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Call for proposal for CSO networks protecting EU values

Name of the organization and project:	Croatian union of associations for autism: Autism – From the Margines to the Center
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Contribution to the I4V2.0 programme result:	Strengthened civil society watchdog/advocacy role
Approved funds:	60.000 EUR
Project duration:	24 months 01.10.2025. – 30.09.2027.

Project summary:

Autistic people and their families in Croatia face systematic violations of basic rights – from difficult access to diagnosis and support to discrimination in education, healthcare, and social services. The main reason for this situation is the lack of a strategic approach: Croatia has never had a National Autism Plan, while institutional responsibility is fragmented and often absent. This is further worsened by a rapid rise in the number of autistic people (an increase of 365% in the past 10 years), leading to an institutional crisis and the invisibility of autistic people in public policies.

The project seeks to address this problem by strengthening the advocacy and monitoring role of the Croatian Autism Association (SUZAH) and its member organizations. The goal is to establish systematic monitoring of policies, document rights violations, and launch a national dialogue for adopting the first comprehensive Autism Strategy in Croatia, aligned with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The project aims to create the foundation for a National Autism Plan and position SUZAH as a key actor in shaping fairer and higher-quality policies for autistic people at both national and local levels.

Project objectives:

- Develop a document “Foundations for the National Autism Plan”, containing an analysis of the current situation, recommendations, and a proposed strategic framework aligned with Articles 21, 26, and 35 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- Document and publicly present examples of non-compliance of Croatian practice with the fundamental rights of autistic persons through a report that can serve as a basis for future systematic monitoring and advocacy.
- Strengthen at least four member organizations of SUZAH to engage in active local advocacy and use the EU legal framework to protect the rights of autistic persons.
- Increase public awareness and institutional dialogue on the need to adopt a National Autism Plan through a public campaign and a final conference involving decision-makers, families, and professionals.

Key activities include:

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- Creating the participatory document “Foundations for the National Autism Plan (NPA)” through desk research, community consultations (focus groups), and an analysis of compliance with EU rights.
- Producing a report on the misalignment of Croatian practices with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, serving as an evidence-based tool for future advocacy.
- Training and empowering SUZAH member organizations in four regions (Zagreb, Rijeka, Zadar, Slavonski Brod) for local policy monitoring, document analysis, and advocacy using EU legal tools.
- Conducting a public campaign and a national final conference to present results, raise public awareness, and initiate dialogue with decision-makers.

The expected impact of the project is to contribute to the protection of the fundamental rights of autistic individuals in Croatia by strengthening the watchdog role of civil society, producing strategic recommendations, and promoting structured dialogue with institutions.

Expected project results:

1. A participatory and legally grounded framework for the National Autism Plan (NAP): the consolidated document “*Foundations for the NAP*” is developed in a participatory way and submitted to relevant institutions, opening a structured dialogue with key stakeholders.
2. Violations of the fundamental rights of autistic persons publicly recognized and documented: a legally grounded report on the misalignment of practices with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is developed, published, and used, while a case database is launched for continuous monitoring.
3. Increased public visibility and institutional dialogue on the rights of autistic persons: a national campaign and a final conference with institutional stakeholders are carried out, generating public and political pressure to improve the rights of autistic persons.
4. SUZAH strengthened its watchdog function and internal monitoring systems: SUZAH member organizations use developed common tools and methodologies for watchdog advocacy at the local level, thereby strengthening both the network’s watchdog function and SUZAH’s capacity for coordinated national advocacy.

Target groups and final beneficiaries:

The project’s target groups are autistic persons (children, youth, adults), families of autistic persons (parents, especially mothers), SUZAH member organizations (17 CSOs in four regions – Zagreb, Rijeka, Zadar, Slavonski Brod), autistic youth and young activists/parents, as well as institutions and decision-

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makers (national/local). The final beneficiaries of the project are all autistic persons in Croatia and their families, as well as the wider public.

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