



17 May 2023

Citi Foundation Invests Further \$250,000 in Program Supporting Young People with Disabilities in Central Europe

The Second Phase of the Youth Disability Rights Program “Ascend” will be Implemented in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia in 2023.

Today **Citi Foundation** announced a new investment of \$250,000 to the successful Ascend Program run by The **European Disability Forum (EDF)**. The program was designed to build the disability movement among young people in the Central European countries of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. This new grant takes the total investment in the program to \$500,000.

In the new phase, the countries will place even greater emphasis on young people living with disabilities getting involved in advocacy for their rights and accessing education, vocational training and employment.

“The Ascend program is part of Citi Foundation’s Pathways to Progress, a global job skills-building initiative that addresses the persistent issue of youth unemployment. Access to education, vocational training and employment are all the more a concern for youth with disabilities, who face both physical and financial barriers to access university education and employment. I am confident that our partnership with EDF will engage even more youth into the disability movement while improving the capacity of local disabled people organizations to serve their members”, said **Munir Nanji, Central Europe Head at Citi**.

“The active involvement of young people with disabilities is key to ensuring the disability movement reflects the needs and hopes of all persons with disabilities”, said **Yannis Vardakastanis, EDF President**. “In a time of instability, pandemics and emerging technologies, it is more important than ever to continue building on what we have achieved to date with this project. The important support from Citi Foundation, for which we are very grateful, will help us ensure that the voices of young people with disabilities are reflected in the work we do, leading the way towards a more inclusive future.”

In 2022, in the first phase of the program, more than 700 people received trainings on disability rights. 82% of the people reached were living with a form of disability, and 55% of participants were young people with disabilities. 54% were women. With projects customized for local requirements, the initiative outperformed its expected deliverables on building the disability rights movement among young people with disabilities in each country.

Dozen program participants took part in empowerment trainings on themes such as independent living, human rights policy, and advocacy in the European Union. Within the framework of the project, Romania conducted an in-depth national research project interviewing over 200 young people with disabilities. Slovakia took the opportunity to successfully rebrand NROZP, whilst the Czech Republic focused on teaching sign language to the friends and families of people who are deaf or hard of hearing. In Bulgaria trainings on policy were a focus for human rights defenders in the country, as was a new website that is accessible to persons with disabilities. In Hungary,

interactive and in-depth trainings on policy, programming and other theoretical frameworks were the highlight. A dozen young people also visited Brussels to participate in a multi-day conference on youth and human rights in Europe.

EDF is implementing the project in partnership with five national organizations which benefit equally from the grant to support the goals of the program at the local level:

1. **Bulgaria:** National Council of People with Disabilities in Bulgaria (NCDPB, or Национално представителните организации на и за хора с увреждания)
2. **Czech Republic:** National Council of Persons with Disabilities of the Czech Republic, or Národní rada osob se zdravotním postižením ČR (NRZP ČR)
3. **Hungary:** Hungarian Association for Persons with Intellectual Disability (ÉFOÉSZ)
4. **Romania:** Romanian National Disability Council (CNDR), or Consiliul National al Dizabilitatii din Romania.
5. **Slovakia:** Slovak Disability Council (NROZP, or Národná rada občanov so zdravotným postihnutím v SR)

###

Citi Foundation

The Citi Foundation works to promote economic progress and improve the lives of people in low-income communities around the world. We invest in efforts that increase financial inclusion, catalyze job opportunities for youth, and reimagine approaches to building economically vibrant communities. The Citi Foundation's "More than Philanthropy" approach deploys the enormous expertise of Citi and its people to fulfill our mission and drive thought leadership and innovation.

Citi

Citi is a preeminent banking partner for institutions with cross-border needs, a global leader in wealth management and a valued personal bank in its home market of the United States. Citi does business in nearly 160 countries and jurisdictions, providing corporations, governments, investors, institutions and individuals with a broad range of financial products and services.

European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an umbrella organization of persons with disabilities that defends the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe. EDF is an independent non-governmental organization (NGO) that brings together representative organizations of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families, and it is a strong united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe. Additional information may be found at www.edf-feph.org | Twitter: @MyEDF

[More information and resources of the project](#)