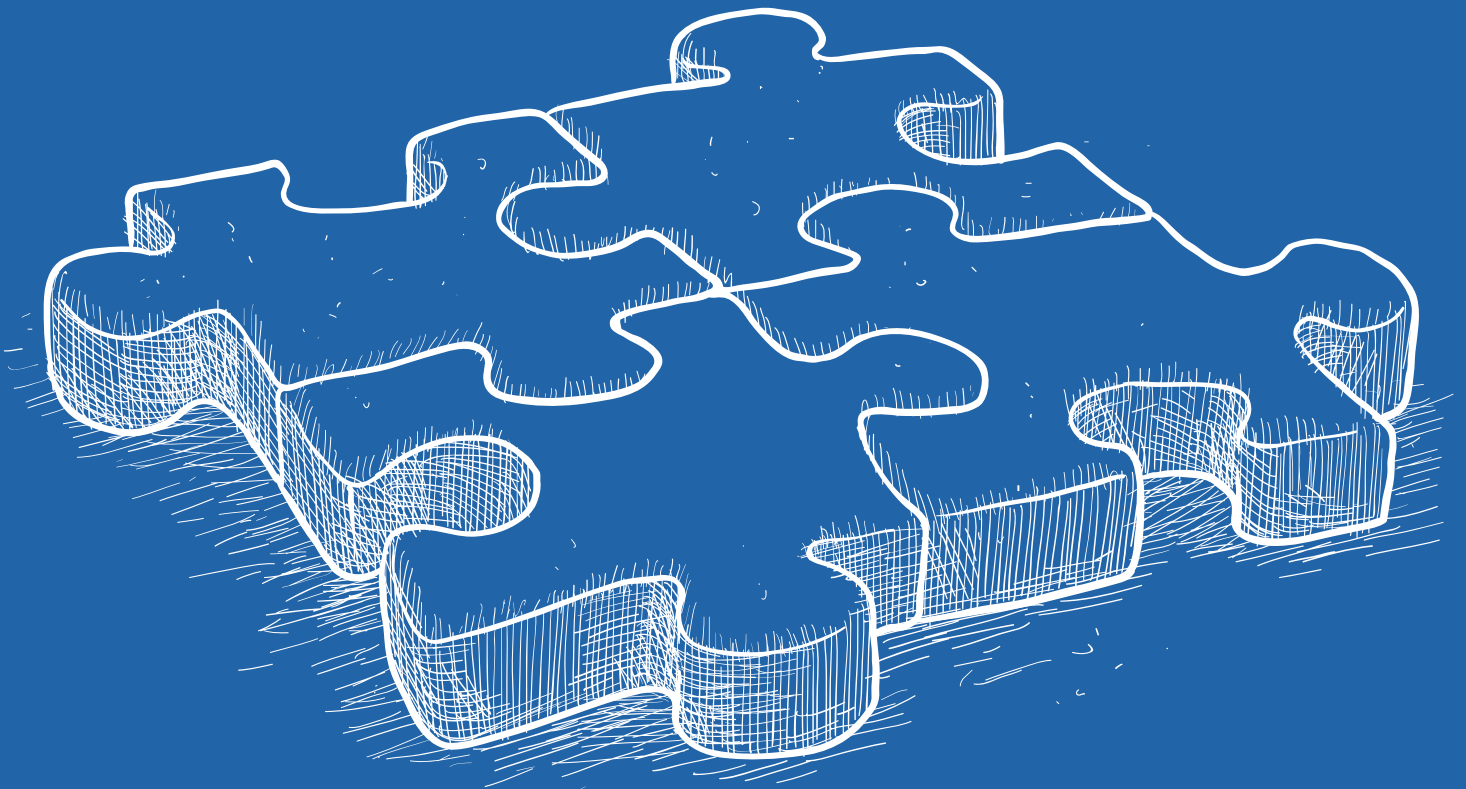




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Report on Regional CSO Networks in the Western Balkans and Turkey (2016)

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REPORT ON REGIONAL CSO NETWORKS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

June 2016

Prepared by Morana Smodlaka Krajnović

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ACRONYMS

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BCSDN	Balkan Civil Society Development Network
CfP	Call for Papers
CS	Civil Society
CSF	Civil Society Facility
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EC	European Commission
ESSEDRA	Environmentally Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of Rural Areas
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
FPP	Framework Partnership Programme
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

OSF	Open Society Foundation
SEE	South-East Europe
SEEMO	South East Europe Media Observatory
SEEYN	South East Europe Youth Network
SELDI	Southeast Europe Leadership for Development & Integrity
SFI	Slow Food International
TACSO	Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations
WBT	Western Balkans and Turkey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This report has been commissioned by the Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) project, with an objective to update an initial Report on Regional CSO Networks in IPA countries (2011; 2012). This update is expanding on those initial findings and examining the current capacities of regional CSO networks, their formation process, accountability, added value for their members, networks' contributions to new social values and their sustainability prospects. For purposes of this report, regional CSO networks are defined as either formal or informal groups of at least 3 organizations, from at least 2 countries from the region (WBT), who have come together voluntarily to pursue shared purpose (be it information sharing, coordination of activities or joint advocacy or social services delivery).

Methodology

The assessment was conducted between May and July 2016, using desk research, key informants interviews, semi-structured interviews with eight network representatives, and online surveys for network coordinators/representatives (39 responses) and network members (individual CSOs – 76 responses).

Key Findings

Since 2012, when the initial report was last updated, regional CSO networks in the Western Balkans and Turkey have gained on visibility and influence, and are active in wide range of thematic fields. This was largely due to EU and TACSO support, which remain the biggest (often the only) providers of technical assistance and funding to regional networks.

The main reasons CSOs join regional networks are exchange of information, coordination of activities and creation of new social value. This new social value is mostly seen in the increased ability of networks (as compared to individual CSOs) to influence public policies in the region. Additional benefits that networks provide to their members are greater visibility and increased leverage at the local level.

The WBT regional CSO networks vary in the formality of their structures, from very loose and informal networks, to formal and hierarchical ones. This report argues that there is no linear network development model, and that informal structures can be as effective as the

formal one, if it fits the purpose of the network and the level of interdependency of its members.

Key Recommendations

- Regional CSO networks require continuous and flexible support, both in terms of technical assistance and financial support, before they can reach stability and sustainability. Currently, that support is coming almost exclusively through EU and Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations programs, including the TACSO project, and without continuation of that support, regional networks would not be able to maintain the current level of involvement and influence on regional policies. Flexible funding approach should allow networks to combine operating and project activity costs.
- Regional networks need to continue investigating alternative sources of funding from membership fees to income generating activities, to complement and reduce dependency on the EU funding.
- Networks' credibility is connected with its accountability, not just towards donors, but also toward their constituencies, their members. Networks' structures need to be carefully balanced to ensure efficiency and effectiveness, without jeopardizing members' involvement and ownership.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

The general objective of the Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) project is to strengthen the overall capacities and accountability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) within the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) beneficiaries, to guarantee the quality of services of CSOs and to create a sustainable role of CSOs in the democratic and European integration processes. The main purposes of the project are to:

- Increase and improve the capacity and actions of CSOs; and to
- Improve the democratic role of CSOs.

Among TACSO's numerous activities, it is also envisaged that TACSO, directly or indirectly, contributes to networking of CSOs across the region.

Ashman, D. (2005) defines civil society networks as civil society groups, organizations and sometimes, individuals that come together voluntarily to pursue shared purposes of social development or democratic governance. These purposes may include exchanging resources, addressing common social goals or expressing their identities as community or social group. For purposes of this report, regional CSO networks are defined as either formal or informal groups of at least 3 organizations, from at least 2 countries from the region (WBT), who have come together voluntarily to pursue shared purpose (be it information sharing, coordination of activities or joint advocacy or social services delivery).

Liebler and Ferri (2004) have recognized a number of benefits for members that a network can potentially offer. These include (1) increased access to resources including information and expertise, (2) increased efficiency through reduced costs, avoidance of duplication of efforts and sharing of lessons learned, (3) a multiplier effect as the value of the network is greater than the sum of its partners, (4) solidarity and support, (5) increased visibility of issues, best practices and contribution of underrepresented groups, (6) risk mitigation in project implementation, (7) reduced isolation in particular of organisations and individuals in remote locations and (8) increased credibility to both the policy and donor communities.

The above listed benefits are main reasons why CSOs join networks, but they are also main reasons behind donors' decision to support networks. CSOs in IPA countries, specifically, can

benefit greatly from regional networking, as they work in similar context, shared history and common goals and challenges, connected to the pre-accession processes.

In order to take stock of the formal and informal regional networks, TACSO developed an initial Report on Regional CSO networks in the IPA countries in 2011 (updated in 2012). The objective of the report was to identify regional networks, and to examine their organisational capacities. Since 2012, EU, through TACSO and different other grant programs, have provided significant support to CSOs networks and partnerships active in the Western Balkans and Turkey and TACSO has commissioned a second round of assessment of regional CSO networks to examine the current situation with their existence; ways they are structured and how they are formed; what mechanisms they use for coordinating activities and making decisions and how they engage their membership base. Further, the assessment should look at sustainability prospects and challenges of regional CSO networks and their contributions to democratic and economic developments in the region.

The initial report provided the first mapping of the networks active in the region, using desk research and Skype interviews with selected networks and member organisations. It also outlined and explained main concepts related to networks, definitions and preconditions for their functioning.

This current report wanted to expand on that initial information, providing analysis of quantifiable data collected through online surveys, as well as case studies illustrating foremost characteristics of regional CSO networks. The contact list of regional CSO networks identified by the initial mapping in 2011 has been updated with information gathered through online surveys and interviews.

As the initial report provided a thorough and broad background information and overview of general concepts and definitions related to CSO networks, to avoid repetition, this update will focus on the assessment findings and limited definitions that are necessary to understand the approach of the assessment.

One of the challenges when designing this assessment was to find the appropriate way to assess networks capacities. Most of the capacity assessment tools for individual CSOs place CSOs on different development levels, usually on a scale of four, with the assumption that the capacity development efforts should help the organization achieve the higher level. However, networks don't necessarily need to become more formal or structured to become more effective, and in this assessment we follow the approach, presented by Ashman and

al. (2005) and Ashman and Luca (2007) that the most efficient networks are those whose structure is aligned with their purpose, and their structure is of a form that suits their needs the best. Table below presents five network models typology (Ashman and Luca, 2007) that was used as a starting point for developing questions about regional CSO networks formation, purpose and structure for purposes of this report.

Table 1: Network typology (Ashman)

Shared purpose	Level of interdependence	Change in decision-making	Change in ownership or governance	Types of network structure
(1) Exchange information, learn from one another	Low	Little joint decision-making	None	Informal relationships; Single agency convenes mtg(s); Responsibility of member ass'n. to convene members
(2) Coordinate policies, programs, or activities	Medium-low	Limited joint decision-making by executives or delegates	Requires formal or informal agreement	Group or committee of authorized representatives
(3) Obtain common funding	Medium	Some joint decision-making, focused on finance	Requires formal agreement & often legal organization	Project management unit, hosted by one member or jointly created
(4) Joint advocacy (5) Joint service delivery	Medium-high	Some joint decision-making, focused on program action & finance	Requires formal or informal agreement; may involve new coordinating organization	Coalition, alliance, service delivery network. Coordinating organization may be hosted by one member or jointly created.
(5) Strengthen members' long-term common identities and interests, e.g. policy, legislation, reputation, etc.	High	Permanent joint decision-making by representation of executive or senior delegate	Requires formal legal organization, bylaws, etc. as provided by legal code and social norms/practices	Member association, apex body, federation, etc. Usually involves a general membership, elected board, and a hired staff who work in a coordinating unit or secretariat.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this report are to:

- update the initial list of the regional CSO networks
- examine organizational capacities of the regional networks, including
 - general concepts and definitions
 - networks' capacities and accountability; formation process; membership development
 - incentives to engage in networks; membership participation and ownership; decision-making processes
- assess the added value of regional networks for members
- assess networks' contributions to new social values, either through service provision or advocacy efforts
- examine sustainability prospects and challenges for the regional networks

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The mapping of regional CSO networks in the Western Balkans and Turkey was conducted from April to June 2016. Regional CSO networks, for purposes of this report, were defined as either formal or informal groups of at least three organizations, from at least two countries from the Western Balkans and Turkey region. The following methods were used for the assessment:

- Desk research: reviewing available resources on CSO networks, the initial TACSO report on networks, EU calls for proposals and grants evaluation reports

- Key informant interviews with TACO team leader and TACSO resident advisors, and DG NEAR team. These interviews informed the design of online questionnaires and semi/structured interviews with network representatives.
- Online surveys for network representatives and CSOs that are members of regional networks
- Semi-structured interviews with representatives of selected networks. These interviews provided more in-depth information about the network structures, ways of engaging members and were used for case studies to illustrate that.

2.2. INSTRUMENTS

Online survey was designed specifically for this assessment. Two questionnaires were used, one for network coordinators or persons representing the network, and the other for CSOs who are members of a regional network.

Questions for CSO members were addressing their motivation to join the network and their satisfaction with how well their needs are being met, as well as their needs for future support. As there were CSOs who wanted to take part in the survey but do not belong to a regional network, the online survey allowed them to proceed, from initial questions to the last section, about support needed.

Questions for networks were focused on their:

- area of work
- size (number of members) and countries included
- organizational form
- leadership and governance structure
- fundraising capacities
- the network's advocacy and service delivery capacities; technical capacity, with examples of successes

- satisfaction with support received, if any, from TACSO and other EU funded programs
- needs for future support

Both surveys were hosted on Google Forms platform and accessible from mid-May until end of June 2016. Copies of questionnaires are appended to this report.

2.3. SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

The invitations to participate in this assessment were disseminated through TACSO national offices and Resource centres mailing lists. Invitation included a definition of a regional network and instructions for network members (CSOs who are part of networks) and network coordinators (persons coordinating and/or representing the network), to clarify the criteria for participation. In addition, DG NEAR staff has distributed it to the recipients of their FPA, Long-term and operating grants.

There were 76 responses from individual CSOs (62 of which are members of a regional network), and 39 responses from regional network representatives (there were altogether 46 responses, however 7 were excluded from further analysis as they did not meet the criteria of covering at least two countries in the region and were representing national networks). Table 1 below presents number of responses from different countries. Some networks have a base outside of the Western Balkans and Turkey, but as they have members from the targeted region, which is also where the main focus of their work is, they were included in the table and further analysis.

Table 2: Number of responses per country

Country	Number of networks participating in a survey, based in the country	Number of CSOs participating in a survey
Albania	6	9
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	10
Belgium	1	1
Bulgaria	1	1

Croatia	2	2
Germany	1	1
Italy	2	0
Kosovo	1	24
Latvia	0	1
Macedonia	6	10
Montenegro	3	5
Romania	1	0
Serbia	10	7
Slovenia	1	1
Turkey	1	4
Total:	38	76

2.4. LIMITATIONS

The assessment was looking into networks active in the region that encompasses seven countries thus field research was not feasible, nor economically justified. Data was collected through online survey and Skype interviews. While online survey has many advantages, such as low cost and ease of data collection, known limitations are connected with the absence of an interviewer who could provide additional explanations and expand on questions. Online surveys are also not suitable for open-ended questions. This limitation was partly mitigated by conducting semi-structured Skype interviews with representatives of seven selected networks, that allowed for more in-depth questions and following up on answers provided.

Survey questions were in English, which excluded potential respondents who are non-English speakers.

While one of the objectives of this report was to assess contributions of networks in producing new social value, and to provide recommendations to DG ENLARGE for their future support to regional networks, this was not an evaluation of DG ENLARGE grants programmes. Described advocacy and social delivery successes have been reported by respondents. Verifying those successes and looking into their relevancy and attribution would require much broader scope.

3. RESULTS

3.1. REGIONAL CSO NETWORKS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

The responses from 38 regional network representatives included in this survey are showing that majority, 10 of them, are based in Serbia, followed by 6 each in Albania and Macedonia (see Chart 1). During interviews, network representatives stated that selection of where the network should be based often depends on whether there is a favourable legal framework for registering a network, for example, it is fairly easy to register an organization in Albania, while the process can take unusually long in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In case of non-registered networks, some other factors influence that decision: distance and easiness of travel arrangements (Serbia is well positioned within the region and Belgrade is a transport hub), location of the lead or coordinating CSO, residence of the coordinator and/or access to funding opportunities. Several of the surveyed networks are based in one of the EU member countries, but their members come from the WBT region and the main focus of their work is in the region.

Out of 38 participating networks, 10 are registered as legal entities, while 28 are not registered. The oldest networks emerged in early '90s, while the youngest one is from February 2016. Their regional coverage also varies: the smallest network (Albanian Alps Alliance) is covering two countries, the largest one twelve (SEE Coalition on Whistleblowers Protection). While members from the WBT are represented the most, more than half of participating networks include members from broader SEE region (Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania) and have additional members from Western Europe.

When it comes to their areas of work, answers were equally diverse, as shown in table 2. Highest number of responses, five, was in the field of social protection and social inclusion, followed by four networks active in the field of human rights and four in the field of environmental protection.

Chart 1: Countries where networks are based

Countries where networks are based

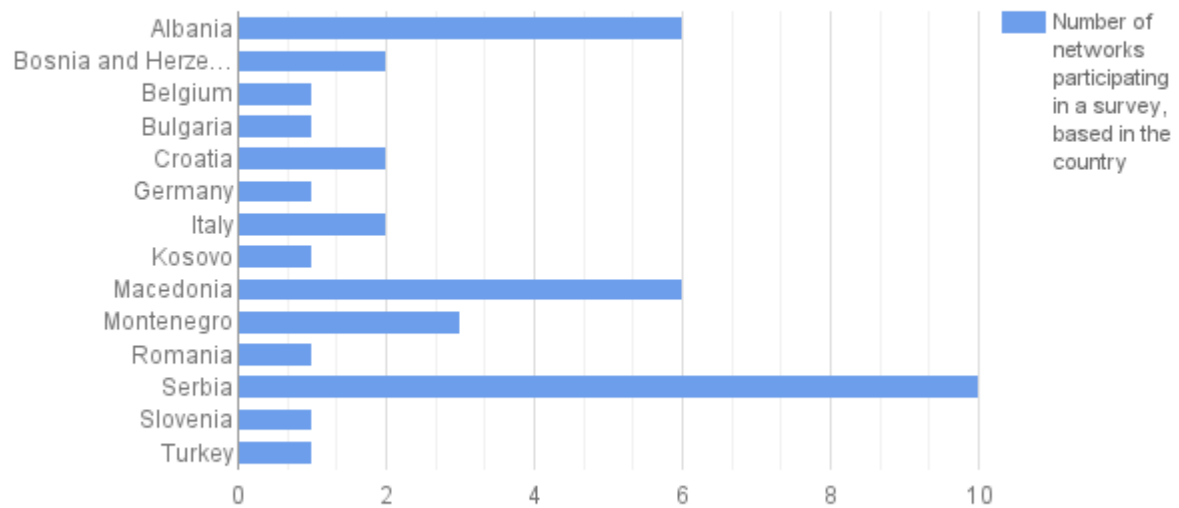


Table 3: Thematic areas in which regional networks work

Thematic area	Number of networks	Percentage
Anti-corruption	1	2.63%
Civil society development	3	7.89%
Culture	2	5.26%
Democracy and governance	2	5.26%
Dialogue and reconciliation	2	5.26%
Environmental protection	4	10.53%
Gender equality and women's rights	2	5.26%
Human rights	4	10.53%
LGBTI	1	2.63%
Media	1	2.63%
Professional association	2	5.26%
Rule of law	2	5.26%
Rural development	3	7.89%
Social inclusion and social protection	5	13.16%
Social innovation	1	2.63%
Youth	1	2.63%
Other	2	5.26%

3.2. NETWORK FORMATION

Ashman et al. (2015) list the following types of shared purposes for networks, i.e. the main reasons why CSOs decide to join networks:

- 1) To exchange information and learn from one another
- 2) To coordinate policies, programmes or other activities

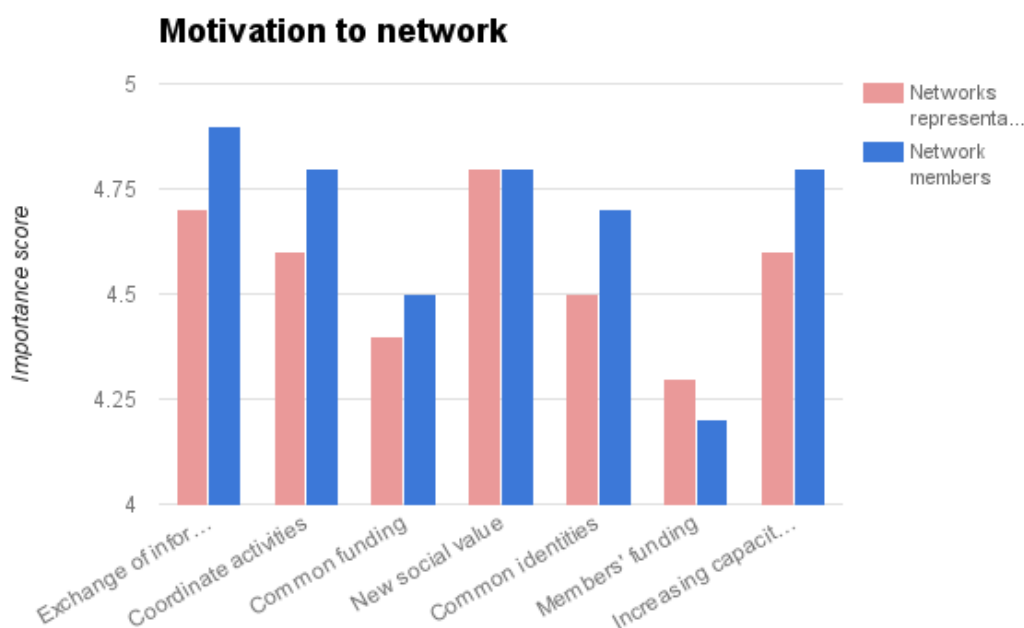
- 3) To obtain common funding
- 4) To create new social value, either through advocacy work or to develop joint programs for social delivery
- 5) To strengthen members' common identities and interests over the long term

To these five common reasons, we have added additional two:

- 6) To obtain funding, through the network, for your CSO activities (for individual CSO activities, as opposed to common funding for the network listed under 3)
- 7) To increase individual members' organizational and technical capacity

Both network coordinators and individual members were asked to rate, on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest importance, these reasons for their decision to form and/or join the network. The results are shown on the Chart 2, below.

Chart 2: Main reasons for joining networks



For members, the most important reason to join is exchange of information, followed by coordination of activities and creation of new social value. For networks representatives, creation of new social value had the highest average score, followed by exchange of information and building of common identities. For both groups, obtaining either common funding or funding for individual members, had the lowest average score.

CASE STUDY: NETWORKING AS CAPACITY BUILDING FOR ITS MEMBERS (IRIS NETWORK)

IRIS network is the regional network that brings together CSOs social service providers in South East Europe. IRIS connects currently 140 member organizations that provide different types of social services to different vulnerable groups: people with disability, children and youth at risk, women victims of family violence, refugees, asylum seekers etc.

IRIS aims to strengthen the role of not-for-profit social service providers throughout SEE and to ensure that these organizations are recognized as equal partners by the public sector.

IRIS was founded in 2012 by nine partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania, FYR of Macedonia and Serbia. These partners were selected based on the previous experience in the joint implementation of different socio-economic projects or based on common values and priorities related to the development of CSOs at the national and regional level. Further, each partner has organized the network of at least 20 national CSOs that provide social service in different sector: elderly care, care for persons with disabilities, gender based and domestic violence, support to children and youth at risk and migrants.

IRIS main purpose is capacity building of its members, and they used the FPA grant to increase technical skills and capacities of smaller CSOs, sharing the best practices and standards in social service delivery, opening doors for better cooperation with local governments. IRIS network became a member of SOLIDAR network, an European network of CSOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. This follows 4 years of cooperation where SOLIDAR supported IRIS Network through capacity building, policy and advocacy activities. Through this membership, IRIS's 140 CSOs now have even better access to decision-makers at the EU level, which in turn strengthens their position and visibility at local level.

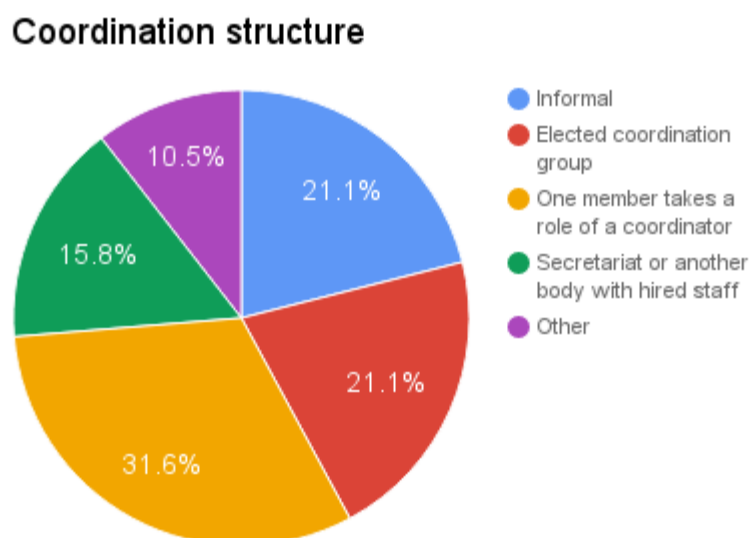
3.3. MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

Networks participating in the survey report a whole range of coordination structures: from informal, where it is member's responsibility to convene other members, if and when needed, through elected coordination group with representatives from member CSOs, to having one member organization taking the role of the coordinator and the most formal of structures, when there is a secretariat or similar coordination body with hired staff. These different coordination mechanisms are almost equally represented among regional networks in the WBT. The most common type is having one member organization taking a role of a coordinator. In some networks, this role would be changed over time, with member organizations taking turns.

While networks often evolve in a way that with years of existence they develop more formal structures, it does not always have to be the case. Some of the oldest networks in the re-

gion, existing from 1990s, still prefer informal structure, as they find it more fitting to their organizational values and the purpose of their work.

Chart 3: Networks coordination structures



Secretariats vary in size from one paid staff member to as many as fourteen. The roles and duties secretariats fulfil include: preparing and gathering the general assembly, coordinating activities of the network, fundraising, financial management, implementing activities and policies in line with the decision of the general assembly or the governing board, facilitating membership and partnership building and communication with and between members.

Each of these different structures has its advantages and disadvantages. The less formal ones, where members convene according to the needs or when there is an elected coordination group comprised of members' representatives, base their decision-making on consensus of members and usually have processes where members are highly involved. However, such decision-making takes time and is not always the most efficient. On the other hand, networks with secretariats or those when one, usually the strongest member takes a role of a coordinator, can be more efficient in implementing project activities, but sometimes this happens at the cost of lower participation and involvement from members. In addition, secretariats with paid staff increase the cost of network operations and present further fundraising challenges, but then again, the same paid staff is actively involved in raising fund for the network.

The decision what would be the most appropriate structure for the network depends on the complexity of a purpose. Ashman and Luca (2007) argue that only the networks with high level of interdependency and complex purposes, such as building common identities and

pursuing long-term interests in policy and legislation, should aim for becoming a formal network with a formal structure.

CASE STUDY: FORMAL STRUCTURE FOR INFLUENCING POLICIES (SEE CHANGE NET)

SEE Change Net is a think tank that campaigns for better governance, a higher quality of life and a more efficient use of resources in South East Europe. It was founded in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 2012, stemming from an idea to create a regional virtual think tank that would do fact and evidence based advocacy, working on an energy model for the SEE region that fits with the current EU environmental and climate policies.

SEE Change Net is currently developing energy models for 7 countries of South East Europe – as well as a regional model – promoting sensible choices about SEE energy future in line with EU goals. The Lead Partner is SEE Change Net working with 17 CSO partners, covering 7 countries from SEE region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia.

From its start, this network was focused on high-level policy influencing, targeting, apart from national institutions, the regional body based in Vienna. The Energy Community is an international organisation dealing with energy policy that was established by an international treaty in October 2005 in Athens, Greece. The Treaty entered into force in July 2006. The Treaty establishing the Energy Community brings together the European Union, on one hand, and countries from the South East Europe and Black Sea region. While some six years ago, SEE Change Net would not have their emails responded by this body, on June 21, 2016, they were invited to participate at the Energy Community's Permanent High Level Group meeting, as the only civil society representatives.

SEE Change Net wanted to do evidence-based advocacy and policy work that goes beyond protests, which did not bode well with some of grassroots level and environmental activists groups. Some of those initial partners left; with others SEE Change Net is providing technical assistance to improve their research skills.

Being focused on efficiency and delivery, decision-making is very structured and streamlined when it comes to policy products and the message of those products. This leads some of the partners to believe that they are not involved enough. SEE Change Net is looking into ways of keeping the quality of policy products and increasing involvement of partners. The main communication and collaboration channel used is Google platform. For each policy product, the lead editor develops the outline and the framework, partners can check and contribute. Apart from this, the network is having a general meeting of all partners at least annually and they are looking into investing in a more advanced online platform for remote team work.

CASE STUDY: LESS FORMAL STRUCTURE FOR A NEW NETWORK (SEE COALITION ON WHISTLEBLOWERS PROTECTION)

SEE Coalition on Whistleblowers Protection is a regional organization dedicated to strengthening legal protections and rights for whistleblowers, investigating whistleblower cases, and raising awareness of the value of whistleblowing to fight crime and corruption. The Coalition is comprised of more than 25 CSOs and other groups from 12 Southeast Europe countries, founded during a two-day meeting in Belgrade on Nov. 9-10, 2015.

This relatively new coalition emerged out of Regional Anti-Corruption initiative and Blueprint for Free Speech, supported by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). RAI is an inter-governmental organization that deals solely with anti-corruption issues; Blueprint is an international advocacy and research CSO; the RCC promotes regional cooperation and civil society involvement in Southeast Europe. For now, the coalition members are dispersed as well as two coalition co-coordinators, one in Berlin, Germany, and the other in Tirana, Albania. The staff journalist and activism/outreach coordinator are based in Sarajevo, and coalition web master/IT director in Prague. So far, there are also no formal coordination mechanisms or decision-making procedures, but the coalition plans to develop them in near future. According to the 5 network typology model, this is perfectly appropriate for a new network. Light and lean network structures can facilitate rapid coordination and joint action (Ashman et al., 2005).

At the moment, there are no formal criteria for membership. The members are organizations and individual journalists and activists who were already cooperating through the Blueprint for Free Speech.

Despite existing for less than a year, the coalition's campaign is already producing first results. The Institute for Democracy and Mediation, a Coalition member, successfully lobbied for the passage of Albania's first whistleblower protection law. The law provides retaliation protection for government and company employees. The Institute and the Coalition provided extensive comments on the draft law, improving it significantly and ensuring that many international and European standards are included in the legislation. The Law on Whistleblowing and the Protection of Whistleblowers passed the Albanian Parliament unanimously on June 2, 2016.

3.4. MECHANISMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Mulgan (2000) defines accountability through a number of features: it is external, in that the account is given to some other person or body outside the person or body being held accountable; it involves social interaction and exchange, in that one side, that calling for the account, seeks answers and rectification while the other side, that being held accountable, responds and accepts sanctions; it implies rights of authority, in that those calling for an account are asserting rights of superior authority over those who are accountable, including the rights to demand answers and to impose sanctions.

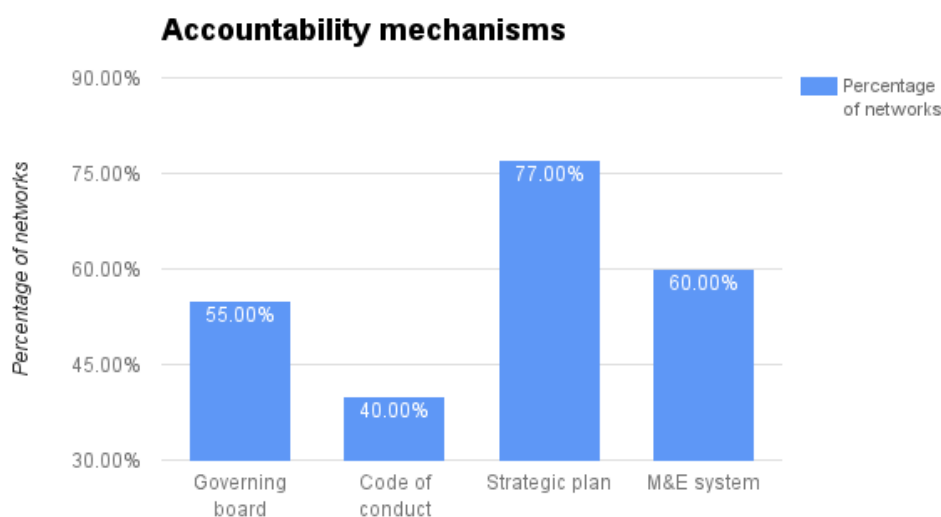
In terms of CSO networks, they are held accountable by their members on one side and by donors on the other side. As networks consist of individual, autonomous organizations, it is important that their leadership and governance structures are collaborative and representative of members' interests.

Smaller and/or informal networks that participated in a survey, usually meet this requirement by having all members participating in all major decision-making, and different implementing functions are then distributed among member organizations that fulfil them in accordance with decisions made by all members.

Larger and/or more formally structured networks have developed correspondingly more formal mechanism of accountability that includes the assembly (all members) who in turn elect the governing board. The governing board is a body that sets the strategic direction for the network (approved by the assembly) and assigns duties to the executive part of the network. The executive bodies (secretariat; coordinators) in turn report on their activities, including financial aspects, back to the board and the assembly. Those activities should be aligned with the network's strategic plan, if it exists, and measured and reported against the M&E plan. Chart 4 presents percentages of participating regional networks that have adopted the main mechanisms of accountability. Strategic plan is a tool that majority of networks have in place (70%), followed by 60% of networks that report on having an M&E system. Slightly more than half of participating networks have a governing board, while only 40% report on having a code of conduct.

As regional networks represent joint voices of their members, there are often expectations that they represent much larger group of citizens/stakeholder affected by their issue. As they are not elected official and part of the public sector, they cannot be assumed to represent public, they can only represent and be accountable to their constituents (usually their members). One example is the Balkan Civil Society Development Network that is often facing expectations to speak on behalf of the whole civil society in the region, whereas they only have a mandate to represent and speak on behalf of the fifteen CSOs that are members of that network.

Chart 4: Mechanisms of accountability



CASE STUDY: FORMAL STRUCTURE AND EFFICACY WITHOUT SACRIFICING ACCOUNTABILITY TOWARDS MEMBERS (LGBTI ERA)

LGBTI Equal Rights Association (LGBTI ERA) is a regional lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex association active in the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey. Network was founded in September 2015 and its members are LGBTI organizations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey.

Although formally founded in 2015, this network comes as a result of intensive communication and cooperation between LGBTI CSOs from these countries since early 1990s. Organizations that formed ERA are also part of other, geographically broader networks working on LGBTI issues, and the decision to form a network focusing on the Western Balkans and Turkey came from the understanding that there is a common historical, cultural and often political heritage and that this can be used as an advantage to bring forward long-lasting changes to the societies and justice systems in the entire Balkan region.

The decision to formalize the network was brewing for some time, and when DG NEAR was calling for proposals for long-term grants, they saw it as a perfect opportunity. The network is now a model example of well-developed internal policies and practices: from network bylaws, organogram and code of conduct, to workplace policies and procedures, steering board procedures, and internal and external communication policies.

Having experienced, as members, other formal and less formal networks, they were aware of advantages and disadvantages of different structures. In a non-formal network, decision-making was horizontal and very democratic, but the efficiency was sometimes affected by very long processes and lack of clear roles and responsibilities. In a very structured and formal network, on the other hand, they could observe influencing policies at the EU level, but were not always as involved as they would have preferred to be (“that network almost lost touch with its members”). LGBTI ERA used these experiences as lessons learned on how to structure their network. For efficiency and timely policy products delivery, there is a secretariat with paid staff. The executive team is working on implementing action and strategic plans that the Assembly approves upon suggestions from the Governing board. Both the executive team and the board are composed respecting gender equality (3 board members identify themselves as women, three as men, and 1 as neither).

Great attention has been given to maintaining members’ involvement: there are weekly reports for members, daily consultations, use of Google platform and there is a closed part of the web site dedicated to members’ communication. Each Friday is so called “open Skype line” where one of the executive team members is on a stand-by to respond to questions from members.

3.5. MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Regional CSO networks vary greatly in size of their memberships. Among the networks included in this assessment, there are large ones with as many as 150 members (IRIS-SEE) and as small as having 3 members (Bioplant based in Albania, including members from Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo).

Most networks have one type of membership, full members, with about third of them also allowing for associated members.

Among 38 networks that responded only three charge membership fee: 100, 200 and 250 Euros annually.

Application procedures for membership vary according to the type of network. The most important criteria that almost all networks listed are that CSO has to have a mission in line with the network’s mission. There are networks that do not accept applications, but instead existing members or the steering committee decide if and when new members will be accepted, or existing members need to endorse a potential new member.

In cases where networks are open to receiving applications from potential members, those are assessed either by the assembly (simple majority of votes) or by the networks governing board.

SIGN network, established in 2009 as a regional network of indigenous grant makers for development of sustainable local communities and civil society, has the most detailed list of criteria that a potential members need to fulfil:

- 1) Its core business is providing financial and other support to civic initiatives
- 2) Focuses its action on community development
- 3) Actively works on philanthropy development
- 4) Shares and disseminates knowledge, information, methodologies and principles in community development and philanthropy
- 5) Has clearly defined organizational structure (governance and management)
- 6) Has positive annual institutional audit in three out of four years
- 7) Is highly transparent in reporting, grant giving, employing, and procurement
- 8) Avoid conflict of interest
- 9) Has developed functional systems, policies and procedures in the above mentioned areas
- 10) Does not have political affiliation.

SIGN network is also the only one that reports on “removing an organization from their membership for no longer sharing the same values and no longer operating in an accountable and transparent manner which is one of the pillars of SIGN network’s work”.

3.6. MEMBER PARTICIPATION AND OWNERSHIP

The legitimacy and credibility of networks goes back to their members’ participation and ownership. Networks that develop decision-making structures that remove themselves from their members eventually end up losing those members. Networks memberships are voluntary in nature, and members need to see that their interests and their motivation to network are being met, which is more likely to happen if they are involved in decision-making and feel ownership.

Participating CSOs who are members of regional networks were asked to rate their familiarity with the network’s decision-making structures. The scale used was from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not familiar at all) and 5 being “completely familiar”. Large majority, 72.6% of responding CSOs, have stated that they are completely familiar with the decision-making structure of the network where they are members. There is a certain risk that these results are showing overly positive bias. The participation in this survey was voluntary, with invitations sent through different mailing lists, and it is a probable that active members of networks are more likely to respond. However, even if that is the case, it does show that re-

gional CSO networks have critical mass of active members, who are familiar with decision-making structures and involved in decision-making.

Chart 5: Members' familiarity with a governance and decision-making structure of the network

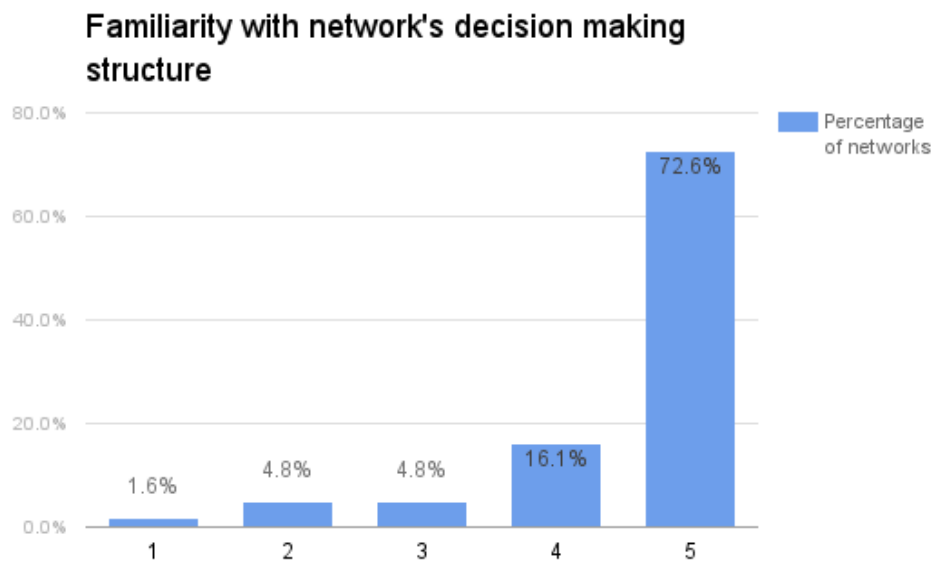
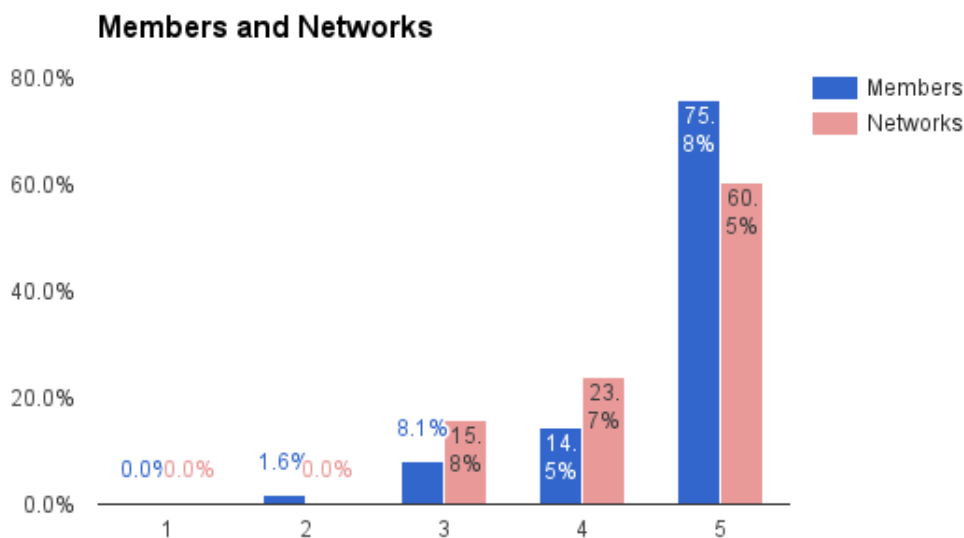


Chart 6 is confirming that conclusion, showing side by side satisfaction with members' involvement as rated by members themselves and by network representatives. Majority of responses from both groups shows again the highest rate of satisfaction with members' involvement, with network representatives slightly more critical (60.5% as compared to 75.8% of CSOs giving the highest rating).

Interviews with selected networks confirmed this result, with some of the more formal and structured networks with functioning secretariats reporting that members in those cases tend to expect majority of work and decisions to be made by secretariats or other coordinating bodies.

Chart 6: Satisfaction with members' involvement in the decision-making process of the network

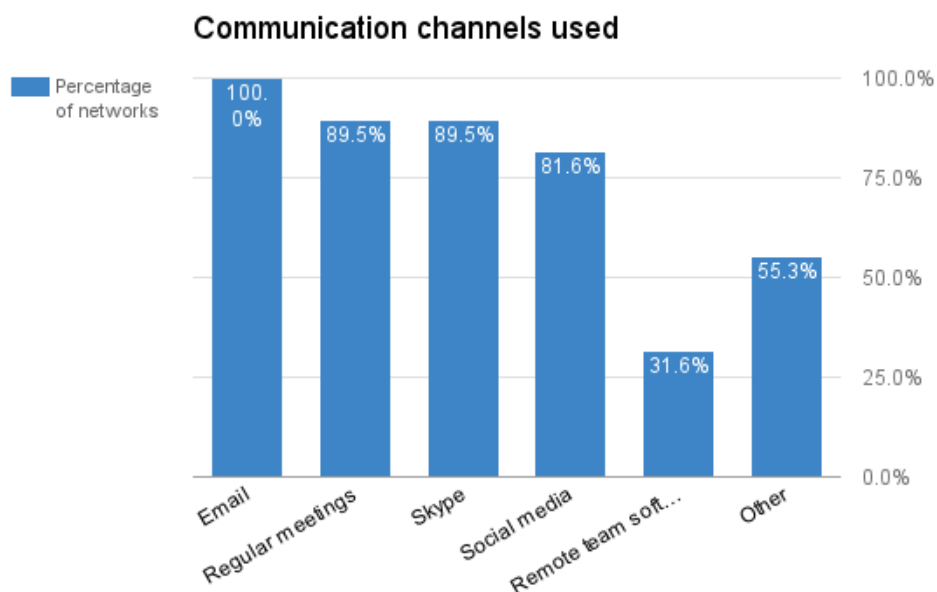


The main communication tool with members, used by all networks, remains email exchange, followed by face-to-face meetings and Skype conversations. While email and Skype communication have their downsides, only 31% of networks are exploring using other software tools, specially developed for remote team work. Skype remains the preferred choice for online calls and meetings, regardless of often reported connection issues, because it does not require additional training on how to use it or new installations.

Although all interviewed network representatives said that nothing can replace meetings, they absorb resources, both financial and time wise. Networks that have project funding sources aim to include members meetings in all project activities, and many networks report that TACSO assistance was indispensable in this regard.

Project funding, depending on its structure, has also some drawbacks when it comes to members' engagement and participation. Projects that are activity oriented, such as FPA, often absorb capacity of networks' secretariats, or other coordinating bodies, and those bodies become project management units, which takes away from their task to communicate and engage members, outside of project related topics. On the other side, networks that are benefiting from operating grants, while appreciating how it allows them to develop their structures and strengthen internal communication, regret not having enough funds for joint/network activities.

Chart 7: Communication channels networks use to engage members



3.7. ADDED SOCIAL VALUE

MEMBERS' BENEFITS

Participating CSOs report high satisfaction with the benefits received from being part of the network: 93% are satisfied or very satisfied with the exchange of information, 78% with increased organizational and technical capacity of their CSO, and 84% with joint advocacy or social delivery activities. Joining the network also helped them with increased outreach to their communities, enrichment of organizational perspectives and diversification of resources. Members also reported that through networks they increased their own reporting and financial management skills in terms of PRAG regulations, and they were able to expand regional cooperation at governmental and non-governmental levels. For some smaller organizations, regional network activities were their first international exposure and it helped them increase their visibility and credibility at local level.

Improving social services – IRIS Network is an example of a network that is focused on increasing capacity of its members and helping them gain recognition and influence policy at local level. Some of their successes of influencing local level policies are described below.

Educational network Leskovac (EDC) and IRIS Serbia network of social service providers launched a campaign for inspection of regularity and transparency of the budget spending in the Serbian Ministry of Labour, Employment, Social and Veterans' Affairs. The funds in question were intended for strengthening the provision of social services in Serbia. After the action of IRIS Serbia, the Call in question has been cancelled by the Ministry. The campaign and monitoring on what will happen with the funds that were originally planned to be used for the Call is ongoing.

IRIS Macedonia network members met with the President of the Committee on Labour and Social Policy presenting the need for amending the Law on Social Protection, with particular

emphasis on social services. In BiH, IRIS network conducted an advocacy campaign on development of strategic documents/local action plans for the development of social services; Bijeljina and Kalesija municipalities developed those documents. Members of IRIS Network Albania were involved actively in National Reform of Social Protection and Inclusion through related working groups and in Reform's Steering Committee. Network played pivotal role in the implementation of the National Initiative in Support of Children in Street Situation through involvement in the Mobile Units during the outreach interventions and Case management and provision of direct services. Members of the network are cooperating tightly with the Municipality of Tirana through needs assessment for social groups in need in the territory of the Municipality of Tirana, capacity building for the staff of Department of Social Services of the Municipality, and 2016-2020 strategy of social services of the Municipality of Tirana,.

INFLUENCING POLICIES

Church et al. (2002: 2–3) identify five key ways in which 'linking and coordinating' bring added value to CSO advocacy work: (i) The improved quality and sophistication of joint analysis that underpins the advocacy; (ii) The extended reach to key actors in key contexts through which that improved analysis can be channeled; (iii) The capacity to act simultaneously, with shared ideas, in many places at once; (iv) The space for competing views to be discussed and consensus positions achieved; (v) The opportunity for those with few other avenues to powerful decision makers to gain access through the networked relationships.

For regional CSO networks in the WBT, all five of these key ways are even more emphasized as the countries in the region have numerous commonalities when it comes to historical, political and legal context, with partial exemption of Turkey. For five former Yugoslav countries, commonly understood language also plays a role that makes networking easier and more effective.

Surveyed and interviewed networks and network members coming from EU neighbourhood and enlargement countries have emphasized the importance and benefit of having members from the EU countries in their networks. This allows for learning transfer and facilitates policy influencing that could be lost if future calls for proposals would exclude network partners from EU countries.

Following are some of the examples of policy influencing by regional CSO networks that participated in the survey.

- The ENV.net network has been able to develop a monitoring matrix web platform, which aims at giving an overview on the approximation process to the EU environmental acquis in the countries covered by the network. More specifically, it allows to compare specific directives of the EU environmental policy with the national legisla-

tions and to identify possible gaps in the adoption and implementation processes. This matrix presents the findings and recommendations raised from the monitoring exercise conducted by ENV.net members. Furthermore, the ENV.net partners were able to organise simultaneous events with common messages and activities to raise awareness among civil society organizations in their countries on important topics (water management, climate change, etc.) so that it would be possible to improve the dialogue and to influence national governments, the EU Institutions and other possible relevant stakeholders in adopting specific policies to facilitate the process of the approximation to the Environment *acquis*

- BCSDN has been striving to set the agenda of civil society development at the EU level and influence the EU's strategic policy and funding support to civil society in Enlargement countries. According to BCSDN, the Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development served as a basis and inspiration to the EC to create their own EU Guidelines for Support to Civil society in Enlargement Countries.
- The PERSON project has managed to successfully bring to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg several Amicus Briefs on behalf of different partners such as from Serbia and BiH, which have impacted positively the court in the decision making process. Another success story was the one from Croatia where the Croatian partner, SHINE, together with the other partners has managed to bring legal changes in the Constitution and the Family Code.
- Regional Advocacy Initiative for volunteering policy in the SEE region is one of the main achievements of the SEE Youth Network (SEYYN). SEYYN member organizations become leaders in their countries for development of the Volunteering Infrastructure and established national and local volunteer services. At regional level, SEYYN Secretariat has role to coordinate those activities ensure funding, expertise from abroad and advocate on EU level for volunteering through networking with stakeholders important for volunteering policy. As a result of this initiative, several countries in the region have volunteering policies, national volunteer services, local volunteer centres and they increase capacities of organization from their country how to run an volunteer centre and how to involve volunteers - volunteer management. They also establish national award for volunteering in their countries as one of recognition tools.

3.8. REGIONAL CSO NETWORKS SUSTAINABILITY

While financial resources are a key element of networks' sustainability, whether or not a network will be sustainable will also depend on whether the network continues to serve its purpose and provide benefits to its members and other stakeholders. In their paper on Networks' sustainability (2006), A. Ortiz and G. Rivero state that "long term network sustainability is built around a balanced mix of a clear value proposition in response to stake-

holder needs, solid network fundamentals and a clear financial strategy that efficiently aligns resources with network operational and strategic aims. While financial sustainability of a network doesn't necessarily imply high value for the stakeholders of networks, funding strategies to provide for basic network operations are key."

From participating networks, approximately half do not have their own budget. Available resources are contributed and managed by members. The next groups are networks with small annual budgets, from 1000 to 5000 Euros, and finally networks that receive support from EC under Civil Society and Media Facility are those with largest annual budget sizes, up to 300.000 Euros. Apart from EC and EU, mentioned sources of funding are members' contribution, National Endowment for Democracy, Visegrad Fund and German Foreign Ministry and Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ), the Open Society, the Oak Foundation, Friedrich Neumann Stiftung (for some national members). There are also several thematic specific funders such as Regional Cooperation Council (anti-corruption issues), Cultural Heritage without Borders and ChildPact.

While having a formal, registered network is often seen as a step towards sustainability, it can be a double sword: formal, structured networks require more resources. Less formal networks usually have lean structures and members contribute resources. The network of Autonomous Women Houses has been active since 1993, they are still an informal network. The network uses EC funding for joint activities, but after such a long time, it is very probable that the network will continue to exist and cooperate even without the funding, albeit without additional funding the cooperation would probably scale back to simple information exchange and some limited joint campaigns.

Also, as Liebler and Ferri (2004) found when interviewing development practitioners, "networks that are formed as the result of external, especially donor-driven, impetuses are less sustainable in the long term than networks that evolve organically out of existing partnerships". Majority of respondents from this assessment agree that providing support to already existing networks would yield better and more sustainable results.

Formal networks with paid staff would not be able to continue operating on such a scale and in such a manner without external funding, and currently, the only donor willing to provide substantial grants to regional networks is EC DG NEAR.

A mid-term evaluation for FPA grants has identified several networks that have developed products that will extend beyond the life of EU support. According to the evaluation, those examples are: BCSDN's monitoring matrix for civil society development, ESSEDRA's Ark of

Taste Gazetteer and the Slow Food Planet App; EEB's environment acquis monitoring tool, and SESEEP's (SEE Change Net) energy model. However, these tools and apps still require financial resources to be implemented and the question remains, in case EU support would stop, who would continue funding it and who would continue using the tools.

Lack of funding diversification is the biggest threat to sustainability of regional networks, as well as worrying trend of worsening operating environment in the region, with Turkey and Macedonia being the most drastic examples.

Exactly half (50%) of participating networks have developed some sort of a sustainability plan. ESSEDRA is working on becoming the most credible network advocating for small-scale artisan food producers in Southeast Europe and are looking to gather EC funding through INTERREG and Life+, private foundations support (Open Society), as well as from Visegrad Fund. SIGN network is considering introducing membership fees; having SIGN network members start income generating activities and working on developing local philanthropy. However, SIGN also recognizes that their broader work on civil society development and strengthening of philanthropy as part of the overall process of creating a more enabling environment, would not be possible without policy and financial support from EU.

Sustainability takes time, even if we talk about individual CSOs, and with regional networks the access to funding is even more restricted. By their nature, regional CSO networks are few steps removed from direct beneficiaries, which makes it harder to access individual or corporate philanthropy sources. Because of their regional character, they are not eligible for majority of funding available at national levels. Liebler and Feri (2004) confirmed through interviews with civil society and networks researchers and practitioners that most networks require a minimum of five years of continuous financial support during their initial phase. In case of regional CSO networks in WBT, that start-up period, needed to reach stability, might be longer, for all the above-mentioned reasons.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. CONCLUSIONS

The assessment found that since 2012, largely due to EU and TACSO support, the number and variety of regional CSO networks in the WBT has flourished. These networks range from having as few as 3 members, from 2 countries, to networks spanning over 12 countries with 140 members. Their decision-making structures vary from very informal to formal and hierarchical ones. Efficacy and the strength of the network are not determined by the formality of its structures, but with how those structures are fitting with the complexity of networks purpose and interdependency of its members. Some of the oldest regional networks are in fact still informal, which does not take from their effectiveness.

Responding networks' representatives and CSO members list exchange of information, coordination of activities and creation of new social value as the main reasons to network. Members are, in general, very involved in networks' decision-making and familiar with organizational and governance structures. Some networks and their members report that efficiency and project management sometimes absorb resources from coordinating bodies, which can cause lower members' involvement and ownership.

Regional networks have contributed to greater visibility of their members, and have assisted them in increasing their organizational capacities, and their leverage on local level. Most significant added value from networks is visible in different policy areas: from civil society development, rights of LGBTI community, gender equality, environmental protection, provision of social services to vulnerable population, energy efficiency and freedom of media.

The biggest challenge remains financial sustainability of regional networks as currently the only substantial support is coming from EU, either through TACSO and their technical assistance or through DG NEAR grants program.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Those providing support to networks should recognize that there is no linear development model for networks: networks that have aligned their purpose and members' in-

terdependency are more effective. There are certain advantages of formally registered networks, such as streamlined decision-making processes, usually stronger internal controls and financial management procedures, which in turn allows for better access to funding. However, both networks and those that support networks should be aware that formal and registered networks are not always more effective, nor more likely to be sustainable, in fact they require more resources and can lead to lesser involvement from members.

- TACSO should continue its current practice of supporting regional networks meetings and exchanges and provide additional capacity building support that would allow networks to better meet the expectations of their members. Encourage learning and sharing between networks; perhaps start a community of practice for networks.
- Regional networks need to continue exploring new funding sources, including membership fees. While those funds will never be able to match large project grants, they can still provide a certain safety net or contingency fund.
- While large number of regional networks would continue to exist even if funding stops, the current level of CSO involvement in influencing regional policies cannot uphold without continuous funding and political support from EU.
- Sustainability takes time. Most researchers and thought leaders agree that donor support is most crucial in the start-up phase, lasting approximately five years. Many argue that meaningful and impactful support should be even longer than that.
- Networks require long-term support and flexibility, allowing members to develop their working relationships. Eventual discontinuation of funding should be done gradually.
- A flexible approach could be designing a grant program that would allow networks to combine operating and project activity costs, thus allowing them to strengthen network's internal relationships and structures, as well as working on achieving desired social changes.
- Involvement of members from EU member countries can be very beneficial and should be allowed and encouraged under new calls for proposals, however, it shouldn't be mandatory.

- Supporting already existing networks yields better chances for effectiveness and sustainability. There is an added value in using funds to encourage formation of new networks, however in such cases, there should be a starting period allowing members to develop their internal communication and partnership principles. Good practice would be to regularly monitor those grants and conduct mid-term reviews. Further funding should be made contingent on the findings whether the network/partnership has potential to continue beyond the life of the project.
- So far, TACSO and DG NEAR have been most significant supporters of regional CSO networks in WBT. Involving other donors and international organizations, organizing conferences and sharing learning about networks, success stories and benefits from regional networks could encourage others to engage and invest support.

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6. APPENDICES

- 6.1. LIST OF REGIONAL CSO NETWORKS
- 6.2. NETWORKS REPRESENTATIVES QUESTIONNAIRE
- 6.3. NETWORK MEMBERS QUESTIONNAIRE
- 6.4. LIST OF INTERVIEWED NETWORKS

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