Fostering equality and young people involvement through cultural activities

The Ministry of Culture evaluates activities to be supported according to the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy 2012-2018 (hereinafter referred to as the Guidelines), and anticipate to support those events in the Action Plan of the guidelines, which expect to have funding from the budget of the Ministry of Culture and which cannot raise foreign funding for their fulfilment or such funding is very limited, for example:

Support to the Association of Latvian National Cultural Partnerships of Ita Kozakeviča - for preservation of identity of national minorities.

*The Association of Latvian National Cultural Partnerships (LNKBA)* named after Ita Kozakeviča was established on 30 November 1988 – during the Awakening. It unites over 20 cultural partnerships and associations of different nationalities living in Latvia.

LNKBA helps representatives of minorities to become more aware of their ethnical link, learn their culture and language, religious traditions. LNKBA and its partnerships frequently organise political and individual art exhibitions, concerts and meetings with culture representatives. LNKBA also provides support to the development of different amateur art clubs, including those for children. From 2003, in late November and early December, LNKBA organises a wide-scale national minority art festival “United in diversity” [1].

**Ambassadors of Latvian culture**

The Latvian cultural ambassador program has been implemented with the support of the Ministry of Culture since 2012 by the Latvian National Cultural Center. The Latvian cultural ambassador training model is based on two international British Council programs – “Intercultural Navigators” and “Active Citizens”. The program has trained Latvian cultural ambassadors in cooperation with the various ethnic communities in relation to ethnic Latvian culture and its interaction with ethnic minority cultures.
Trainees develop knowledge of cultural diversity, identity and societal cohesion, which serves as the basis for establishment and development of various partnerships (Latvians and ethnic minorities), as well as gaining the initiative for further work.

After completing the training program, cultural ambassadors use the acquired knowledge to organize training for local communities and non-governmental organizations wishing to participate in shaping better living conditions and favorable environment in their own village, town or region.

“European Traces in Latvia” project

The project “European traces in Latvia” (“Eiropas pēdas Latvijā”) has been organized since 2014. Its aim is to encourage cooperation between children and youth (especially ethnic minorities) in a creative, modern and interactive way and to help identify Latvia as part of the European cultural space, where its historic cultural heritage (art, architecture, music, cuisine, etc.) has left its mark and its presence can still be felt today.

Children and youth who were involved in the project created videos about evidence of European culture, or traces, in their city and region, as well as participated in erudition competitions about the European Union. In a geocaching race, participants of the project team attracted more than 300 students from various Latvian schools. Using geocaching principles, hiding geocaches and searching for other team geocaches, project participants searched for and marked Europe’s traces in Latvia. By promoting European cultural values and an appreciation for diversity, the project “European traces in Latvia” promotes minority culture belonging to Latvia and Europe, as well as strengthens youth minority participation in building a democratic society.

Awareness of the Latvian immaterial cultural heritage - tradition of the Song and Dance Festival

The tradition of the Song and Dance Festival is a thankful environment for human creativity and collective action. The festival does not distinguish between professionals and amateurs, adults and children, Latvians and foreigners - everybody participates (belonging means participation). Participation of representatives of minorities in the All-Latvian Song and Dance Festival is evaluated as a good example of integration.

The Latvian National Cultural Centre ensures active cooperation with national minority formations also in between Song and Dance Festivals, involving national minority formations in the folklore festival “Baltica”.

Latvian Forum of National Minorities

Since 2014, the Ministry of Culture gathers together representatives of national minorities, non-governmental organisations (NGO), state institutions, experts and persons interested in the annual forum of national minorities.

The forum promotes cooperation of national minorities, and especially national minority NGOs, representatives and information about latest and important public processes. Within work groups, experts, representatives of national minorities and state institutions and other interested persons update problem matters and search for solutions of the matters of importance for national minority communities in Latvia (for example, national minority education, preservation of culture, ensuring activity of NGOs, etc.).

Pynu, pynu situ (Pinu, pinu sietu) festival of cultures
In July 2017, the first festival of Latvian cultures “Pynu, pynu sītu” (Pinu, pinu sietu) was held in Daugavpils and all over Latgale, publishing over 500 participants from all over Latvia. Participants of the festival confirmed that the unique Latvian cultural space promotes reinforcement of national identity, maintains, reinforces and unites the sense of belonging to Latvia in conditions of globalisation. The festival of cultures, while preparing for the Latvian centennial anniversary, represented the diversity of national minority culture and its contribution to the Latvian cultural space, as well as promoted awareness of shared values (freedom, rule of law, solidarity, etc.). The Ministry of Culture, the German Federal Foreign Office supported the festival financial and the Daugavpils City Council also provided its support.

“Regional NGO support programme”

77 different NGO projects were supported and implemented in 2017 for the purposes of promoting civil society initiative and participation of the population, providing support to regional NGOs and promoting their mutual cooperation, fostering the implementation of the supreme goal of the Latvian state centennial anniversary “to strengthen the national identity of the Latvian society and the sense of belonging to the country, stimulating self-organisation processes and cooperation”, supporting activities aimed at the involvement of local people in the improvement of conditions and quality of life of their community, fostering growth and sustainability of the individual, the community and the state, involving local governments, libraries, cultural centres, museums, educational institutions, the formation of statehood, research of the history of development and preservation and modern communication of its results in the neighbourhood, awareness of talents, excellence, entrepreneurship and achievements of Latvian people and inspiring from them and strengthening the link between generations, children and young people assuming equal initiative and responsibility.

Combating discrimination and poverty through cultural activities

Creative camps for national minorities

After active participation of national minority formations in the All-Latvian Song and XV Dance Festival in 2013, the matter of significance of cultural exchange for consolidation of the Latvian multinational society. The Latvian National Cultural Centre, with support of the Ministry of Culture, has been organising Creative camps for national minorities in 2014, educating leaders of Latvian national minority formations, for the improvement of capacity and artistic performance, preparing for the next All-Latvian Song and Dance Festival in the context of the centennial anniversary.

The camp programme includes lectures read by invited experts (incl. from foreign countries) on aspects of Latvian and national minority cultures, what they share and in what ways they are different. Organised master classes and demonstrations with the possibility to master the stage culture, Latvian national traditions in creative and democratic ways.

Latvian Roma Platform

The implementation of the Latvian Roma Platform project promotes cooperation with Latvian local governments with considerable numbers of Roma inhabitants, incl. events to promote more active involvement of Roma children and youths in processes in the society, especially in the process of education, developing cooperation with Roma families and educational institutions, as well as other local government authorities.

The project is implemented by the Ministry of Culture within the framework of the European Union programme Rights, equality and citizenship programme for 2014-2020, section “Grants to support the establishment of national Roma platforms”. Moreover, in order to increase understanding of the
society about Roma culture, history and social matters, as well as about the negative impact of prejudices and stereotypes on the status of Roma, the NGO Latvian Centre for Human Rights in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture is planning to continue implementing activities of the DOSTA! Campaign of the European Council – Enough! Go beyond prejudice, meet the Roma! The events will be implemented according to the political objective of the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012-2018) – to promote the inclusion of socially excluded groups in the society and to prevent discrimination.

In addition, the Regional Expert Network in Roma Integration Matters created by the Ministry of Culture in 2014 is being developed in order to promote regular exchange of information and experience between local government specialists in Roma integration matters and to develop cooperation between the Ministry of Culture, local government authorities and Roma community for effective implementation of the Roma integration policy.