
CENTER FOR PUBLIC INNOVATION

Annual Report 2023

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About us

Mission

The Association Centre for Public Innovation (CPI) is an organization established in 2014. Based in Bucharest, CPI is doing research and advocacy work at national level, on topics related to human rights, democratic institutions, and inclusive society, and it is developing innovative grassroots civic education projects.

Our mission is to promote the open society in Romania. We are building a country where citizens are in solidarity with each other, without exception, and at the same time take an informed attitude towards what is happening around them. We are building a country where transparent institutions provide access to information in open formats and decide together with and in the interest of the citizens, guaranteeing equal rights for all people.

Scope of work

We implement programs and projects on three pillars:

- *Democratic institutions and human rights* - our work comprises a mix of advocacy, policy research, and watchdog activities. We are working in coalitions, together with like-minded organizations and individuals.
- *Civic education* - focusing on developing innovative grassroots projects, supporting communities, schools, and students with civic education projects.
- *Inclusive Society* - our work is currently focusing on the migrants living in Romania. Our tools remain advocacy and policy analysis, and we are not providing direct services to migrants.

We are also providing services (consultancy), and we use the profits generated to advance our mission and objectives.

Organization

CPI is registered as an Association. According to the national legislation, the overseeing body is the General Assembly, currently comprised of five persons (four women, one men). The executive body is the Council of Directors (CD), comprising of three members of the association (as required by the law). The executive director (member of both the association and CD) is in charge with the daily management and the representation of the Association.

In 2023, three persons made the permanent staff of the Association, including two of the CD members. Another ten persons were involved as experts or volunteers, on short term, in the projects of the Association.

In 2023, the total spending of the Association was XXX lei (approximate XXX euro). The most important funders were, in this order: Open Society Foundations, the Civil Society Development Foundation (through the EEA Grants), and the Civitates Foundation.

More information

Please visit our website: www.inovarepublica.ro, or contact us by email at: scrie@inovarepublica.ro

Our work in 2023

I. Democratic institutions and human rights

We believe in liberal democracy and the universality of the fundamental rights

Our work on democratic institutions and human rights comprises a mix of advocacy, policy research, and watchdog activities. We are working in coalitions, together with like-minded organizations and individuals.

The State of Democracy

Monitoring the health of the democracy and the civic space. Project supported by: Open Society Foundations; Civitates Foundation.

CPI is a founding and active member of the Coalition NGOs for Citizen. The Coalition is aiming to convene the voice of the watchdogs and human rights organizations, in a period of civic fatigue, to defend the civic space and civil liberties. CPI is contributing with research and advocacy work.

The Coalition is monitoring the legislative framework and the government's actions, and it reacting quickly to any threat to civil liberties. The website [StareaDemocratiei.ro](https://stareaDemocratiei.ro) is displaying some of our work, on topics such as: legislation on national security; surveillance; access to information; transparency in decision-making; pressures and harassment of independent voices; force evictions etc. The Coalition is publishing yearly the report 'The State of Democracy', remembering the hot issues of the previous year. International organizations working on human rights are often quoting the reports.

Participating to public debates

Active citizenship and participation. Project supported by: Open Society Foundations; Civitates Foundation.

In 2023, the Center for Public Innovation remained an active participant to the public debates, through various mechanisms.

Alone or in coalitions, we have submitted 14 opinions on normative acts initiated by the Parliament, various ministries, or the Bucharest General Council. This way, we have participated to the formal policy dialogue regulated by the legislation on transparency in decision-making.

We have submitted a contribution to the consultation on the Rule of Law Report of the European Commission, and we have participated to two consultations initiated by the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union.

Not least, the Center was open to providing opinions and knowledge at the request of various mass-media outlets. We had more than 30 interventions and opinions in publications, including Recorder, RFI Romania, Europa Liberă, Euronews Romania, and Libertatea.

Better legislation for human rights

Improving effective observance of fundamental rights and liberties. Project supported by: Open Society Foundations.

In Romania, the law requires public institutions that initiate normative acts, to include a preliminary analysis of the impact of the respective acts on fundamental rights. In 2022, the Government updated the templates of the documents required to fundament new legislation. During the public debate, CPI recommended improving the visibility of the section on fundamental rights, and the Government accepted the recommendation. Our monitoring shows that the general practice has not improve, and most initiators are simply ignoring the section on fundamental rights.

In fall 2022, we have initiated a dialogue with the relevant department in the General Secretariat of the Government, with the Romanian Institute for Human Rights (IRDO) and with the Ombudsman institution, on how to apply these legal provisions. The work continued in 2023, leading to developing guidelines and tools for the civil servants involved in drafting new legislation.

Electoral reform and transparency of political party financing

Advocating for fairness and transparency of the political processes. Supported by: Open Society Foundations.

CPI is a founding member of the Coalition Electoral Code Now (Cod Electoral ACUM!), a platform of the civil society advocating for the improvement of the electoral legislation, to improve fairness and transparency, and to enhance citizens' participation. Unfortunately, from a positive approach in 2020-2021, the Coalition was forced in a defensive stance, rather protecting the existing framework against political attacks.

One of the key issues is the transparency of political parties. Yearly, the political parties represented in the Parliament receive around 50mln euro in public subventions. A large part of this money is used for advertising and mass media. The larger parties are now effectively among the largest advertisers on the social and political niche. Using public money, the parties are effectively buying the complicity of media outlets.

The parties are subject to the law on access to public information but they refuse to comply. In 2021, CPI sued all political parties, in an attempt to obtain Court decisions forcing them to disclose how they are spending the public money. The strategic litigation activities are ongoing in 2023.

In 2023, CPI was the most active participant in the public debate on the new draft law on political parties financing, under debate in the Parliament. We have submitted recommendations to both Chambers of the Parliament, and we have participated to the meetings of the relevant Committees. The debate will continue in 2024.

II. Civic education

We believe that informed citizens are the backbone of liberal democracy.

Our work on civic education is focusing on developing innovative grassroots projects, supporting communities, schools, and students with civic education projects.

Participatory budgeting in schools

Learning participatory processes in schools. Supported by: Open Society Foundations.

We have adapted to the Romania context the concept of Participatory Budgeting in Schools (PBS), developed by International Budget Partnership in US. PBS is a democratic process through which a community – a class or a school – decides how to use a small budget available for educational activities.

In 2019-2021, we have piloted the concept in five high-schools from different backgrounds, and we found out that it is an excellent learning tool. As a result, in 2023, we are continuing to work with three high-schools, in which we have piloted the model in the first phase. The second process of PBS which we are implementing during this school year, brings a novelty. Each of the three high-schools is co-financing from its own financial resources the educational project which will won in the voting phase and will be implemented by the students' team.

PBS gives students a positive experience of civic engagement; it strengthens ties between students, teachers and administration, improving the educational climate; it establishes key competences and skills for democratic citizenship: teamwork, critical thinking, analysis, negotiation, research and documentation,

and problem solving; it introduces elements of economic education: understanding and building a budget; and it raises students' awareness of community issues.

Observatory of Disinformation and Exclusion – a media literacy project

Developing media literacy competences. Supported by: Embassy of the Netherlands in Romania, Open Society Foundations.

ODE (Observatory of Disinformation and Exclusion) was a grassroots project, implemented in partnership with five high schools from different localities. The project's main objective is to set up an effective and sustainable support system, designed to empower local community facilitators to dismantle fake news and disinformation, to enable critical thinking and to enable inclusiveness, social cohesion, trust and healthy community relations. CPI worked with five facilitators (mostly high school or secondary school teachers in communities consisting of diverse cultural minorities) and 25 secondary or high school students from the respective communities. The project financed by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Romania was finalized in June 2023.

At the end of the project 5 facilitators (high school teachers) were aware of the topics as: discrimination, fake news, disinformation, marginalized, excluded persons from their community; 38 students trained on the project topics as discrimination, fake news, disinformation, marginalized, excluded persons from their community; 5 case studies developed by the local student teams on cases of young people excluded, marginalized from their communities; 8 raising awareness actions in four of the fifth communities involved into the project; 21 anticipatory stories about the 'positive' future elaborated by four of the local student teams; a toolkit to prevent and combat false news, disinformation, hate speech and its consequences and a project community web page (The Observatory of Disinformation and Exclusion).

In the school year, 2023-2024, we are continuing to implement the project in two high-schools and we are working with two new facilitators and 15 high-school students.

III. Inclusive Society

We believe that human beings must respect one other, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language.

Our work on inclusive society is currently focusing on the migrants living in Romania. Our tools remain advocacy and policy analysis, and we are not providing direct services to migrants.

Immigration policies

Human rights have no borders. Supported by: Civil Society Development Foundation (EEA Grants), Open Society Foundations

CPI is a founding member of the Coalition for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees (CDMiR), the main (and single) platform of the civil society organizations advocating for the rights of migrants, or offering direct services. Our contribution is research, advocacy, and coordination.

In 2016-2022, we were the national partner of the strategic EU-funded project NIEM (NIEM – National Integration Evaluation Mechanism. Measuring and improving integration of beneficiaries of international protection), which is a trans-national project covering 16 states and including 20 partners, financed by the European Commission. The aim of the project is to mainstream an integration evaluation mechanism into the integration policies for refugees and beneficiaries of international protection at the national level in the participating project countries. The six-year project represents both an element of financial and organizational stability for the organization, as well as an opportunity to establish itself as a source of information on migration policy in Romania.

Since the start of the war on Ukraine, CPI was actively involved in advocacy efforts, together with the colleagues from CDMiR. Our common contribution included convening the energies of the civil society, providing expertise for the integration of the refugees, and providing input to the Parliament – constant communication with the Human Rights Committee of the Senate.

The Center acted as the advocacy lead for the CDMiR, by drafting policy documents and position papers. We have coordinated the series of eight position papers of the Coalition, and more than 20 articles and punctual inputs to legislation (available on its website, www.cdmir.ro).

Financial information 2023

Income

In 2023, our total income was 1,704,596.31 Lei. The sources of income are:

Donor / source	Amount (Lei*)
Open Society Foundations**	1,274,000.00
European Union (Interreg programme)***	174,918.12
Civil Society Development Foundation	64,002.64
Civitates Foundation	38,164.61
Individual donation through the 3.5% mechanism	726.49
Revenues from services provided	164,146.44
Total	1,715,958.31

*) The amounts received in other currencies were converted using the National Bank of Romania yearly average exchange rate.

***) Advanced payment for activities that will be implemented May 2023 – April 2026

****) Reimbursement for activities implemented in 2022 (Melia Observatory project)

Spending

In 2023, our total spending was 563,615.95 lei. The spending on the main pillars of our work was:

Dimension	Amount (Lei)
Democratic Institutions and Human Rights	227,536.45
Civic Education	169,639.42
Inclusive Society	82,007.37
Services provided (consultants)	146,405.00
Administration	7,014.96
Total	632,603.20

Public money

In 2023, we have received public money from the European Union (Interreg programme) and individual donations under the 3.5% mechanism.

The money received from the European Union represent reimbursement for the expenses made in 2022, on the Melia Observatory project. Please see the 2022 Report for details.

The amount of 726.49 lei, received under the 3.5% mechanism, was added to the organizations' reserves.