include the goal of working in the fields of sustainable development, promoting human rights, youth, gender equality, or strengthening civil society organizations.**
- **Projects to structure the local CSO sector (SMA) and projects focusing on sustainable development and global citizenship education carried out in the countries will be encouraged and may therefore be supported.**
- CSOs whose main missions are exchange, international influence, reflection or intellectual production activities are not eligible.
- **The CSO must have been financed at least once for a completed project, either directly or via a French CSO, by an entity of the AFD Group (DPA/OSC, Operations Department, Expertise France) regardless of the amount received.** It may choose to renew its partnership with the French CSO, which has already supported it, as a partner in the intention it is submitting in its own name.
- **The CSO must be able to demonstrate that it has carried out activities of significant scope and duration,** through the implementation of development, sustainable development and global citizenship education projects and/or projects to organize the non-profit sector.

CSO financial situation and co-financing ceilings

- A. The organization's accounting and financial information must be approved in accordance with the law of its country of registration, in particular the approval of its accounts by a statutory auditor or local equivalent. This information will be checked when the CSO submits its application, during the project shortlisting process.
- B. The CSO must have the financial and management capabilities to carry out the project/program for which it is seeking co-financing. Particular attention will be paid to the ratio between the project's annual budget and the CSO's annual budget, and to its ability to provide the human resources required. DPA/OSC will ensure that the **average annual cost of the project does not exceed 70% of the CSO's annual budget for the last three years, except in cases that are duly justified. The CSO's minimum annual budget cannot therefore be less than €238 000.**

B. Project Assessment Criteria

Nature of eligible projects

- A. Development projects implemented in one or more countries eligible for official development assistance, if possible in partnership with other local stakeholders.** They must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals. **The project must include measures to strengthen local stakeholders; it must involve the central and decentralized government services of the country in which the project will be implemented, unless the situation in the country does not allow it.**

All sectors are eligible: agriculture, environment-biodiversity-climate, water and sanitation, professional integration and training, healthcare and social action, urban development, energy, productive sector and microfinance, human rights, local development, control and citizen participation, gender equality and advocacy projects.

- B. Sustainable development and global citizenship education projects (sometimes referred to as global education or ECSI)** Article 4.7 of the 2030 Agenda urges us help learners “acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity [...]”

Projects aimed at educating citizens of all ages about these issues, and encouraging them to take action to help create a fairer, more united and sustainable world are eligible. Project activities may be carried out in the partner country, or abroad (including France and Europe).

The project may take the following forms: education and training action and program (within a formal institutional framework, or within a non-profit framework), production of educational tools and methods (such as activities, games, digital tools and materials, documentary materials, teaching kits), event-based actions (such as festivals, street performances, prizes and competitions), awareness campaigns for the general public or targeting specific groups, advocacy work, training and support for project initiators. Actions may be carried out within the formal education sector in school settings, or in non-formal and informal education, implemented by civil society for the general public.

The project may combine development and sustainable development and global citizenship education activities.

- C. Projects to structure the non-profit sector (SMA)** These projects must have a national or international impact on one or more of the following pillars:

- Structuring CSOs, capacity-building, closer alignment and convergence of actions
- Advocacy, political dialogue, collective action
- Professionalization and creation/dissemination of innovations in the sector and beyond
- Contribution to the collective efforts of CSOs to strengthen public action at the local, national and multilateral level

D. Common criteria

Multi-stakeholder approaches (involving CSOs, local authorities, research organizations, businesses, other stakeholders) are preferred.

Regardless of its geographic and thematic scope, the project must **take into account gender and gender equality issues** and give special attention to **youth**, and provide concrete solutions to address these issues as much as possible.

If the project is shortlisted, the detailed project presentation note (NIONG) submitted to AFD must specify the intended actions and present the human, material and financial resources needed to carry out these activities.

Special attention will be paid to the **relevance and innovative nature** of the project.

Particular attention will be given to projects that involve international solidarity volunteers (ISVs) in the implementation of their actions, without volunteering being the main and exclusive purpose of the project.²

Projects may be **led by a national CSO or by a formal consortium** of several national CSOs, with a designated lead CSO.

A CSO may submit a single project intention (on its own or as part of a consortium).

Ineligible projects

The project may not include activities involving religious proselytizing or political propaganda.

Projects that are mainly or exclusively aimed at the following activities are not eligible for AFD co-financing:

² Led by the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE), the International Solidarity Volunteering (VSI) allows anyone without age or nationality condition (the volunteer may not, however, carry out a mission in a State of which he is a national or a regular resident) to undertake a mission of general interest in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian action. In practice, the missions proposed in the framework of the VSI are missions of expertise aimed at capacity building, structuring and development of activities and projects led mainly by civil society organizations internationally. The volunteers thus engaged are graduates, with skills and for the most part already having professional experience, especially internationally.

Financial support: As part of the regulatory texts relating to the VSI, the MEAE financially supports the implementation of the scheme through several aids (see Decree) for an annual amount of approximately € 9,000. The financial support granted under the MPN/OSC Committee can supplement the additional costs of mobilizing volunteers.

Duration: Minimum of 12 months and a maximum of 24 months for a mission. The experience is capped at 6 consecutive or fractional years over the lifetime.

Where: The mission must be carried out outside the European Economic Area and in countries eligible for official development assistance, established by the OECD DAC. A volunteer may not be deployed in an area categorized as "formally discouraged" by the MEAE on its travel advice page. A foreign volunteer who is a national of a country on the DAC list may commit to reciprocity in France.

With whom: 22 associations + France Volontaires are currently approved by the MEAE for the contracting of VSI missions. [See list.](#)

France Volontaires, operator of the MEAE for the promotion and development of international volunteering [can inform](#) associations interested in the implementation of VSI mission. The operator has a network of [Volunteer Desks around the world.](#)

Legal and regulatory framework:

Law No. 2005-159 of 23 February 2005 as amended

Decree 2022-1067 of 28 July 2022 adopted for the application of Law No. 2005-159 of 23 February 2005 on the international solidarity volunteer contract

Decree of 1 December 2022 fixing, on the one hand, the conditions for granting and the amount of State aid to international solidarity volunteering and, on the other hand, the minimum and maximum amounts of compensation paid by associations to volunteers.

- Training projects or programs when the project involves this type of activity alone or is built entirely around this type of activity
- Publications or editorial projects when the project involves this type of activity alone or is built entirely around this type of activity
- One-off and geographically limited actions may not be co-financed, unless they are part of wider processes and actions
- Projects including activities to build or restore infrastructure representing over 40% of the estimated budget (except in duly justified cases, discussed with the CSO in advance)
- Emergency one-off operations under the responsibility of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
- Organizing conferences, symposiums and seminars when the project involves this type of activity alone or is built entirely around this type of activity
- Evaluations alone
- Individual or group trips for members of the CSO
- Covering logistical resources (transport, containers, vehicles, etc.)
- Sending or providing equipment (medicine, books etc.) or private fundraising

Projects that are mainly or exclusively aimed at the following sectors of activity are not eligible for AFD CSO Initiatives co-financing, except in special cases that AFD alone may assess:

- Academic and scientific exchanges
- Youth exchanges
- Archeology
- The French language

Co-financing amounts and ceilings and combating the financing of terrorism

- **The total project cost must be greater than or equal to €500,000.³**
- The ratio of the project/program budget to the CSO's annual budget: the average annual cost of the project **must not exceed 70% of the CSO's annual budget for the last three years**, except in cases that are duly justified ; **the CSO's minimum annual budget cannot therefore be less than €238 000.**
- **Indirect costs are set at a maximum of 14% of the direct project costs.**
- **The maximum co-financing rate of AFD's CSO-I mechanism is set at 90% of the total project budget.**
- **Combating the financing of terrorism:** AFD requires the CSOs it finances to comply with the measures to freeze assets and prohibit the direct or indirect provision of funds or economic resources adopted by the United Nations, the European Union and France. See to Work Sheet 10 of the Methodological Guide.

Project duration and renewal

- **The maximum project duration is three years, except in cases that are duly justified.**

³ Projects for a total amount of between €300,000 and €500,000 may exceptionally be declared eligible by the CSO Division (DPA/OSC), in highly specific and justified geographical and/or sectoral contexts.

- If it is a renewed project that has already been co-financed directly by the AFD group or through a French CSO, and if its implementation has been satisfactory, **it may be renewed once only**, provided that the geographic and thematic scope remains stable over time.
- If it is a new project, it may be renewed twice.