



**Institute For Social
Policy Development**

20
22

DEBATE REPORT

**CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS
FOR THE NGO SECTOR IN 2023**



ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

Institute for Social Policy Development Foundation (IRSS) is a civic think-tank operating in strategic partnership with the Kulski Foundation for Polish-American relations. It is a place of in-depth debate, analyzes, solutions proposals, as well as exchange of views between a range of circles.



CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE NGO SECTOR IN 2023

Date:

December 16th 2022 r.

Place:

ZOOM platform

Moderator:

Szymon Dziubicki - Director General and Member of the Board of the Union of Associations Confederation of Non-Governmental Initiatives of the Republic of Poland

Panelists:

- Tomasz Moliński, Director of the Civil Society Department, Prime Minister's Office;
- Justyna Ochędzan, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee;
- Krzysztof Pater, Chairman of the Polish Scouting Association;
- Małgorzata Bogusz, President of the Institute for the Development of Social Affairs, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee;

DESCRIPTION OF THE DEBATE

The debate focused on the prospects and challenges for the NGO sector for the coming year, 2023. The experts discussed how much the Polish third sector has done for Ukraine, and what reflections and lessons we can learn for the future. The panelists also talked about the aspect of financing the third sector and the transparency of the expenses.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE DEBATE

Małgorzata Bogusz:

- When we talk about the responsibility of the third sector in connection with the Russian aggression against Ukraine, we can say to ourselves that we, as NGOs, primarily operating in Poland, but also we as Poles passed the test. An exemplification of how the third sector was involved in helping Ukrainian refugees and in reducing the consequences of this armed conflict in the social category happened yesterday through the presentation of awards by the European Economic and Social Committee - the Civil Society Award for the most active NGOs in Europe. One of the awards went to ZHP.
- From the very beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, what Polish society did, was an unprecedented event. Every organization, even the smallest, tried to help. Refugees were accepted on the Polish-Ukrainian border. Large organizations did it, small organizations did it. Each of them contributed. Given the scale of assistance that larger and smaller NGOs in Poland have realized. Nevertheless, it is these small actions that provide such an opportunity and are such a programmatic effort to help in such a huge crisis. It is, in a sense, an emanation of the capabilities of the third sector.

- According to the European Commission's figures for October 2022, 7.4 million refugees have entered European Union countries, while more than 1.5 million of them are permanently detained in Poland. No organized refugee centers have appeared in the category of "refugee camps." They all ended up either in organizations, in homes run by third sector organizations, or in the homes of Poles.
- Long-term thinking on how to foster the future reconstruction of Ukraine is one of the most key challenges for both small NGOs and very large NGO structures in operation.

Justyna Ochędzan:

- Recently, there was a recruitment for the monitoring committees of EU programs. This first, most difficult phase was completed in a very short time. We managed to select a representative group of NGOs. This is only the beginning, as the new financial perspective of EU funds gives NGOs tremendous opportunities to draw from this source. We are in the middle of the process when it comes to selecting regional committees. All the key programs except countryside and food aid are already virtually complete. We have less time than in the previous programming period because of the very complicated procedure we have created.
- The challenge for NGOs is that they should spend their money wisely, and that organizations should also fit into the trends - the digital transition and the green transition, or technological and green transformation. For now, organizations are practically not getting into these "green" things. There are very few organizations just in technology, artificial intelligence, automation, around Fiber Data. This is what business, universities are doing, but there are very few organizations here.
- It is important for NGOs to be active in monitoring committees, to speak up and try to influence how much money goes to the third sector as it's still not a big beneficiary, at least in these "green" areas.

- Financing NGOs is also a matter of a certain transparency as for the election of regional programs for monitoring committees, there are indeed a lot of certain imperfections there, which is something that public policy is working very hard on and making sure that this does not happen.
- I encourage everyone to take this EU money wisely and to cooperate among themselves. This is more my appeal to non-governmental circles, because we managed to achieve a lot on the level of cooperation during the programming, and this is the value that was not there before. And this needs to be nurtured, because as a sector we also have specific missions to accomplish, and we can agree in different configurations.

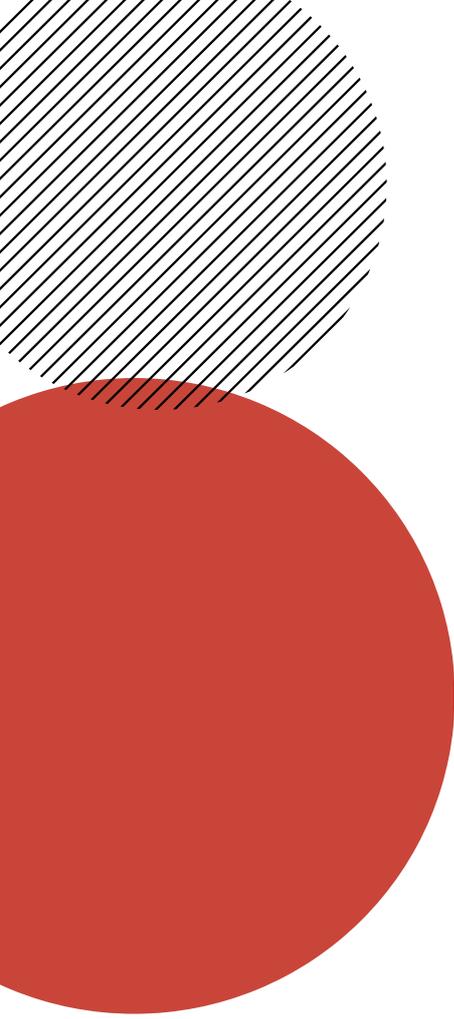
Tomasz Moliński:

- I believe that NGOs have the greatest ever such opportunities to find funds for their activities. And I mean both such opportunities to obtain public funds, state, or local government funds, but also EU funds and funds from various private sources, from various collections, from various donations.
- With the development of the civic sector in Poland, these opportunities are increasing, and we are already asking ourselves more and more not only how to increase funding for NGOs, but also how to improve the efficiency of spending these funds, and how to make them go to those organizations that are able to achieve better results with this money, the most publicly useful ones.
- Today I represent the Committee for Public Benefit that, among other things, oversees creating, preparing, implementing programs to support the development of civil society, in other words, simplifying educational programs of various kinds. These educational programs are implemented by the executive agency, which the Committee oversees through the National Freedom Institute. And since 2017, when the Committee was also established, the number of funds distributed through these programs has increased significantly. When we recalculate how much we have distributed over the past five years we are approaching one billion zlotys - likely to be exceeded early next year.

- As for the number of individual grants, there are already more than 5,000 of them. We have between 100 and 150 thousand NGOs in Poland. The National Institute of Freedom has awarded about 5 thousand grants over the past five years, and of course it is not the only entity that offers such grants to NGOs. The scale of this support is quite large. For next year, we plan to distribute about 200 million zlotys under the programs.
- Support will go in the direction of support tools aimed at certain specific, defined types of NGOs or types of activities carried out by NGOs. In the institute, we started with such horizontal programs, aimed at the entire civil sector, FIO programs and PROO programs. On the other hand, in recent years, more and more programs have been created that are dedicated to narrower groups and only specific types of NGOs are eligible to compete in these competitions. In the coming 2023, we can expect to see an increasing number of such directional programs. This will make it possible to sometimes reach those organizations that find it difficult to somehow compete in these competitions, which include all civic entities.
- The funds at the disposal of NGOs are increasing, and the expectation that these funds should be spent in an honest, transparent, and simply expedient manner is growing. We, as the Committee for Public Benefit, have been working on a law for several years now to address this very problem of transparency. This is the law on NGO reporting. This piece of legislation is very difficult to prepare because it completely turns the current system upside down. We have set as our goal not only to increase transparency, but also to simplify all reporting obligations.
- Certainly, from the conflict in Ukraine we can turn the development of NGOs in Poland, especially the development of volunteerism. It would be very good if we could persuade at least some of those volunteers who first became involved in some charitable, volunteer activities during the influx of refugees from Ukraine to Poland.

Krzysztof Pater:

- A major step forward needs to be taken in rebuilding the awareness of policymakers, primarily Members of Parliament, about the importance of civil society. Their perception of civil society is very different. There are great people who recognize this importance, who can cooperate, who can be advocates for civil society. There are also those who treat it purely instrumentally. They are happy to be photographed at NGO events, but once a civil society organization has a request, they are not too eager to help.
- We are actively seeking supporters from the political level, as we want 2025 to be the European Year of Volunteers.
- The war in Ukraine has shown that investment in civil society organizations is public money well invested. Our assumption has always been that you just must get going, and once you get going, then there will be experience and you can modify further actions. Spontaneous action by the public is wonderful, but in the short run. At some point it starts to turn into a system.
- Small organizations play a very important role in the environments in which they operate. They tend to enter niche areas where they are simply a simple response to problems that arise. Press organizations are needed if they treat their role as a representation of their members, rather than becoming independent entities.



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