

Network^{of}
European
Foundations

PARTNERING^{FOR} IMPACT

NEWSLETTER
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Dear Readers,

As winter recedes and the challenges of the broader world persist, we are pleased to share a ray of light: the launch of the Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts (ASEA). This exciting new project brings together 11 foundations under the chairmanship of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

This launch is significant for several reasons. First, it demonstrates that patience and collaboration lead to meaningful results.

Now entering its pilot phase, ASEA is rolling out an ambitious and tailored fellowship program designed to strengthen participating organizations, support fellows' professional development, and drive impactful advocacy. During this experimentation phase, the Alliance will learn and adapt, refining its proof of concept along the way. At NEF, we are delighted to host two 'Alliances'. ASEA now joins its elder sister, the Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe (AGEE). They are both called 'Alliance' because they are building movements, bringing together diverse actors around shared values, common priorities, and new approaches that go beyond the traditional donor-beneficiary relationship. An alliance is also a 'promise' where partners must continually recommit to stay true to this vision.

Now, after 3 years of existence, and against the backdrop of growing anti-gender movements across Europe, AGEE is entering a new strategic phase with renewed purpose. At NEF, we firmly believe in the urgent need to invest in gender equality across Europe. We are continuing our own journey on this crucial issue, and this year, our Board will welcome new members to strengthen our diversity and representation. As always, we welcome your thoughts and feedback.

Peggy Saïller
NEF Executive Director

Highlights- - - - -

Launching the Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts

On 23-24 January, we gathered in Lisbon with creative practitioners and cultural leaders from across Europe to celebrate the launch of a new collaborative philanthropic programme: the Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts. The Alliance is a new programme hosted by NEF, that brings together 11 of Europe's leading philanthropic funders with a shared mission that aims to connect and elevate visionary leaders and organisations in socially engaged arts across Europe, transforming public and policy awareness, and securing vital recognition and funding

to accelerate their impact.



The Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts represents NEF's first art-driven programme, harnessing the power of creative expression to strengthen democracy and promote social inclusion across Europe. Throughout history, socially engaged arts have played a central role in challenging the status quo and providing society with creative tools and connections to inspire positive change. Today, socially engaged arts continue this legacy across Europe, bringing artists and communities together to collaborate and address social, political, and cultural issues through art. Rooted in co-creation and participation, these creative practices foster dialogue, change perspectives, and spark positive social change through art, paving the way towards a more equitable and connected future.

Central to the Alliance's mission is its inaugural Fellowship, a transformative programme designed to amplify the impact of socially engaged arts by investing in visionary leaders of arts organisations. Currently open to receiving applications, the Fellowship offers a unique opportunity for up to 15 leaders working across diverse artistic disciplines and social issues. The Fellowship isn't just about individual growth — it's about collective impact. Through a mix of opportunities for collaboration,

mentorship, capacity-building support as well as a €60,000 grant, Fellows will strengthen the impact and structures of their organisations, accelerate their professional growth, and drive impactful advocacy efforts alongside other participants.

Visit the [website](#) to find out more about the Alliance and its Fellowship.

Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe

Impact so far

Over the first three years, the Alliance has distributed over €4 million to 38 organisations across 18 countries, directly expanding opportunities and rights for more than 60,000 marginalised women, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals. During this time, the Alliance also increased its budget fivefold and more than doubled in size, reinforcing its role as the only pooled fund for gender equality in Europe.



As our pilot phase concludes, we have undertaken an [external evaluation](#) to identify key lessons and shape the next phase of our work. The evaluation reaffirmed the Alliance's value as a peer-learning space for funders, broadening knowledge about the gender equality landscape and connecting donors with grassroots organisations. It also highlighted the urgent need for sustained funding to advance gender equality.

A changing context

Across Europe, democratic backsliding and the rise of the anti-gender movement are threatening decades of gender equality progress. Attacks on reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ protections, and activism are intensifying, fuelled by sophisticated disinformation campaigns and well-coordinated transnational networks.

Yet, while anti-rights actors spent over \$707 million in Europe between 2009 and 2018 to roll back progress, funding for gender equality efforts remains scarce.

Grassroots gender equality organisations also face an increasingly hostile environment, growing restrictions on public funding, and a lack of opportunities to connect, strategise, and collaborate, making it harder for them to sustain and scale their work.

What's next?

Building on our experience and learnings, the Alliance is entering a new phase with a new strategic framework for 2025-2027 . While we will continue funding Economic Opportunities and providing capacity strengthening support, we are also launching two new sub-funds:

- **Movement-Building** - A strong feminist movement is key to sustainable gender equality progress. We are currently conducting a sector-wide consultation to better understand the needs and opportunities for strengthening the movement.
- **Gender & Democracy** – By equipping grassroots organisations to withstand the destabilising pressures of the anti-gender movement, we can strengthen their capacity to defend democracy and advance gender equality more effectively. We will provide small, short-term opportunity and emergency grants, enabling organisations to take advantage of emerging opportunities or respond to urgent challenges.

In this new phase, the Alliance will double down on its commitment to mobilising the

philanthropic community in support of the grassroots gender equality movement for a more inclusive Europe.

Project Updates - - - - -

Civitates

By the end of 2024, Civitates had selected 19 new grantee partners across our three portfolios for a total of about 3.5 million euros committed in grants, including in two Western European countries in which Civitates had never operated before (Greece and Austria).

The Civitates Steering Committee, which met in Oslo in November, approved a 4 million euro budget for 2025, and welcomed a number of new foundation partners. Our priorities for 2025 are to launch open calls in our media portfolio (on-going) and in our tech & democracy (mid-February). We will also have a call for projects in Italy in our civic power portfolio (in June). We are planning a series of on-line and in person convenings for the new cohorts of grantees.

Our team is expanding to meet the needs of a growing pooled fund and we are currently recruiting for a Learning and Impact Manager (full-time role supported by the Bosch Foundation), and a half-time Grants and Programme Officer role (who will also support the EAISF on a half-time basis).

In an effort to spur cooperation with other democracy-donors, the Civitates Director will attend a global funders roundtable on re-imagining international support to democratic resilience (Canada) as well as a democracy futures (scenario planning) workshop (US) in February.

Our next Steering Committee meeting will take place in Warsaw on 25-26 March and will provide an opportunity to our foundation partners to meet with a half dozen Polish grantee organisations, as well as other stakeholders interested in supporting

democracy.

The Inaugural EPIM Forum

EPIM hosted its inaugural Forum on the 13th and 14th of November 2024, bringing together 38 actors from across the migration ecosystem in Europe, in Brussels. The Forum consists of people with diverse lived experiences and expertise from civil society, government, private sector, social entrepreneurship, migrant activism, journalism, and philanthropy.

What the first Forum was about



Framed from a trust-building lens, the inaugural Forum offered participants a chance to reflect upon the current state of migration ecosystem and envision the transformation needed towards a regenerative, resilient, and forward-thinking ecosystem. We also had a chance to prototype some of these ambitions and put them in action, co-shaping the directions of EPIM's Reimagining European Migration Governance cluster, guided by insights from the first-ever system map on migration

governance.

Finally, the Executive Council – EPIM’s core governing unit was put in place, with Audrey Guichon, Carolina Gottardo, Elizabeth Kassinis, Eunice Romero, Hannes Einsporn, Ilaria Caramia, Janina Stürner-Siovitx and Letícia Ishibashi, serving on the council for its first term.

A Reminder – What is the Forum?

The EPIM Forum is a unique Social Lab for the migration ecosystem to catalyse and cultivate other ways of working and relating to one another. It is a dynamic space for connections, collective sensemaking, learning, and visioning. With the Forum, we hope to simultaneously build:

- a relational infrastructure for new social connections to emerge and collective intelligence to flourish,
- an imagination infrastructure to envision a future where everyone belongs,
- a sensemaking and learning body to check in on EPIM’s strategy and directions and on the ecosystem’s progress towards the vision.

At the heart of EPIM’s vision is the belief that to improve migration in Europe, we need a shared purpose and better collaboration across the ecosystem. This requires rethinking our relationships, understanding power dynamics, and reimagining resource flows. We see the Forum as a centre of gravity for the ecosystem where we can plant new seeds to flourish in the future.

European AI & Society Fund

In the year ahead, the European AI & Society Fund is [committed](#) to challenging the stranglehold of big tech vision for AI and shaping a future where AI truly serves people and society.

The response to our call for funders to help turn the tide on AI— so it can become a useful tool that’s harnessed with care to deliver the kinds of fair, inclusive and

sustainable societies we all want to live in — has been nothing short of incredible.

Three new philanthropic partners and eight long-term supporters have joined forces, [contributing over €5 million to our Breakthrough Initiative](#).

Getting this funding into the field to resource public interest advocates has been our priority. The appetite for this work has been remarkable - our [two recent open calls for proposals](#) received a record number of nearly 400 applications demonstrating the growing momentum and urgency to hold AI accountable.

European Fund for the Balkans

The European Fund for the Balkans is launching a new programme with the working title "Bridging divides". It will focus on activities that contribute to overcoming inter-ethnic divides and political polarisation and support related initiatives.

Nationalist rhetoric, the use of war narratives, and targeted disinformation campaigns have increased mutual distrust between people throughout the Balkans. Citizens feel compelled to take sides. These developments take place against a backdrop of war traumas, unresolved prejudices, and failed inter-ethnic reconciliation that have not been adequately addressed. Internal tensions and geopolitical manoeuvring in this crossroads region of Europe could continue to fuel political instability, even as the countries move closer to the EU.

The programme seeks to support activities that bring people from different ethnic and political groups together around common issues. The first phase of the programme will be a participatory design process, responding to existing needs and building on the knowledge of actors already working in the field. Implementation of the programme is expected to start in late summer 2025.

JAFOWA participated in the "Salone del Gusto - Terra Madre 2024" in Turin at the end of September, where it organised a workshop on "Partnerships for agro-ecological intensification and sustainable food systems in Africa".

The testimonies and contributions of a range of local and international actors converged on the role of farmers' organisations in promoting agro-ecological intensification. Farmers' organisations are well placed to contribute to sustainable food systems in their territories, to engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships, and to engage with youth and women to plan for their development.

The team also conducted backstopping missions to Senegal and Burkina last October/December. JAFOWA is currently preparing its 4th Call for Proposals, which will be launched in March/April 2025.

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