



EU TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY



EUCSG 2020 Assessment Report

(Assessment of the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society against the Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement region, 2014-2020 for the year 2020)

**Consultation and validation meeting
Serbia**

On-line event, 3 September, 2021



Objectives & Purpose

Technical Assistance to civil society organization (TACSO) is an EU-funded regional project in its **third phase**. The project is part of the Civil Society Facility (CSF).

Main goal is to strengthen the capacity of CSOs to actively take part in the democratic processes and to stimulate an enabling environment for civil society and pluralistic media development.

The project targets Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey.

**and This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*



Main areas

-  **01** CSOs organisational and operational **capacity development (trainings, mentoring, coaching etc.)**
-  **02** **Enabling environment** for civil society development
-  **03** **Communication** and **visibility** of civil society
-  **04** Development and monitoring of the **Civil Society** and **Media Guidelines**
-  **05** Effective **relations between EU and CSOs**
-  **06** Events management (including the **People-to-People programme**)

Purpose of the Assessment

1

**ASSESS THE STATE OF
ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
AND CAPACITIES OF CSOs
AGAINST THE EU CS
GUIDELINES (2014-2020)**

2

**TRACE EFFECT OF COVID-19
AND END OF GUIDELINES
ON CIVIL SOCIETY**

3

**INFORM PREPARATION OF
EC COUNTRY REPORTS
AND CIVIL SOCIETY
SUPPORT**



EUCSG 2014-2020 Result Framework

OVERALL OBJECTIVE:

To strengthen participatory democracies and the EU approximation process in the Western Balkans and Turkey

AREA 1: CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Fundamental rights and freedoms
Enabling financial Environment

AREA 2: CHANGING RELATIONS BETWEEN CSOs AND GOVERNMENT (PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS)

Civil society and public institutions work in partnership through dialogue and cooperation

AREA 3: CSO CAPACITIES

Capable, transparent accountable, effective and financially-sustainable CSOs



Approach & Methodology





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Regional Overview

KEY FINDINGS





COVID-19 EFFECT ON CIVIL SOCIETY

- ✓ Freedom of assembly and expression were notably **restricted** due to the COVID-19 related measures;
- ✓ **Decrease in funding** due to stopped or delayed public funding processes;
- ✓ **Inability to organize fundraising** or other activities due to restrictions, etc.;
- ✓ CSOs were generally not included in the **state support packages for the fight against COVID-19**, with some exceptions;
- ✓ CSOs had to **adjust their services** to vulnerable groups and increase **advocacy efforts**.





CSO CAPACITIES

01

CAPABLE TRANSPARENT ACCOUNTABLE CSOs

- **Transparency and accountability:** low capacities;
- **Internal governance:** mostly in line with the legislation, however not fully functional;
- **Launch of self-regulation ("code") initiatives:** Albania, North Macedonia;
- **Communications:** low capacities, but increased visibility due to COVID-19;
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** project-level, not systemic.

NO SIGNIFICANT
CHANGE, BUT
GROWING AWARENESS

on the needed
improvements in:

- Internal governance;
- Communications;
 - Advocacy;
 - Constituency-building etc.

02

EFFECTIVE CSOs

- **Strategic approach:** donor-driven, not thorough;
- **Advocacy:** lack of skills for evidence-based;
- **Networking:** project-initiated; vulnerable sustainability;
- **Increased digital skills due to on-line work and outreach.**

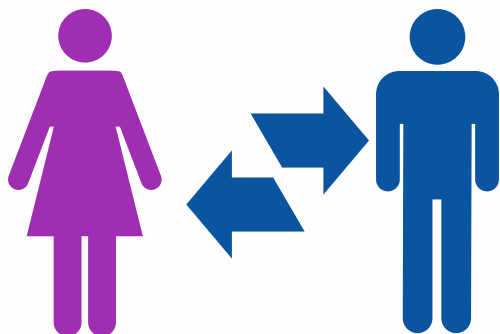
CSO CAPACITIES



03

FINANCIALLY- SUSTAINABLE CSOs

- Lack of long-term **funding strategies**;
- Majority of funding from international donors and state funds; private sources make small portion. **Decrease due to COVID-19.**



04

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

- **Gender equality**: higher awareness than in other sectors; policies rarely in place; strong presence of CSOs dealing with gender issues.

EUCSG 2014-2020 Effects

- Used as a basis for **programming of EU civil society support**;
- Used as a basis for **EC's Annual Report assessments**;
- **Raised awareness of all actors** (EUDs, IPA Beneficiaries and target groups) on the importance of **capacity building and the concrete elements it entails** for this to be improved;
- More **focused monitoring** with concrete baselines and clearly defined target groups needed to assess and measure concrete changes driven by it.



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Serbia





Instrument	Primary Purpose	Implementation - Serbia
Desk analysis	Collecting quantitative and qualitative data from available secondary sources with focus on the existing regulatory framework on enabling environment	More than 20 documents comprising laws and by-laws, analysis of international and domestic CSOs reports, and researches etc.
Survey	Collecting primary information from CSOs through a direct survey on the practices and implementation	More than 90 responses from CSOs
Interviews	Gathering information on the perspective and insight of relevant stakeholders on the state of enabling environment and capacities of civil society, as well as collect information on useful secondary data	10 sessions with representatives of CSOs (4), Government representatives (2) and donor community (4)
Focus Groups	Providing an in-depth insight into specific issues stemming from the other data-gathering methods and priority areas already identified (e.g. networks, gender, etc.)	3 sessions with a total of 14 participants (Local CSOs, Networks, Youth organizations, Social services providers)



Conducive (Legal and Policy) Environment (1)

Freedom of Association

- The legal framework has not changed and is in the line with international standards
- Serious pressure by the public institutions' abuse of the AML/CFT framework
- 26 cases of violations recorded



Freedom of Assembly

- The legal framework has not changed since 2016
- Restrictions due to anti-COVID-19 measures
- Protests were marked by numerous cases of unnecessary and excessive use of force by police

Freedom of Expression

- The Government adopted a conclusion authorizing only the Crisis Staff to inform the public about the state of the pandemic
- 123 cases of violations identified Pressures on journalists, constant devaluing of their work and smear campaigns in pro-regime media
 - a journalist arrested with charges of spreading panic and fake news



Conducive (Legal and Policy) Environment (2)

Volunteerism and Employment

- There is no change in the legislative framework regulating employment and volunteering in CSOs
- No discriminatory articles against CSOs in labour legislation, including active employment policy
- Legislative framework is still not stimulating enough in promoting volunteering



Grass-roots organization

- Trend of forming new grassroots as a reaction to the lack of an institutional mechanism for citizens' participation, and the lack of adequate state crisis response toward the most vulnerable groups
- Activists continue to be targets of smear campaigns and harassment by representatives of both central and local authorities



Conducive (Financial) Environment for CSOs



Quality of Financial Rules

- Financial rules mostly recognize the specific legal nature of CSOs
- System of incentives should be improved, particularly in the area of social entrepreneurship
- New Rulebook on the Content and Structure of Financial Report Forms



Financial Benefits

- Tax benefits for economic activities of CSOs are only partially provided
- Improvements needed in the legal framework: tax deductions for individual donations missing, for corporate donations remains partially enabling



Individual and Corporate Giving

- Despite joint advocacy efforts aimed at improvements, no changes were made to the legislative framework for individual and corporate giving
- The amount donated to CSOs tripled compared to 2019 (more than 21.6 mil EUR)



Government Support

- The framework for public funding of CSOs has not changed
- Growing support to CSOs (almost 29%) but cases of non-transparent distribution of state funds recorded
- Due to COVID-19, numerous public calls for (co-)financing by local self-governments were cancelled, and a significant amount of the planned funds was not distributed

Relationship between CSOs and Government (Public Institutions)

Inclusion of CSOs in Decision-Making Process

- New Guidelines for CSOs' Involvement in Working Groups for Drafting Public Policy Documents and Draft Regulations were adopted as a non-binding act
- COVID-19 measures significantly limited CSOs and interested citizens in influencing policy-making processes
- Only 15 calls for public debate on the adoption of new laws, strategies and action plans were published
 - evidenced cases of limited public insights into local urban planning documents



Structures and Mechanisms for Dialogue and Cooperation

- After 10 years of functioning, the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society was disbanded and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue was established
- Within its scope there are no competencies related to the collection and publication of information on the public financing of CSOs



Basic Data on CSOs in Serbia (2020)

Country	Number of CSOs	Number of active CSOs	Number of employees	Total income (in EUR)	Number of networks (estimation)
Serbia	37,613	26,864 ¹	9,386 in total (7,602 full-time employees, 1,002 on temporary contract, 951 on other contract type)	N/A ²	N/A

¹ SBRA's data analysed from legal entities' financials reports for 2020 submitted for statistical needs

² Data could be added in case that SBRA's full Report on Business of non-profit institutions in 2020 is published till September

Capable, Transparent and Accountable CSOs

Internal Governance Structures

- Progress is linear, but CSOs are still not fully functional and transparent
- Lack of transparent management selection procedures, clear division of responsibilities within organizations, and clear criteria and standards in organizational management
- COVID-19 new challenges - lack of adaptive management and shared leadership
- Burning issues: Transparency of data, low level of trust in CSOs among citizens, lack of joint self-regulatory initiatives among civil society



Communication of Results and Programme Activities

- Inadequate communication with target groups because of media disinterest, lack of a strategic approach to constituency building and communication
- Discrepancy between CSOs perception and citizens attitudes about CSOs
- Slightly better position of informal citizens' and grassroots initiatives shown by an increasing number of citizens involved in their actions

03 Monitoring and Evaluation

- CSOs assess their M&E capacities as high, but there is no evidence to show that CSOs use M&E in a systematic manner
- Internal monitoring procedures are mainly implemented by more developed CSOs, on a project basis, and mostly initiated by donors



Effective CSOs

Strategic Approach towards Operation

- 80% of surveyed CSOs have a clearly defined VMGs, while 50% of them also have a strategic plan (SP)
- Lack of SPs implementations according to the needs and capacities of CSOs and targets groups
- Challenges caused by shrinking civic space + COVID 19 push CSOs to develop short term and more resiliency oriented plans/strategies



Evidence-Based Advocacy

- No significant positive examples of initiatives recorded
- Most impactful initiatives were those conducted by informal movements and grassroots outside of institutional channels rather than through evidence-based advocacy
 - Grassroots initiatives by residents of the streets of Požeška and Valjevska on Banovo brdo in Belgrade

03

Networking for Advocacy

- Networking is one of the greatest strengths of civil society
- The narrowing civic space and the given political context opened new space for establishing cooperation on different grounds



Financially Sustainable CSOs



01

Strategic Fundraising

- COVID-19 crisis brought new challenges related to the financial capacities of CSOs
- Existing budgets allocated to the crisis response, public funds limited and calls postponed or with changed priorities
- The majority of pro-liberal/pro-EU organizations remain mostly focused on foreign donor support

02

Diversified Funding Base

- More than 37% CSOs used some state support for their activities, around 42% of CSOs collect membership fees
- Citizens were important donors – they accounted for almost 50% of all donations
- Number of CSOs registered for economic activity is almost at the same level as previous years
- Numerous crowdfunding campaigns initiated by CSOs mostly for addressing the needs of the vulnerable groups caused by the COVID-19 crisis
- The share of GONGOs/PONGOs in the distribution of public funds is still high



Key Capacity Building Needs of CSOs

Key Areas for Capacity Building Support

- Fundraising
- Management and organization management
- Project writing

Key Methods of Needed Support

- Mentorship
- Exchange of experiences
- Training course
- Workshop
- Info session



To sum up... (1)

- CSOs faced **new challenges** caused by further limitation of human rights and freedoms, narrowing of civic space, “captured state”, as well as the COVID -19 pandemic.
- Abusing the **AML/CFT framework** as the hardest state pressure on civil society, with significant non-material and reputational damage to civil society.
- **Freedom of assembly** was restricted and endangered by unnecessary and excessive use of force by the police.
- CSOs’ and independent media’ work has been constantly devalued: violations of **freedom of expression**, smear campaigns in pro-regime media, pressures on activist and journalist, harassment, arrests, etc.
- After 10 years of implementation of the **Law on Volunteering** and several attempt to make substantial changes in the legal framework, Serbia is still missing a more enabling approach and policy on volunteering.
- Increased number of new **grassroots initiatives and movements** (in environment protection area and urban planning) indicates to the lack of institutional dialogue and disrespect of citizens’ rights and needs.



To sum up... (2)

- The **financial environment** still needs significant improvements regarding individual and corporate giving (the Government is not open to introducing tax benefits even for COVID-19 purposes)
- A positive step made toward more detail and structured CSOs' **financial reporting**
- Increase of **public funds** for CSOs was recorded, with cases of non-transparent process of distribution involving GONGOs
- The Government misused COVID-19 measures to limit and disable CSOs and other interested citizens' possibilities to influence **policy-making processes**
- Changes made in the institutional framework for **CSO–Government cooperation**: new Ministry's establishment opens new possibilities, but on the other side, future inter-sectoral dialogue might be stocked and the Ministry may become a “bottle neck”



To sum up... (3)

- The **state of CSOs capacity** still indicates strong discrepancies among CSOs based on different criteria, while the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to further CSOs' polarization.
- Discrepancy among CSOs perception and citizens attitudes about CSOs is noticeable, grassroots are in slightly better position.
- Communication with citizens/target groups moved to social media but remains not interesting for media.
- Networking identified as key strength for more influential advocacy.
- COVID-19 brought new challenges related to the state of financial capacities of CSOs – foreign donors' multiyear programs as way to support more capable CSOs, and crowdfunding campaigns for small, local CSOs.
- Weaknesses of CSOs' internal functioning become more visible during the crisis.

Recommendations/Food for thought

- Protect basic rights and freedoms and provide flexible support to related advocacy efforts.
- Increase incentives for corporative giving and introduce incentives for individual giving.
- Develop clear qualitative criteria for participating in calls for public funds distribution-based expertise/experience/results achieved and public interest contribution.
- Establish a system for effective regular collecting and analyzing data on all types of state finding.
- Encourage a different approach to networking, not only among registered CSOs, but also connect informal movements and initiatives on the rise with registered CSOs and networks.
- Improve CSO's internal governing structures and self-regulatory practices and mechanisms.
- Improve strategic approach toward constituency building.
- Use monitoring, evaluation and learning in CSOs work in a more systematic manner.
- Strengthen CSOs capacities for resilience to various external factors that affect the operating environment, by using tailor made and individual approach.
- Further strengthen capacities for more flexible and participatory models of internal management and leadership.



Next Steps

1. **Update** the Report based on received feedback from consultations;
2. The Report is **approved** by the DG NEAR;
3. The Report is **published** and its findings and recommendations are **promoted**.