



Mid-term
Evaluation of the
**Civil Society Facility for the
Western Balkans and Turkey**

1 DECEMBER 2017

Prepared by:



EVALUATION
REPORT

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Mid-term Evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey

1 December 2017

European Commission, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR)
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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CSF	Civil Society Facility (the programme being evaluated)
CA	Contracting Authority
CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation
CoTE	Centre of Thematic Expertise
CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
CCSD	Councils for Civil Society Development
CMTF	Centrally Managed Thematic Projects
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG	Directorate-General
DG NEAR	European Commission, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR), Unit D5 (the Contracting Authority)
EC	European Commission
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EQ	Evaluation Questions
EUD	European Union Delegation
EU	European Union
EU RF	EU Results Framework

FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISG	Inter-Service Steering Group
JMC	Joint Monitoring Committee
JTS	Joint Technical Secretariat
LAG	Local Advisory Group
MCSP	Multi-Country Indicative Strategy Paper
NEAR	European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
NIPAC	National IPA Coordinator
PAR	Public Administration Reform
ROM	Results-oriented Monitoring
REGIO	Regional and Urban Policy
SAP	Stability and Association Process
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TACSO	Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations
ToR	Terms of Reference



TRAG activities

BACKGROUND

The Civil Society Facility (CSF) was established in 2008 under the Instrument for Pre-accession, with the purpose of supporting the development of an active civil society capable of participating in public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law. The CSF aims to assist civil society in developing its capacity to influence policy-making and decision-making processes — strengthening civil society within a participative democracy. The CSF's strategy is to support local capacity building, intended to reach grassroots organisations; to support capacity-building and knowledge growth for governments, EU institutions and counterparts, including through visit programmes such as 'People to People'; to support the creation of space for cooperation between civil society and government; and to support partnership actions and networks between CSOs in all beneficiary countries¹ and with EU partners.

To date, the CSF has supported 633 organisations in the region and 136 EU-based organisations, through 362 projects financed by the CSF between 2011 and 2016. These projects were undertaken in a number of sectors and in a range of diverse initiatives: good governance and local democracy; technical assistance and capacity building; public administration reform and public financial management; rule of law and the fight against corruption; reconciliation and cultural dialogue; environment; climate action; energy and agriculture; social inclusion; anti-discrimination; gender and the fight against poverty; youth and media.²

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The global objective of the evaluation was to assess the performance of the financial support provided by the CSF in EU pre-accession assistance — supporting civil society in candidate and potential candidate countries — and to provide findings and recommendations that assist DG NEAR in the programming and implementation of this support through improving the available instruments.

The *specific objectives* of the evaluation were to **assess the performance of the assistance** both at regional and national levels (particularly its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, EU added value, coherence, impact and sustainability), and to **assess the intervention logic of the assistance** in light of the needs of CSOs in the region and the priorities set by DG NEAR in its policy and strategy documents.

The evaluation focused on CSF-funded projects carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

1. Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

2. See *Annex/Appendix 1 — Evaluation Terms of Reference*.

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

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Section 2 of the Evaluation Report examines the overall performance of the EU CSF. The assessment is based on responses to a number of evaluation questions. These findings are summarised below.

RELEVANCE

Responses to the evaluation questions indicate that the CSF has been a **relevant instrument to respond to the engagement of civil society** in response to the enlargement requirements of IPA countries. The CSF is also a relevant mechanism to support strategic guidance towards establishing a structured dialogue between CSOs, governments, operating structures and the EU (DG NEAR and EU Delegations). The CSF provides a suitable response to the needs of civil society, particularly towards CSO capacity building, dialogue with authorities and empowerment. However, while CSO objectives are generally clear and realistic, it is difficult to assess the actual achievements of the CSF overall, and in respective countries, due to the lack of a systematic intervention logic and indicators.

At the level of projects, the CSF has systems and processes (such as consultations, negotiations, conferences and discussions) that link the objectives of the EU's support to civil society and civil society itself, so that the determining of directions and priorities is **evidence-based and participatory**. The CSF's measures to grow timeframes of support, with three to four year frameworks, ensure the continued relevance and responsiveness of organisations to develop their profile and sustainability, while at the same time providing ongoing support to legal reforms and policy initiatives.

EFFICIENCY

There is commitment, at both EUD level and in DG NEAR, to the use of **appropriate and effective instruments** of financial assistance. While action grants remain the preferred mode of grant-giving, there is a clear focus on delivery of funding through a wider range of instruments, to ensure a **greater reach into civil society** with CSF funding. There are a number of **grant schemes operated by CSOs or foundations in the region**, with CSF funding, that offer innovative and effective approaches

to provision of assistance to CSOs of a variety of sizes, in a range of thematic areas and geographies. The *Active Citizenship Mechanism* of Sivil Düşün in Turkey and the TRAG Foundation's *SIGN for Sustainability* are just two of a number of solid contributors to CSF efficiency (and effectiveness). There are examples of **sectoral coordination** with the CSF, within EUDs, that offer greater coordination and focus. Examples can be found in Albania, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (for media, Roma/inter-community projects) and to an extent in Kosovo. Conversely, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the absence of official coordination regarding civil society, the EUD and USAID, as key donors, maintain close cooperation and exchange on issues pertaining to support.

The availability of action grants, framework partnership agreements and operating grants offer *options for funding that can be of benefit* to a variety of organisations. The steady increase in project duration encourages a **more strategic approach from funded organisations**. However, flexibility is not visible in the relevant EC finance departments, although this is more significant at EUDs than for DG NEAR-funded calls for proposals. There are organisational/administrative challenges, as limited staffing constrains possibilities in terms of the numbers (and sizes) of awarded grants. Lengthy CSF processes of call for proposals, assessment, award and contracting can create a disconnect between project design and the real situation on the ground at the time of award. In this context, the absence of an **inception period, and allowance for project re-design**, particularly for larger or longer projects, detracts from CSF efficiency and project/CSF effectiveness.

EFFECTIVENESS

There is evidence of significant contributions by the CSF to the achievement of its objectives. The main results of CSF support are visible in the extent to which CSO capacities, skills, outreach and structures have been improved. Thanks to CSF support, CSOs are **increasingly better at advocating for, and caring for, their constituency**. There is evidence that the accountability, credibility and visibility of the civil society sector has been enhanced, contributing to better relationships with stakeholders across the region — from the public

generally to decision-makers. Evaluation findings point to grassroots organisations benefiting from sub-grants.

The CSF focuses on **partnership and networking**, with other CSOs in-country and regionally and also with government counterparts. Increasingly, coalitions are being built between NGOs, although the effectiveness of coalition-building, and advocacy for policy reforms, requires extended support. There are still challenges in building partnerships with national authorities, although this is more attributable to the authorities themselves than to the projects funded by the CSF. The use of **evidence-based approaches** are particularly noted in preparation of policy briefs and policy documents.

The CSF is providing support in the **challenging and complex area of media and freedom of expression**. This is focused on improving standards of work and the quality of journalism, although it is an area where CSF support is able to cover only a small part of the visible need. Media actors have been inventive in utilising the CSF in addressing both societal issues (e.g. inter-communal and inter-ethnic relations between Serbia and Kosovo) and media-specific issues.

The single biggest challenge to the CSF, in meeting its objectives, is in addressing the **implementation of the enabling environment** for CSOs³ and for the media⁴. While the enabling environment is beyond the control of the CSF, the facility has **significantly supported governments in the target countries** and regionally to establish and maintain functional mechanisms for cooperation and consultation with civil society.

IMPACT

There is evidence that **supported CSOs are better at what they do** — they learn from their own, focused, capacity-building exercises, in the implementation of their projects, in their network approaches and in sharing in regional programmes such as those provided by TACSO. New capacity is visible in **evidence-based advocacy techniques**

and approaches as CSOs know better how to communicate and negotiate with government agencies and representatives. Organisations are also better at internal management processes: they are particularly better at **strategic management**, but also demonstrate growth in human resources and financial management skills. Funded organisations are more visible in their communities, as are the issues they focus on. Regional networking and **regional initiatives demonstrate strong contributions to impacts**.

However, these impacts are uneven and are hampered by a number of factors, primarily the political instability in the region. The priorities of governments are heavily focused on survival and actions related to power rather than governance. There is a **lack of commitment on the part of governments** to an enabling environment. There is level of distrust between government and CSOs, and development of cooperation requires significant enhancement. There is a **developing 'clientelism' in government processes** that impacts on the view the wider society has of CSOs, and detracts from civil society effectiveness. There is also a relative lack of capacity in government agencies, in areas relevant to CSF-funded projects.

SUSTAINABILITY

There are a number of areas in CSF support where the possibility of sustainability of actions and sustainability of results has improved. Potential for sustainability is **most notable on the organisational side**, particularly the noted improvements in the ability of organisations to **think, plan and act strategically**. The innovative approaches to partnership and to grant-giving, visible in the CSF, are contributing to sustainability of funding and are **replicable across the CSF** by EUDs and DG NEAR. Also notable are improvements in management capacity: administrative, human resource and financial. These improvements bode well for organisational sustainability. The increase in organisational and issue visibility is indicative of potential areas of sustainability. The **lengthening of**

3. DG ELARG Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in Enlargement Countries 2014-2020.

4. Guidelines for EU Support to Media freedom and Media Integrity in Enlargement Countries, 2014-2020, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/press_corner/elarg-guidelines-for-media-freedom-and-integrity_210214.pdf

grant timeframes is contributing to sustainability, as organisations are better able to plan and implement. Sustainability of civil society is very much **dependent on external funding** through instruments such as the CSF. Government funding for civil society is limited, and is not distributed on a transparent basis. Alternative sources of funding remain limited, whether from public or private sources, although there are CSF-funded initiatives addressing exactly this issue.

CROSS-CUTTING AREAS

There is a clear and acknowledged focus in the CSF's frameworks on human rights, and particularly on gender equality and gender mainstreaming. However, this focus is not a key component of funded initiatives. *There is more a formal, rather than substantive commitment to human rights and gender mainstreaming in project design and implementation.* Funded organisations would benefit from an improved understanding of (and the ability to act on) the intent of cross-cutting themes, i.e. that in every funded initiative a genuine consideration is given in design and implementation to ensuring all human rights are considered and respected, and that there is a visible focus on gender equality.

COHERENCE

There is a **lack of consistency between EUDs and between EUDs and DG NEAR** in the frameworks of calls for proposals, in terms of ensuring a coherent direction for CSF support. EUDs do not know enough about multi-beneficiary/regional projects, generally and in their own countries. Coherence and coordination with other donors takes place in all geographies of the CSF, to a greater or lesser level of effectiveness.

VISIBILITY

The obligations of funded organisations in relation to fulfilment of the visibility strategy are completely clear and understood, and are implemented to a very high level. However, **meeting the requirements of the visibility strategy does not necessarily give the desired results.** The fulfilment of visibility requirements does not necessarily mean that EU funding support, nor the importance of EU support to national strategies, is being seen or understood by the wider community. There is evidence to suggest that **the assistance of the EU to national reform processes is not well understood** and that there remains a lack of relevant information in the community.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions to the evaluation are made in the report:

- Overall, the CSF has been **relevant, in strengthening the role of CSOs** in relation to existing and emerging priorities in reform processes; in terms of accession requirements in each country; and in increasing the level of public support for the enlargement process.
- Prospects for the effective delivery of CSF results are good in general. Particularly strong contributions were noted in relation to **building the capacities of civil society and their coalition-building**, as well as mobilising citizens on issues within the thematic areas of focus of the CSF. Support has been less effective for the creation and sustaining of an enabling environment for civil society.
- The efficiency in terms of resource allocation and instruments is good. However, monitoring, internal coherence processes and coordination — both between EUDs and between EUDs and DG NEAR — are areas for improvement.
- There are positive indications related to impact and sustainability, most notable in improvements in the ability of organisations to **think, plan and act strategically**, and in the use of **evidence-based advocacy techniques and approaches**. Sustainability and impact are both negatively affected by external factors, most notably political instability in the region.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation 1** **Shared learning** across the administrative components of management of the CSF to ensure coherence of CSF approaches, adding to CSF efficiency and effectiveness. Shared learning should be enhanced through a) a greater focus on shared learning events, b) sharing of the effective approaches being undertaken with funding instruments; and c) linking the oversight of CSF projects in a given field directly to EUD staff with sectoral responsibilities in that area.
- Recommendation 2** **Replication of innovative approaches** and further development of the innovative approaches to sub-granting and local fundraising.
- Recommendation 3** **An inception phase** should be integrated within contractual frameworks for grants, to allow for changes to certain aspects of a project's design.
- Recommendation 4** **Improve monitoring and evaluation** through strengthening the intervention logic and indicators at all levels, and establishment of systems for consistent monitoring and evaluation of assistance.
- Recommendation 5** **Insist on full integration of cross-cutting themes**, such as human rights and gender in funded initiatives, with ongoing support to assisting and ensuring that CSOs understand and embrace the intent of cross-cutting themes and approaches and their potential outcomes.
- Recommendation 6** **Improve visibility of the CSF through introducing a clear visibility plan** for the CSF-supported actions.

RECOMMENDATION FOR THE CSF DATABASE

An annex to this report (*Annex 14 — The Database*) incorporates the full discussion of findings, conclusions and recommendations related to the CSF database, per the evaluation terms of reference. The specific recommendation for the database, based on the findings and conclusions found in this annex, is found below.

- Recommendation 7** ***A purpose-built management information system (MIS) should be developed solely for the CSF.*** While it is a recommendation from the evaluation that this MIS should be linked directly to PADOR for **contact** information, and should ultimately be linked as well to OPSYS, it is not seen as appropriate for there to be any delay in first scoping a purpose-built MIS and, subsequent to this work, to have the MIS tendered, designed and implemented.



THE CONTEXT OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Civil society has been, and will continue to be, a critical component of the reform process currently taking place in the Western Balkans and Turkey. The region continues to experience significant change, and while the shifts have national variations, there is a general movement towards the structural reforms required for a closer association with, and subsequent membership of, the European Union. Within this general movement is an acknowledgement of the role civil society can and should play in processes of democratisation, including consultation in decision-making, contributions to the analytical and formulation processes associated with changes in policy and legislation and contributions to the oversight-watchdog processes necessary to give citizens appropriate levels of control of their political representatives.

According to the evaluation terms of reference (ToR), a 'strong civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system'⁵. It is in this context that the EU has a specific focus in its policies on the engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the building of a stronger democratic process. This engagement includes improvements in the contribution of CSOs to accountability systems with national authorities and an achievement of improved developmental outcomes across beneficiary countries.

As a result of the importance of the role of civil society in this reform process, but also as a way of promoting, ensuring and encouraging this role within civil society itself and within the governments and other authorities of the region, CSOs across

the Western Balkans and Turkey receive significant financial and technical assistance from the EC, as well as from a wider range of other donors, including bilateral agencies and private sector funds. EU assistance, the focus of this assignment, which is largely delivered through Instruments of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) funding, is firmly based on an understanding of the role of civil society in building and sustaining democracy, and is delivered within a framework of three priorities enumerated in the 2012 European Commission (EC) communication to the European Parliament:

- **Increasing the capacity of CSOs to perform their role as independent development actors.** CSOs across the Western Balkans and Turkey participate in programmes of training and capacity building, and receive technical assistance as a way of improving their strategic approaches and processes, their governance and their organisational structures and skills. The improvements in knowledge and skills associated with this assistance are intended to contribute to a more effective engagement, by civil society, with national authorities and with the public.
- **Promoting environments that are conducive to CSOs' operations.** Support and assistance provided by donors is intended for the creation of an enabling environment for CSO participation in domestic (and regional) political, policy and legislative discussions. The focus of this component of support is specific

5. Specific Terms Of Reference FWC Beneficiaries 2013 - Lot 7: Governance and Home Affairs Mid-term Evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey.

legislation that enables freedom of association, including establishment of standards for registration and operation and improvement to administrative processes that enable organisations to flourish, and freedom to peaceful assembly and expression.

- **Promoting the structured participation of CSOs** in a) domestic policies, b) EU programming cycles and c) internationally. The enabling environment flows directly into a structured participation of civil society in policy discussions and legislative framing, and there are a range of examples of the benefits accrued in the Western Balkans and Turkey when relevant CSOs are invited to participate in and contribute to the development of policy frameworks, specific policies and specific legislation that impact on reform processes and, by extension, EU accession processes. Beyond contributions to the formulation of policies and legislation, is a further engagement in implementation activities with national and local authorities. Further to this domestic participation is the linking of civil society at the regional level and beyond, through assistance in networking processes. Networking is useful for raising the profile of civil society, but is particularly significant in assisting CSOs improve their knowledge and skills, and therefore their domestic impact.⁶

Further, these priorities also form part of the political criteria for accession, as outlined in the 2015 Enlargement Strategy.⁷

In 2013, the EC endorsed a set of objectives and results to provide measurable and useful policy objectives focused on capacity building of CSOs and building an enabling environment for civil society. These objectives were compiled in the *Guidelines*

for EU Support to Civil Society⁸ (Guidelines). The *Guidelines* provide a results-oriented framework and establish a clear set of targets for each country through 2020.

EU assistance for civil society development in the Western Balkans and Turkey has been provided mainly through the IPA. Assistance provided through the IPA is complemented by other policy and financial instruments, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

Under the IPA, the EU established the Civil Society Facility (CSF) in 2008. The intent of the CSF is to support the development of an active civil society capable of participating in public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law. Further, the CSF aims to assist civil society in developing its capacity to influence policy-making and decision-making processes. According to CSF documentation, the overall objective of the CSF is to strengthen civil society within a participative democracy, stimulating a friendly civil society 'environment' and culture. The CSF aims to:

- continue promoting and enhancing the accountability and credibility of the civil society sector and improving the institutional and operational capacity of CSOs in relation to all stakeholders in the region and EU, from large public bodies to decision-makers;
- reinforce dialogue and strengthen ties between CSOs within the region and with their EU counterparts;
- encourage sustainable CSO partnerships and networks, including public authorities;
- promote the transfer of knowledge and experience;
- develop CSOs advocacy role in supporting democratic issues and advising citizens and public authorities;

6. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: 'The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development: Europe's Engagement with Civil Society in External Relations' 2012.

7. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: 'EU Enlargement Strategy' 2015.

8. DG ELARG Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in Enlargement Countries 2014-2020.

- further encourage CSOs to play an increasing part in the adoption and implementation of the EU acquis in policy areas where they have an important implementation and advocacy role;
- raise citizen understanding of CSOs role and participation to the democratic process.⁹

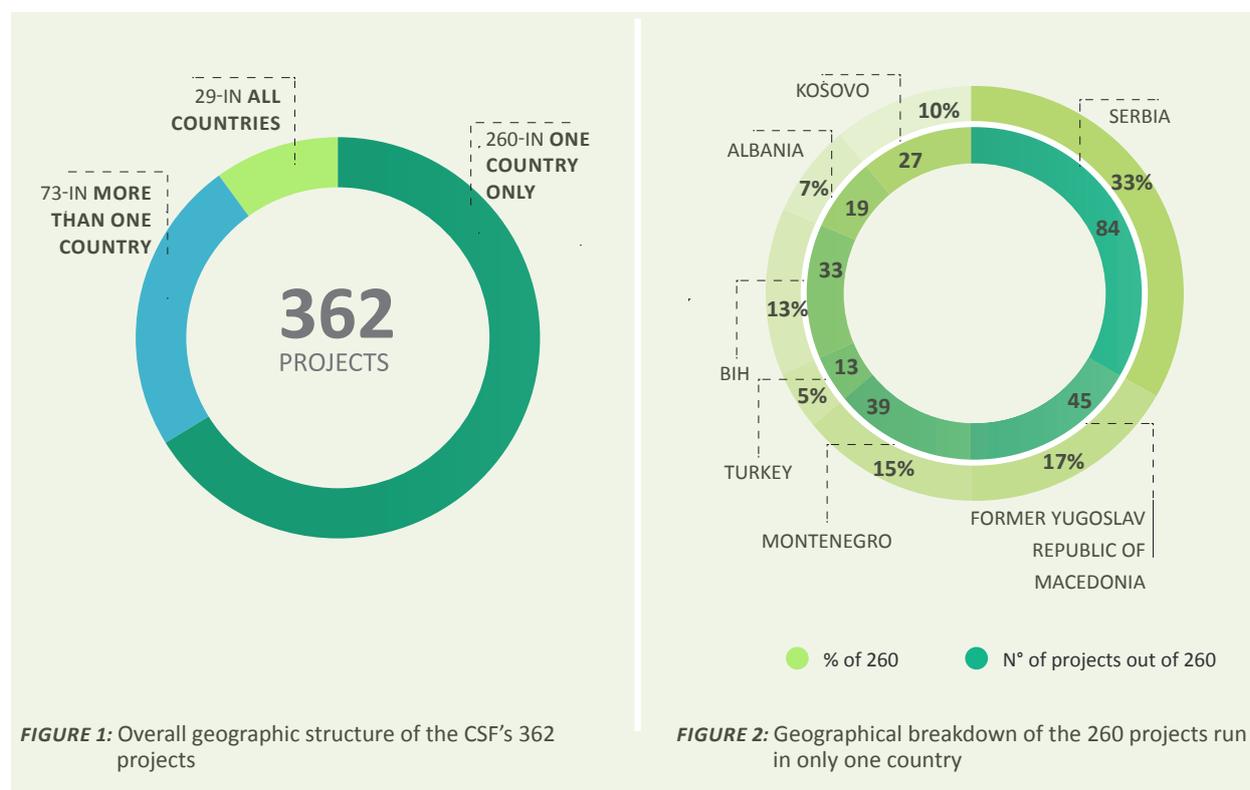
Per the evaluation ToR, the CSF was established based on a clear strategy to support local capacity building, intended to reach grassroots organisations with seed funding and focused on capacity, rather than project/service implementation; to support capacity building for governments, and the creation of spaces for cooperation between civil society and government; to support knowledge of EU institutions and counterparts, through visiting groups (People to People — P2P); and, to support partnership actions and networks between CSOs in all beneficiary countries¹⁰ and EU partners.

According to the evaluation ToR, to date there have been 633 organisations in the region and 136 EU-based organisations that have participated in 362 projects¹¹ financed by the CSF between 2011 and 2016. These projects have been undertaken in a number of sectors and in numerous and diverse initiatives: good governance and local democracy; technical assistance and capacity building; public administration reform and public financial management; rule of law and the fight against corruption; reconciliation and cultural dialogue; environment, climate action, energy and agriculture; social inclusion, anti-discrimination, gender and the fight against poverty; and youth and media.¹²

THE CSF IN NUMBERS

OVERALL CSF PORTFOLIO BY GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

The overall geographic structure of the CSF portfolio 2011-2016 covered by the evaluation is shown in Figure 1, below.



9. Project Fiche – IPA Programme Civil Society Facility – Horizontal Activities (Technical Assistance, People 2 People Programme, Partnership Actions) 2008.

10. Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

11. Per the database provided by DG NEAR.

12. Specific Terms of Reference FWC Beneficiaries 2013 - Lot 7: Governance and Home Affairs Mid-term Evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey.

The breakdown of projects shows a relatively high share in Serbia (84 projects), followed by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (45), Montenegro (39), and a considerably smaller number of projects in Turkey (13). It should be noted that the average

EU budget for the projects in Turkey is considerably higher the overall average. The multi-beneficiary (multi-country and WBT) projects represent a significant share of the total (102).

GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	TOTAL EU BUDGET
Albania	6 087 544
BiH	12 912 470
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	9 911 482
Kosovo	8 544 842
Montenegro	6 688 387
Serbia	12 600 920
Turkey	11 058 604
WB and Turkey ¹³	27 960 887
Multi-beneficiary ¹⁴	35 055 931
Total	EUR 130 821 066

PORTFOLIO BY IMPLEMENTING INSTRUMENT

PORTFOLIO BY IMPLEMENTING INSTRUMENT

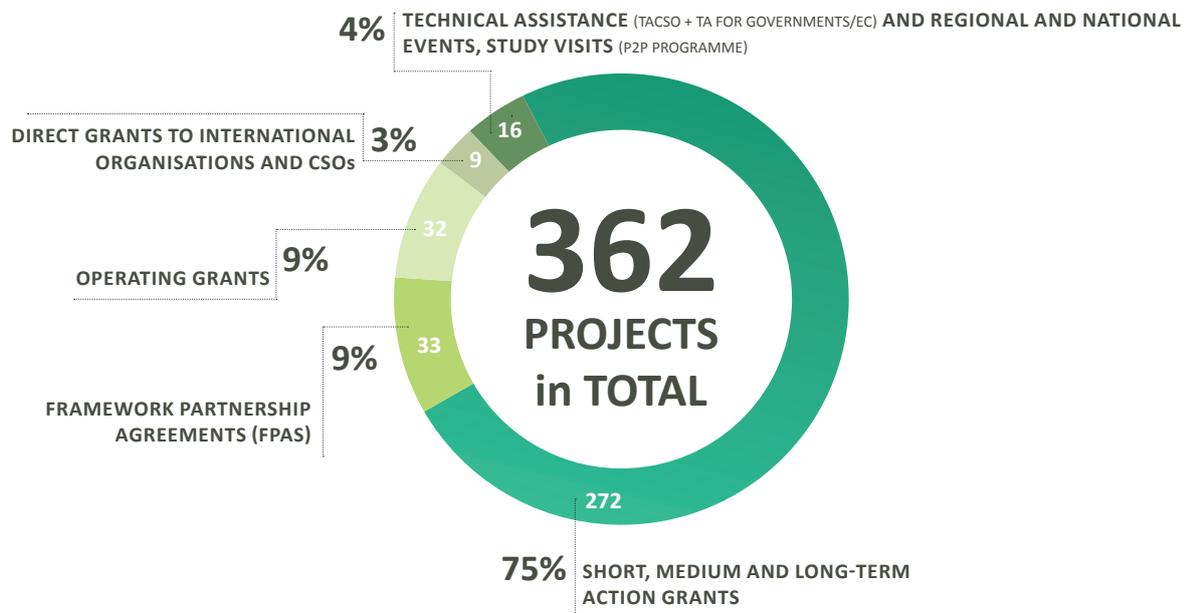
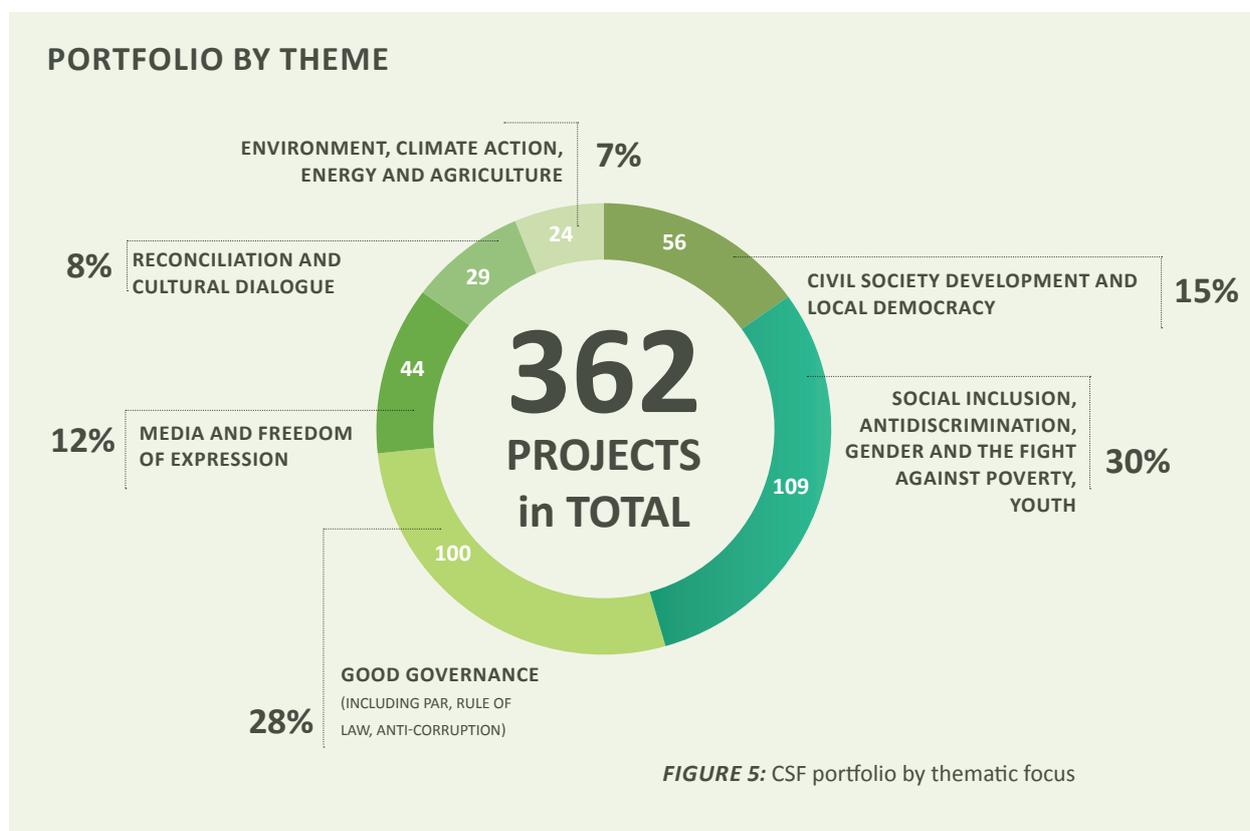


FIGURE 4: CSF portfolio by implementing instrument

13. This description is for contracts/projects that focus on *all countries* in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

14. This description is for contracts/projects that focus on *more than one country* (but NOT all countries).

PORTFOLIO BY THEME



OVERALL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

As per its ToR, the evaluation was carried out against the objectives of IPA I and IPA II, including the Multi-Country Indicative Strategy Paper (MCSP) and the CSF (and Media) Programmes (2011-2017) and all action documents annexed to the programmes. The *Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society* also informed the analysis, given its role as a key strategic document that translates policy priorities into concrete objectives and targets for the assistance. The evaluation also analysed the latest TACSO Needs Assessment Reports, for each beneficiary country, and the TACSO Baseline and Monitoring reports of the *Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society*. The evaluation made use of previous evaluations of the EU support to civil society in the Western Balkans and Turkey, and coordinated with other ongoing assessments in this field. The evaluation addressed all projects, completed and ongoing, financed by the

above programmes and included all CSF components. The analysis of CSF components focused on both thematic criteria and implementation instruments. Thematically, the analysis addresses the following areas, agreed during the inception phase as a logical, overall thematic framework:

- capacity building, civil society development and local democracy;
- social inclusion, anti-discrimination, gender and the fight against poverty and youth;
- good governance, PAR (public administration reform) and public financial management, rule of law and the fight against corruption;
- media and freedom of expression;
- reconciliation and cultural dialogue;
- environment, climate action, energy and agriculture.

In terms of instruments of implementation, the following categories were used:

- short-, medium- and long-term action grants;
- framework partnership agreements (FPAs);
- operating grants;
- direct grants to international organisations and CSOs;
- technical assistance (TACSO + TA for governments/EC), including regional and national events, study;
- visits (P2P programme).

GLOBAL OBJECTIVE OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation is the *mid-term evaluation* of EU support to the CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey, in the context of the CSF and in the period 2011-2016. Per the evaluation ToR, the *global objective* of the evaluation is to ‘assess the performance of financial assistance in achieving its objectives, and namely, its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, EU added value, coherence, complementarity and consistency as well as impact and sustainability.’ The evaluation is also intended to provide findings and recommendations to assist the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission (DG NEAR) in the programming and implementation of EU pre-accession assistance to support civil society in candidate and potential candidate countries with a view of improving the available instruments.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

Per the evaluation ToR, the *specific objectives* of the evaluation were to assess the performance of the assistance both at regional and national levels, particularly as regards its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, EU added value, coherence, complementarity and consistency, impact and sustainability. The assessment of each evaluation criteria should measure achievements against indicators set down in strategic and programming documents, and to provide an assessment of the intervention logic of EU assistance to support civil society in the Western Balkans and Turkey in light of the needs of CSOs in the region and the

priorities set by DG NEAR in its policy and strategy documents. The evaluators will assess to which extent programming documents are based on a balanced and comprehensive planning of the support to civil society.

EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

A full description of the evaluation approach and methodology can be found at *Annex 14 – Evaluation approach and methodology*. The evaluation had three phases: inception, field work and synthesis/reporting. **Inception:** The purpose of the Inception phase was to confirm the objectives, scope and outputs of the evaluation, to develop a final version of the evaluation questions, judgement criteria and indicators, and to set out the methodological approach, work plan and time schedule. These were recorded in the Inception Report. **Field work:** There were three key components of the field phase: a *survey*, qualitative *interviews* with stakeholders and sharing of *preliminary analyses* which enabled reflection on early perspectives of findings and conclusions. During this work, a complete survey was undertaken of all CSF beneficiaries and the survey report is found, in its entirety, at *Annex 15*. A total of 315 organisations initiated their responses to the survey. Of these 315 organisations, 262 provided data for analysis and a total of 250 were complete responses to all questions. As well as these 250, a further 12 organisations responded in whole or in part to questions in the second section of the survey, feedback on the CSF, without providing any organisational details. The organisational analysis section in the survey made use of the responses from the 250 completed responses. During the qualitative interview component, a total of 186 people were interviewed. This total includes five from DG NEAR, three other EC representatives in Brussels, 18 EUD representatives across the region, 22 representatives of national authorities, 127 civil society representatives and representatives of seven other donors. In the **Synthesis and reporting phase**, all collected documentation, inputs, feedback and results of the survey, interviews and focus groups has been analysed. The evaluation team has, based on this material and the analysis undertaken by the team, prepared this evaluation report.

EVALUATION FIELDWORK

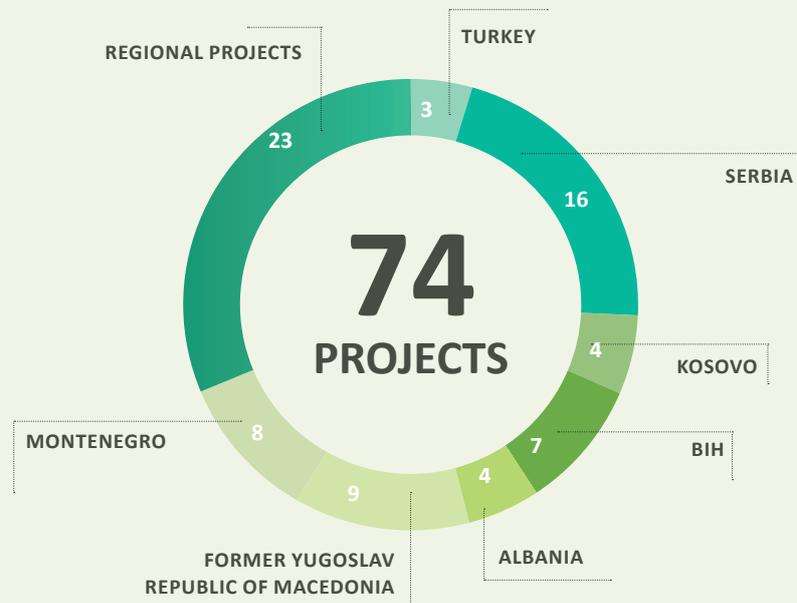


FIGURE 6: Geographical location of the lead organisation for the 74 projects focused on qualitative field work



FINDINGS

TRAG activities

RELEVANCE

RELEVANCE AT THE PROGRAMMING LEVEL

There is a clear relevance to CSF objectives, in the context of the EC Enlargement Strategy, as well as the objectives and priorities of country strategies and policy documents and programmes, and to the content, analysis and priorities of country reports.

The region is undergoing significant change in the process of democratisation and reforms towards EU accession. The CSF was set up with well-thought-through objectives, and policy priorities, and a strong intent to link policy initiatives and funding assistance in this context. The Enlargement Strategy priorities are very visible, as are the Copenhagen Criteria for accession. At the policy level, support has been stipulated in several key documents, including national strategies and action plans.

The Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in Enlargement Countries (2014-2020)¹⁵ are a key framework for DG NEAR and EUDs in the formulation of directions and plans. A related, specific set of *Media Guidelines*¹⁶ have been drafted and are used in programming. The *Media Guidelines* are monitored systematically, with input sought from all relevant civil societies and other national stakeholders. There is a clearly stated and visible intent to maintain a link between the *Media Guidelines* and the priorities of calls for proposals, although it is noted that the guidelines do not have a thematic bearing — they provide a unified framework on which programming for civil society is undertaken.

The CSF remains relevant in all the beneficiary countries and provides strategic guidance towards establishing a structured dialogue between CSOs, operating structures and the EU (DG NEAR and EU Delegations). This relevance, and their links back to strategies, priorities and programmes at the country level, are noted in all countries by national authorities and civil society representatives. The programme has a clear focus on dialogue between public authorities and civil society, and all the Western Balkans countries and Turkey have adopted legislation that acknowledges the role of CSOs in a participatory democracy. Coordination and a participatory approach to policy and strategy formulation and programming for CSOs has, in general, been significantly improved and reinforced under the IPA.

The programme is fully in line with national sector-specific policies (or, where lacking, with main stakeholder expectations), and addresses the importance for civil society to be empowered and fully functional. Coordination, and a participatory approach to policy and strategy formulation and programming for CSOs, has been significantly improved and reinforced under the IPA. TACSO is seen as a tool for developing institutional capacity and achieving maturity within national, institutional CSO support partners.

Responses from funded organisations in the online survey are indicative of a very strong relevance of the CSF to the development of enlargement countries.

15. Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries, 2014-2020, DG Enlargement

16. Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and media integrity in enlargement countries, 2014-2020, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/press_corner/elarg-guidelines-for-media-freedom-and-integrity_210214.pdf

HOW RELEVANT IS THE CSF TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENLARGEMENT COUNTRIES?

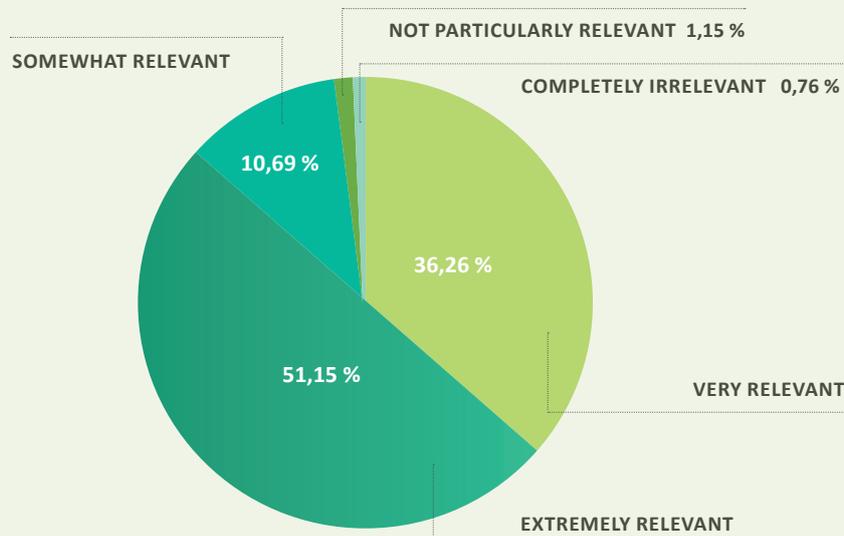


FIGURE 7: CSF relevance to the development of enlargement countries

There is a *disconnect, noted in all beneficiary countries, between the form of the enabling environment regulatory frameworks (which tends to be good) and the actual contribution of national administrations to the growth and development of civil society* (which is much less 'enabling' than the form would indicate). While the *Guidelines* are just that — guidelines — there is no consistent application of an 'enabling environment,' nor a strong application of the *Guidelines'* framework in beneficiary countries. The substantive engagement of CSOs in the accession processes is not consistent across beneficiary countries: in some countries concerns remain about the willingness of governments to provide support to developing CSO capacity and to allow CSOs to fully participate in the design and implementation of national development strategies. While these concerns extend to the full range of democratic reforms, what is particularly relevant to CSF frameworks and priorities is ensuring a more active support to the engagement of civil society in national-level conversations on priorities and processes of democratic reform and EU accession.

CSF objectives are generally clear and realistic, and their priorities are well aligned with the needs of civil society in the country: capacity building,

dialogue with authorities and empowerment. However, further elaboration is missing in order for the objectives to be measurable, including the introduction of SMART indicators at all levels. There is no systematic presence of intervention logic parameters and indicators, which makes follow-up, monitoring and evaluation more difficult and does not allow for any benchmarking and assessments on result achievement (performance as per the EU's Results Framework) of the instrument as a whole, and of the individual projects it has funded.

There are a number of *applied mechanisms focused on ensuring effective linkages between CSF priorities and funding and those of other key donors*. These include a well-founded and well-implemented coordination process across Member States and the EC in relation to the CSF. This is most notable in the agreement on the priorities and funding of the CSF prior to the Commission approving plans and funding. This coordination is also visible in discussions regarding the *Guidelines*, and the input received from other donors (Member States) prior to finalisation of the guidelines. Coordination and coherence is also particularly visible in the commitment made by other key donors to EU accession frameworks and prioritisation in their own planning and giving.

However, there are a number of areas in which these processes require strengthening in order to improve both coordination and outcomes. Specific activities of ‘donor coordination’ are more visible within beneficiary countries, i.e. between EUDs and national authorities, when compared with those in Brussels. Donor coordination tends to be ‘passive’ — there is a tendency to give more emphasis to ongoing, or implemented actions, than to focus on coordination and correlation of strategies.

RELEVANCE AT THE PROJECT LEVEL

There are a number of systems and processes in place that ensure links between the objectives of the EU support to civil society and civil society itself. These systems and processes (consultations, negotiations, conferences, discussions) work both ‘up’ and ‘down’ (i.e. between civil society and the EU) in the process of informing and in determining directions and priorities.

CSOs are supportive of the consultations in these areas. In this context, there tends to be a significant correlation between the objectives of EU support and the activities and results of funded projects. The alignment is present in all the relevant aspects: the Copenhagen Criteria, the *Guidelines*, and the 2014-2020 EU strategy. The *Guidelines* provide a comprehensive frame and drive the programming of CSF assistance.

The ***aims, objectives and activities of the multi-beneficiary and regional projects funded by the CSF’s financial assistance are very closely aligned to the overall objectives of the CSF.*** CSOs, in delivering their projects, contribute strongly to CSF objectives and to the overall objectives of the EC in relation to civil society development. There is significant focus on accountability and credibility, on dialogue and the strengthening of ties between CSOs in the region, on the transfer of knowledge and skills, on EU accession activities, and on the development of democratic processes and citizen engagement. All these areas of focus are visible across the range of funded projects.

The critical nature of CSF funding is that there is only a very limited supply of other funds for civil society organisations in the region. There is no alternative funding for multi-beneficiary and regional projects

in most sectors. Bilateral donors are reducing their support to countries in the region, and where they remain supportive they tend to have both restrained priorities and reduced budgets. National public funds for support to CSOs are extremely limited, and are often not available to the broad range of CSOs, with significant percentages of public funding in all beneficiary countries directed at sporting and religious organisations. Serbia is the only country where there has been an allocation of national funds as co-financing for the CSF, however, these funds have been continuously reduced in the past few years.

The growing timeframes of support are visible, and very important. While true for all funded organisations, regional networks cannot become well-established and self-sustaining in three or four years, nor can legal reforms and policy initiatives achieve success in this period.

The breadth of thematic focus, discussed in more detail below, is mentioned in the context of ‘response to specific needs,’ as there is a very wide range of thematic support from the CSF. In this context, civil society notes the intent of the CSF to address a wide range of issues, and the consultation processes related to this commitment.

However, networks note that even with the wide thematic approach, and with project timeframes being extended, there is absolutely no guarantee of sequencing; that is, a partnership cannot be certain that a new call for proposals will come out in which they will ‘find themselves.’

The CSF has ***focused on the EU political agenda***, and important issues are being covered by the CSF and the projects it funds, including governance, social inclusion, rule of law, anti-corruption and human rights. In principle, EU objectives on cooperation with civil society are reflected in the financial support provided, as the EU strategy supports grassroots CSOs and coalitions. The significant focus in this area is on the enabling environment, which is of demonstrable relevance to CSOs and is visible in funded projects and in project logframes. Examples of the relationship between CSF priorities and projects include the following:

- Western Balkans countries have begun developing anti-corruption systems. There are funded initiatives in this area.
- There is an initiative on anti-corruption in procurement systems.
- There are a number of projects focused on the media, in the context of its role in the transforming aspects of the accession process, media accountability and media transparency.
- A number of projects focus on a dynamic civil society actively participating in public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law, and the capacity to influence policy and decision-making processes.
- There is a project focus on evidence-based contributions to public policies and on advocating for reforms in a range of thematic areas.

Knowledge and understanding of guidelines by grassroots organisations is somewhat limited.

There is a missing link, with civil society as opposed to CSOs — the focus on CSOs is significant in the programme, and blocks EU/EUD DG NEAR dialogue with civil society per se. Related to this is a need for CSOs to look not towards the donor, but to ensure a focus on the citizens and population they serve, in order to be certain about need and the focus of priorities.

However, the ***greatest relevance of the CSF to CSOs in the region is not specifically in relation to their ‘missions,’ or their thematic focus, but to their own functioning.*** Here the CSF is delivering strong outcomes in building the capacity (knowledge, skills and experience) of funded organisations. This growth in capacity flows directly into better-defined actions and improved results. Funded CSOs point to a number of areas of growth in capacity, including strategy: thinking and planning; organisational systems; management skills; better knowledge about relevant thematic areas; growth in cooperation/networking/partnership with other CSOs in their country and regionally; a greater understanding of transparency requirements and processes; better fundraising capacity; and

improved advocacy skills, particularly with local and national authorities.

EFFICIENCY

The most notable aspect of efficiency in the CSF processes is the commitment, by both EUD and DG NEAR, to appropriate instruments/modalities of assistance.

While the reality does not always match this commitment, as is discussed further below, the commitment is visible and is commended by beneficiary groups. There are a number of aspects of this commitment, and its impact on the design and administrative processes of the CSF; these particularly include a wider variety of instruments, including a more visible and effective approach to improving the reach of the CSF funding to smaller organisations and a longer project duration.

VARIETY OF INSTRUMENTS

While ***action grants remain the preferred mode of granting*** for EUDs and DG NEAR, there is a ***visible growth in other instruments***, including FPAs, operating grants, technical assistance and the provision of support to third parties. Further, there is variety within action grants, and in a number of countries and DG NEAR there is an apparent willingness to mix instruments and to consider other options. The framework partner agreements and the regional networks built around long-term action grants demonstrate an improved reach to smaller, grass-root and community-based organisations, although this is probably better exemplified in calls for proposals issued nationally by EUDs.

It is difficult to find a balance between all areas of need and all types of grants. The reality is that CSF funding is project-based, and for a fixed timeframe, and that EUDs and DG NEAR try to address the full range of needs through a diversity of modalities. The CSF is focused on reaching out to smaller and new stakeholders, and is developing and implementing innovative approaches, although there are organisational or administrative constraints within DG NEAR and in the EUDs, as limited staffing constrains possibilities in terms of the numbers (and sizes) of awarded grants. The availability of action grants, FPA and operating grants all offer options

for funding that can be of benefit to a variety of organisations.

There are a number of **CSF-funded grant schemes operated by CSOs or foundations in the region that offer innovative and effective approaches** to the provision of assistance to CSOs of a variety of sizes, and in a range of thematic areas. These approaches are visible in national CSF grants as well as regional and multi-beneficiary awards. There is significant room for replication and further development of these approaches. More detail on instruments' effectiveness is provided below, in 2.3 Effectiveness, in the section on instruments.

REACH

The approach of DG NEAR and EUDs in recent years, and with recent calls for proposals, has had a clear focus on 'reach,' i.e. grant assistance reaching down further into civil society and more widely geographically. Key components of this approach and the focus on reach include **sub-granting mechanisms**, such as the Active Citizenship Mechanism of Turkey's Sivil Düşün Programme,¹⁷

and other national sub-granting schemes (either stand-alone or as part of every project/grant). While there are some aspects of this approach that need further work, it is clearly effective, especially in cases of stand-alone projects with the sole focus and design to support small, new, non-urban CSOs and initiatives. In addition, a lesson has been learned that reaching out to such parts of civil society and even citizens requires a specific approach, with a strong focus on capacity building and mentoring as well as adapted procedures and requirements that can be met by such actors (e.g. no co-financing or some flexibility in its application, local language application processes, or a reduced level of expectations on what can be achieved) focused on their *development* and *empowerment* rather than (just) project outcomes. Further, but related, is that the current focus has an impact on middle-sized CSOs, who struggle to respond to calls for proposals where they would be required to lead a grant-giving project and are not able to find sufficient funding, or an acceptable focus, as sub-grantees.



**SIVIL DÜŞÜN:
ACTIVE
CITIZENSHIP
MECHANISM
AS A TOOL FOR
SUPPORTING
CIVIL SOCIETY IN
TURKEY**

Civil Society Facility (Sivil Düşün II)
(Contract N° 370-752)

<http://sivildusun.net>

Active Citizenship Mechanism (ACM) is one of the four components of Sivil Düşün³. CSF Turkey implemented through a TA contract, and conceived as a tool to provide a facility for interpretation, translation, travel and ad hoc expertise to allow broader participation of citizens in EU activities, has evolved into flexible support mechanism for in-kind support to CSOs as well as unregistered projects such as platforms, newly emerged initiatives and digital groups and activists.

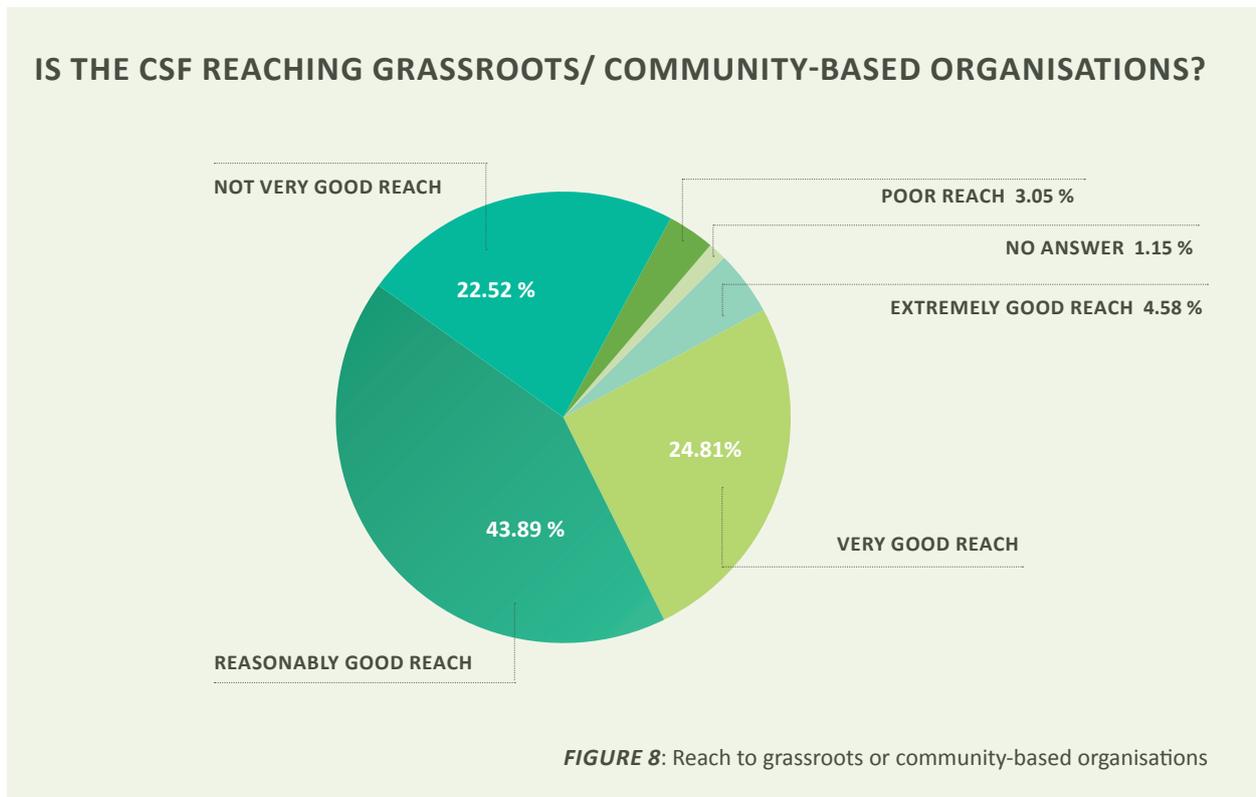
ACM was designed as a flexible tool allowing fast responses for rights-based organisations and activities. Simplified tools that allow online and telephone applications in different languages and braille were introduced to reduce both language and physical barriers for grassroots organisations. The main eligibility criterion of the programme is based on implementing a rights-based activity and providing added value for the civil society in Turkey. The programme does not ask for previous experience about running a project and/or the financial capacity to implement an activity. Providing in-kind support also eliminates financial and technical capacity problems of CSOs and activists and improves their ability to plan and implement rights-based activities.

The project achievements are as follows:

- The flexible design has allowed the necessary adjustments to the rapidly evolving needs and contexts.
- Accepting individual activists and CSOs without legal status as eligible applicants responds to a significant need of the civil society.
- ACM clearly contributes to a wider mainstreaming of the rights-based approach amongst civil activists in Turkey.
- The programme managed to reach out grassroots to organisations/activists not targeted by other support programmes.
- The support provided allowed the CSOs to initiate, follow-up, and complement their rights-based endeavours in a manner that increased the prospects of impact and sustainability.
- Receiving in-kind and technical support from Sivil Düşün ATM is good reference for a CSO when applying to other donors.

17. Contract Number: 370572.

Responses to the stakeholder survey are largely positive about the CSF's reach, although there is a not insignificant proportion of respondents whose view is clearly that more work is required to achieve desired outcomes in this area.



The EU understands the need for greater reach, and has implemented a number of strategies aimed at achieving. While there is no baseline for this question, responses do indicate that this attempt at greater reach is being relatively successful.

SECTORAL COORDINATION

The EUD in Albania has a particular focus on an **approach that better links CSF projects with the sector**. An effective EUD strategy in this context is to pass responsibility for CSF projects in a specific sector to the task manager responsible for this sector. The EUD sees the importance of having all parts of its work together, improving coordination and focus. This is also the case for the EUD in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (for the media, Roma/inter-community projects) and to an extent Kosovo. There was also reported thematic coordination between DG NEAR and EUD task managers in given thematic areas (i.e. Roma), but in many cases this type of coordination is missing or could be stepped up. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, in absence of official coordination regarding civil society, EUD and USAID as main donors maintain close coordination and exchange on issues pertaining to support.

An effective strategy that the EUD in Albania is implementing is to pass responsibility for CSF projects in a specific sector to the task manager responsible for this sector. The EUD sees the importance of having all parts of its work together, improving coordination and focus.

This is also the case for the EUD in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (for Media, Roma/ inter-community projects) and to an extent Kosovo.

PROJECT DURATION

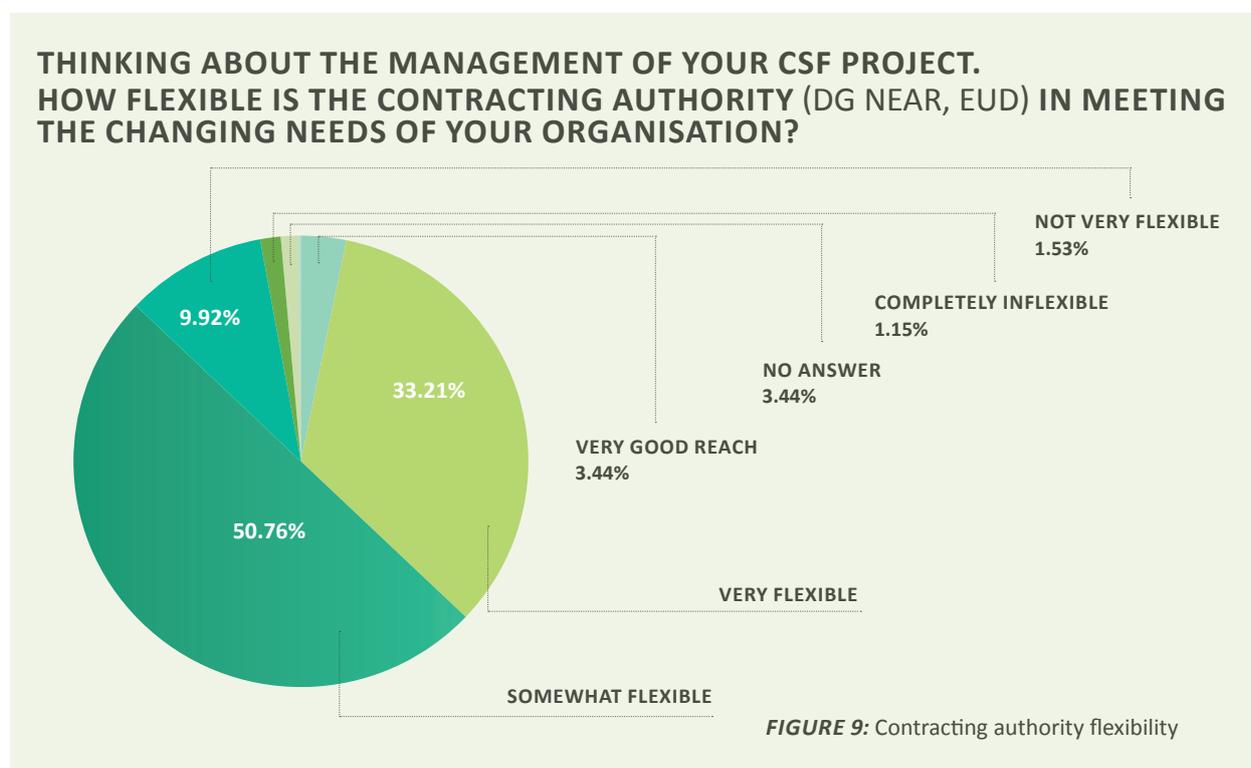
There has been a **steady increase in project duration** in recent calls for proposals across the whole portfolio of the CSF. According to BCSDN, 'the EU has supported more long-term actions with an average length of approximately 2.5 years (29 months),¹⁸ suggesting 'the Commission has been moving away from action-focused shorter-term interventions towards a more strategic development support'.¹⁹ This is also true of all types of instruments and has been both noted and supported. While true across the CSF, regional initiatives in particular require a longer timeframe, specifically in those instances where the thematic area of network itself is new, or where the intent is to impact on policy frameworks or practice. In this regional context, the stronger emphasis on long-term action grants and other longer-term instruments is demonstrably effective.

AREAS IN WHICH EFFICIENCY CAN BE IMPROVED

Flexibility — While there are clear attempts at improving CSF flexibility at all stages of calls for proposals through to project finalisation, and there is an appreciation amongst funded organisations

that CSF management in EUDs and at DG NEAR generally should be more flexible, flexibility is still an area in which improvements can be made, particularly in the financial administration of EUDs and at DG NEAR. There is a notable flexibility in the approach to the development of new and innovative instruments for granting. For example, the EUD in Ankara has responded to assessed needs through a highly innovative and flexible intervention to provide in-kind assistance through the Active Citizenship Mechanism of Sivil Düşün. There is an increase overall in the timeframe for grants, and the commitment to being responsive to the needs and priorities of CSOs in the region. There is also a visible priority of flexibility in approaches that increase the reach of CSF funding deeper into civil society across the region, although it is noted that only with the very localised grant schemes found in some EUDs does CSF funding begin to reach past CSOs to citizens themselves.

Survey responses indicate a relatively high level of support for flexibility in contracting authorities, including one-third of respondents who view either DG NEAR or their EUD as very flexible.



18. <http://www.balkanecd.net/novo/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/96-4-BCSDN-The-effectiveness-of-EUs-regional-support-FINAL-web.pdf>

19. Ibid.

Delays with calls for proposals and assessing proposals — Delays with calls for proposals and in assessing proposals is a noted issue with the administration of the funding. It is understood that conceiving, preparing, issuing and then managing a call for proposals is a complex and time-consuming activity, particularly where staffing is constrained, as it is within EUDs and DG NEAR. The greater complexity in types of grants also means greater complexity in the administration of calls for proposals and projects. For organisations that depend on CSF funding, even to a certain extent, delays anywhere along the process can be devastating.

The CSF database/electronic management approaches — As it is currently structured, the database does not add value to CSF administration, management or reporting. Specific questions were raised as to the actual process of application, award and reporting — both narrative and financial — and why these processes are not all performed electronically, within an integrated system of management. It is understood that other EU grant instruments have completely electronic processes, supported by a purpose-built database and portal. Such a significant, large, geographically distributed programme as the CSF would clear benefit from its own electronic portal, where all aspects of calls for proposals, applications, notifications and then reporting would be carried out. A full discussion of issues with and recommendations for the CSF database can be found in Section 6 below.

Variations in project designs — Given the length of time between issuance of a call for proposals, assessment of applications and award, the prohibition on grantees varying their plans and activities is not effective or efficient.

Grants to international organisations — While the value of providing funding to and through large international agencies is understood from an administrative efficiency perspective, it is not so easily justified in terms of reach, effectiveness or cost-efficiency. The key point here is not the use, with regional and local CSOs, of the grants provided to these international organisations, but rather that the grants themselves might better serve the objectives of the CSF if there was a

greater emphasis on their distribution to national or regional CSOs or foundations for significant sub-granting programmes. UN-supported initiatives offer little visibility for the EU contribution that funds them, as the UN branding is much more visible and recognised throughout the implementation processes.

Co-financing — a full discussion of issues with co-financing can be found below, in Section 2.3 Effectiveness, in the section on instruments.

Obstacles faced with national funding rules — There are a number of issues encountered by funded organisations, related to meeting both CSF and national administrative and taxation procedures. These include challenging VAT procedures, the different VAT procedures in each country, the administrative burden, delays associated with the waving of the national VAT, and the fact that in Albania third-party grantees are unable to get VAT exemption.

EFFECTIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

The CSF is making a significant contribution to achieving its objectives. There are a number of areas in which this contribution is most visible.



PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNANCE AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN EUROPE AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

Local Coalitions for Community Development (Contract N° 306-435)

www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/project_dett.php?ID=52

Implemented by the Association of Local Democracy Agencies ALDA, France, the overall objectives of this project are as follows: to help strengthen the capacity of community-based organisations for service provision to citizens; to help improve the capacity of CSOs for participation in policy- or decision-making; to help raise awareness of CSO-initiated actions; to help develop the capacity of CSOs for cross-sectoral partnership building and civil dialogue; and to reinforce the role of CSOs as a relevant stakeholder in PAR and EU approximation process.

The capacity-building activities on good governance principles are reinforced by a sub-granting component, through which eight small CSOs were supported to implement projects at the local level.

The project enhanced awareness of CSO-initiated actions, improved CSOs' capacity for participation in policy- or decision-making and established the basis for future local coalitions of CSOs and partnership with the local self-governments, through enhanced capacity for cross-sectoral partnership building and civil dialogue

The project has created strong multiplier impacts through:

- developing a second project for interventions in the areas defined and incorporated in local development strategies of respective municipalities, such as social care, environmental protection, sustainable tourism development, democratic governance and culture of participation;
- disseminating and promoting good practices for the social inclusion of people with disabilities and violence against women that were multiplied/replicated in other settings;
- assisting the beneficiary CSOs to develop new projects and apply for funding within the framework of different EU programmes.

Across the Western Balkans and Turkey, the CSF, is ***continuing to promote and enhance the accountability and credibility of the civil society sector***, through improvements to the institutional and operational capacity of CSOs. These improvements have contributed to better relationships with stakeholders across the region, from the public generally to decision-makers. CSOs at all levels are building capacity, notably in advocacy approaches, but also in terms of their own administration and management. CSOs note most strongly, and consistently, the improvements in their capacity to think and plan strategically, and in their ability to manage their organisations: they specifically mention improvements in the systems, knowledge and skills of organisational management. There is an improvement in the visibility of CSOs, notably at the community level with those smaller, grassroots organisations benefiting from sub-grants. There is a related improvement in the

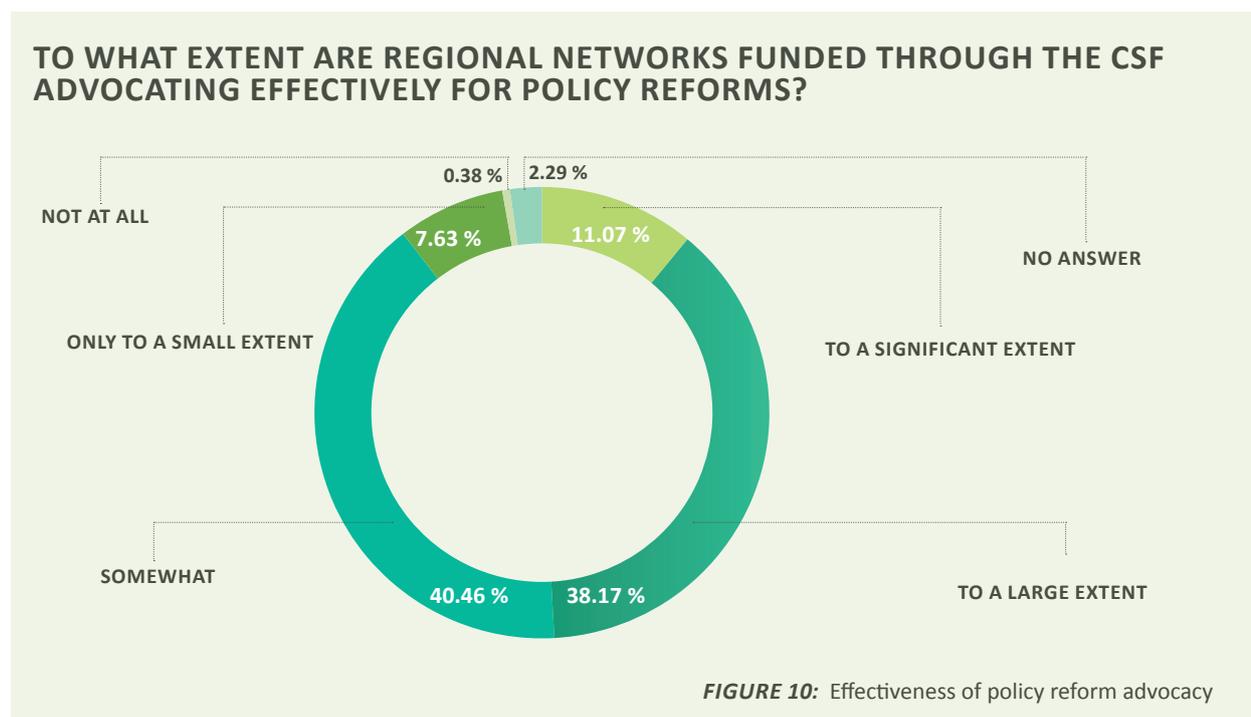
visibility of the issues being addressed by CSOs with CSF support.

The particular focus on partnership, coalition and networking has ***reinforced the dialogue and strengthened the ties between CSOs in the region***, and with their counterparts from the EU. This engagement is seen as being important for effectiveness of outcomes (through learning processes, and particularly peer-to-peer learning) as well as in addressing historical issues between countries. The regional and EU-wide initiatives provide useful knowledge, data, skills and approaches, both down from EU-based partners and up to those partners. A specific benefit of this approach is the encouragement of sustainable CSO partnerships and networks, including with the involvement of public authorities. While sustainability remains an issue, partnerships, coalitions and networks are receiving strong

support from the CSF. This support has assisted with improvements in the knowledge and skills of partners, improvements in approaches (partner and network) and a strengthening of advocacy through better evidence bases and approaches.

The survey asked a specific question about regional networks, and policy advocacy. While clearly the

view of organisations is that CSF funding contributes to effective advocacy for policy reforms, what is more interesting and important is the significant percentage of respondents that indicate the funds are only somewhat effective. While still positive, this 40 % of respondents clearly think that there is room for stronger results.



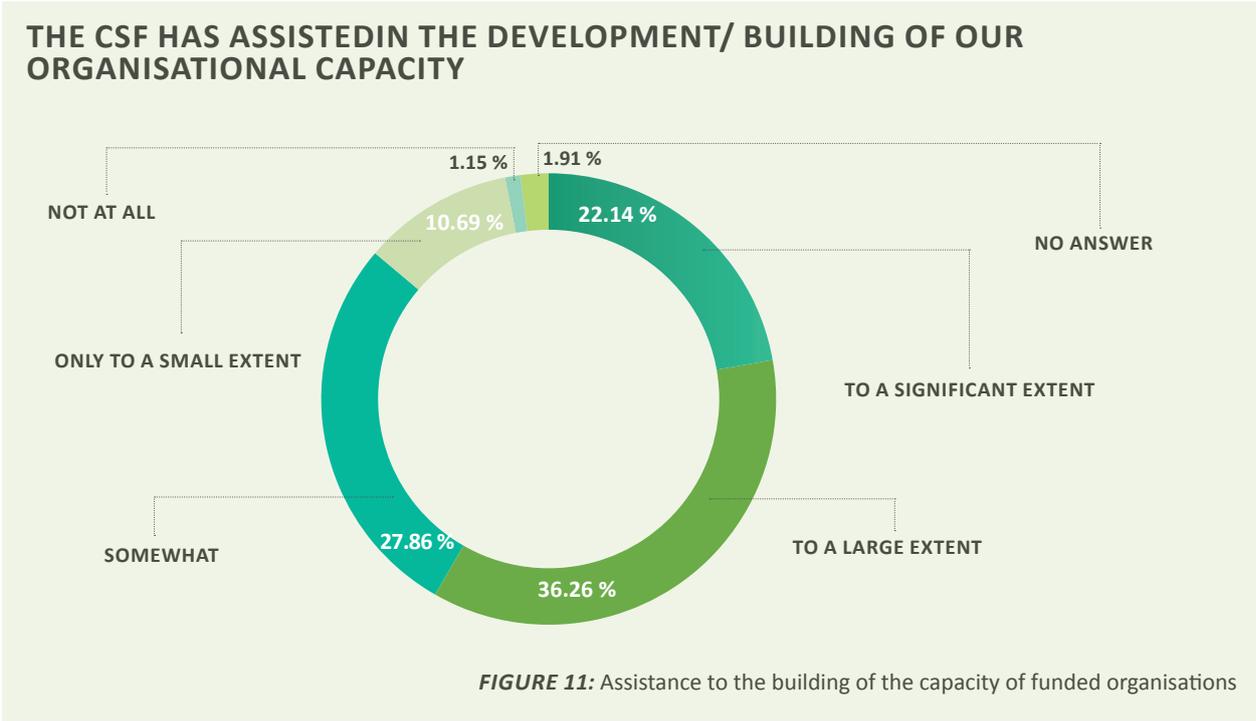
More so than with other types of assistance provided by the CSF, **building lasting, regional networks requires extended support**. There remains a particular issue with the relationships and partnerships with national authorities across the region, although this is more attributable to the authorities themselves than to the projects funded by the CSF.

The **advocacy role of CSOs engaged is demonstrably stronger**, based on effective approaches, improved knowledge and an increase in skills built through training programmes and engagement with regional and EU-based partners. The use of evidence-based approaches are particularly noted. CSOs are engaged in the preparation of policy briefs, and policy documents, and are advocating with government on behalf of this work. They are engaged locally and at the national level.

A clear example of the effectiveness of the CSF is the range of initiatives that have been developed for the provision of grant funding, accompanied by capacity building, to smaller, more grassroots and local CSOs. A further example of the effectiveness of the CSF is the range of technical assistance projects that have been funded, not least TACSO.²⁰ These are discussed in Section 2.3 Effectiveness, in the section on instruments.

In the survey, organisations were asked to respond to the assistance of the CSF in building their organisational capacity. Responses to this question are also very interesting because of the difference of opinion visible in the spread of answers. While responses are generally positive, there is an overall positive response: over 38.5 % respond with *somewhat* or *only to a small extent*, which is indicative of a less positive response rate than for most questions.

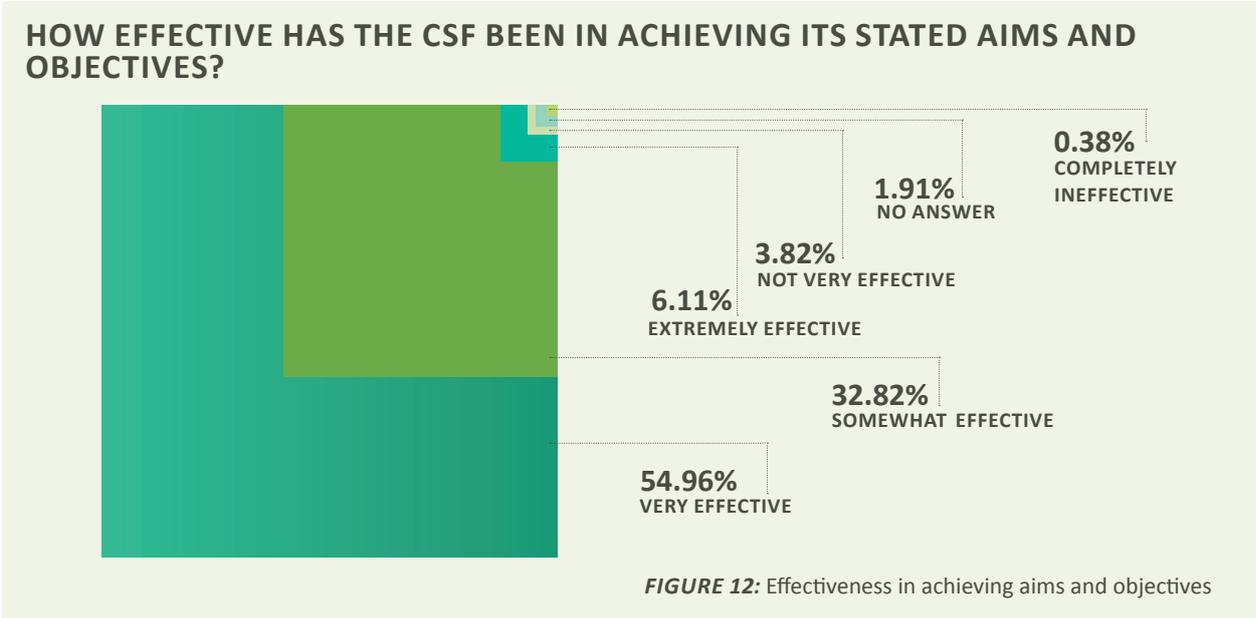
20. Contract numbers: 325596 and 325603.



The single biggest challenge to the CSF, in meeting its objectives, is in addressing the implementation of the enabling environment for CSOs but also media — to turn into substance. Here, a clear linkage has not yet been established between CSF objectives, indicators and those of the guidelines targets as identified nationally, which is crucial. The example of the media guidelines’ targets being linked to concrete project funding by the EUD in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia can be easily followed (if not already) by all EUDs and beneficiaries. This issue was discussed above, and is

mentioned in each of the country-focused evaluation matrices found in the annexes. A consistent fact across the whole of the Western Balkans and Turkey is that the ‘enabling environment,’ defined and prioritised in the guidelines, exists only in principle in the beneficiary countries.

The responses to the stakeholder survey are indicative of the strong view of funded organisations that the CSF is effective: 54.96 % of respondents describe the CSF as very effective in achieving its objectives.



The CSF is effectively contributing to addressing the needs and priorities of civil society in the region. The single most important factor, also mentioned above, is how the support from the CSF contributes to building the capacity of the organisations that are being funded and the individuals working in these organisations. Capacity growth is noted in the development and use of strategies and techniques for advocacy with local and national authorities. Another important factor that indicates the effectiveness of CSF support is the practical contribution to policy and legislative change: empirical research that contributes to effective dialogue about the form and content of policies and legislation; provision of focused training for authorities, including the courts, police, ombudsman offices; provision of training for the media; social dialogue; youth issues and advocacy; and the development of tools for monitoring in a wide range of areas, which provide objective data for analysis. There are a number of databases, monitoring tools and indices that have been created through CSF funding.

Notwithstanding the above, further strengthening of approaches to and results from advocacy and political dialogue is needed to make it more structured and engaging. There are a number of outcomes in relation to legislative proposals and contributions to development of legislation and policy — these will benefit from a continued emphasis and priority.

THEME ANALYSIS

Civil society development and local democracy

Generally, CSF objectives and region-wide calls for proposals demonstrate a strong alignment with the Copenhagen Political Criteria for Accession, particularly preservation of democratic governance and human rights. Civil society empowerment is an integral part of the political criteria for the EU accession process, especially the role of government in successfully establishing a conducive environment for the sustainable development of civil society. EU objectives on cooperation with civil society are reflected in the financial support

provided, and the focus on support to grassroots CSOs and coalitions. Most fundamentally, according to original CSF documentation, the CSF aims to:

- ‘continue promoting and enhancing accountability, credibility of civil society sector and improving the institutional and operational capacity of CSOs in relation with all stakeholders in the region and EU, from large public to decision-makers;
- reinforce dialogue and strengthen ties between CSOs within the region and with their counterparts from the EU;
- encourage sustainable CSOs partnership and networks, including public authorities;
- promote transfer of knowledge and experience;
- develop CSOs advocacy role in supporting democratic issues and advising citizens and public authorities;
- further encourage CSOs to play an increasing part in the adoption and implementation of the EU acquis in policy areas where they have an important implementation and advocacy role. Raise citizen understanding of CSOs role and participation in the democratic process.²¹

The aims, objectives and activities of the projects funded by the CSF are closely aligned to the overall objectives of the CSF, with a clear focus on **civil society development**, including the transfer of knowledge and skills. This is the area of greatest importance to civil society in the region, and the areas where CSOs who have benefited from funding acknowledge the greatest results. There is a focus on **accountability and credibility**: as is visible throughout this report, there are ongoing issues between CSOs and government and CSO and citizens as to the role and intent of civil society. Civil society can, and needs to, be proactive and open in addressing these issues. There is also a focus on **dialogue**, and the strengthening of ties between CSOs in the region and nationally, in beneficiary

20. Project Fiche – IPA Programme Civil Society Facility – Horizontal Activities (Technical Assistance, People 2 People Programme, Partnership Actions) 2008.

countries. The role and importance of regional and national networking and networks is particularly visible as a contributing factor in the success of civil society in building a democratic society. Finally, there is a consistent focus on specific civil society actions, particularly in terms of **local democracy**, including EU accession activities and the development of democratic processes and citizen engagement. Each of these areas of focus are visible across the range of funded projects, with their emphasis on:

- developing CSO advocacy roles;
- supporting actions related to and the growth in awareness about democratic issues;
- providing advice to citizens and public authorities;
- encouraging CSOs to play an increasing part in the adoption and implementation of the EU acquis in policy areas where they have an important implementation or advocacy role.

There are a number of systems and processes in place that ensure links between the objectives of the EU's support to civil society and civil society itself, including ensuring the needs of civil society, and its priorities are visible in the content and structure of calls for proposals. These systems and processes include TACSO activities related to needs assessments and CSO consultation processes²² and EUD and DG NEAR consultations with funded organisations. There has been an intentional move away from EU-driven content of calls for proposals, with the focus on the ways that **CSOs are able to define objectives themselves, within a framework that gives indications on what types of actions will be supported**. There has been a move away from short-term action grants in recent years, with a related increase on longer project timeframes. This change has been particularly effective in increasing the outcomes from funded initiatives.

The intent of the CSF to develop civil society is strong, but the focus on CSOs is so great it can get in the way of EU/EUD/DG NEAR dialogue with

civil society per se. This issue is acknowledged by EUDs and DG NEAR, with ongoing consideration of finding an appropriate balance. This balance is a particular focus of EUDs and DG NEAR in promoting and utilising a variety of funding instruments. More work is required in terms of citizen understanding of the role of CSOs, and indeed in the understanding of the role of the EC in beneficiary countries. This work is needed specifically in the development and implementation of effective visibility approaches, and **focus is required on transparency and on more specific engagement with citizens**, although this last issue is more visible now in work being done by grassroots and community-based organisations through sub-grants. The perspective of the EC in relation to the status of democratic development in the Western Balkans is not in complete alignment with the view of CSOs in the region, who feel much more political support is required from the EU if real reform is to happen. A critical issue for the effectiveness of the CSF is that while the framework of an enabling environment is in place, generally, across the region, the reality is much less visible. The effectiveness of the CSF is linked, to a large extent, to the success of building this enabling environment, and in a region that is increasingly polarised this process is more difficult to achieve.

Social inclusion, anti-discrimination, gender, the fight against poverty, youth

The CSF provides CSOs with support in their efforts for sustainable and inclusive growth, through capacity development for individual organisations, as well as with networks at the national and regional level.

The CSF portfolio has a total of 109 projects dealing with the themes categorised as social inclusion (including anti-discrimination, gender, the fight against poverty, and youth). The projects are implemented through 82 action grants, 20 operating grants, six FPAs and one financial contribution to third parties. Serbia has the most national projects dealing with social inclusion issues and Turkey has the least. The portfolio has 25 multi-beneficiary projects, two of which are projects implemented across the whole of the Western Balkans and Turkey.

22. <http://tacso.org>

NETWORK 23

NETWORK 23 & NETWORK 23 +

Contract no. 2014/333780
& 2015/372126

www.merc.org.mk

Network 23²³ is an informal thematic network of 12 CSOs established in 2014, whose objective is to encourage public debate, impact on issues in the area of judiciary and fundamental rights (Chapter 23) in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The network has been established and supported with two consecutive grants by the EUD Skopje to enable the network to grow and develop its impact. The Network is co-lead by the European Policy Institute (EPI) and the Helsinki Committee, Center for Change Management was also a partner in the project grant in the first instance. The specific objectives of the projects include the following: (i) establishing structured monitoring of the implementation of the political agreement and urgent reform priorities in the context of the EU accession process; (ii) further increase the capacity of CSOs to produce quality monitoring reports; (iii) influence the policy-making process through coordinated input on Network 23; and (iv) engaging citizens in reform processes in Chapter 23. The activities of the Network were divided into three clusters: engage, deliver and impact. In order to expand the Network and its influence over national decision-makers, the project included a re-granting scheme and capacity building of local CSOs working on various aspects of rule of law in the country. As part of the project, the network has delivered regular shadow reports on Chapter 23 — Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, policy briefs and monthly monitoring briefs, reflecting on the rule of law situation. Advocacy activities include cooperation with national institutions, policy dialogues and conference to have wider impact on selected stakeholders, as well as presentation of the main findings of the shadow reports in Brussels and initiation of consultations with EU Delegation and DG NEAR. Special focus was invested in activities for targeting media, including social media, and engaging citizens. As a measure of greater impact and sustainability, the project developed MERC, a *unique monitoring and policy advocacy platform*, which includes a web-based application (merc.org.mk), a database enabling categorisation, cross-referencing and elaboration of data related to EU accession of the country in relation to the areas of Chapter 23 (judiciary, anti-corruption policy and fundamental rights). All of these areas contain subareas, which present relevant documentation, policy/analysis and visualisation for each. The Network outputs have contributed to development of the ongoing reform in the rule of law area and the leading organisations are members or observers in the working group established by the Ministry of Justice to tackle the reform.

Overall the project support demonstrated:

- relevant and effective support towards strengthening capacities and thematic networking in rule of law area;
- peer learning from developed, capacitated CSOs, both thematically and methodologically, to smaller, local CSOs, who work on concrete challenges in the rule of law area faced in everyday lives of citizens;
- successful combination of cooperation between the research organisation (EPI as a think-tank) and advocacy organisations (such as the Helsinki Committee) with complementarity of both thematic and methodological knowledge;
- branding and communication of complex issues via easy web tools (MERC) and visualisation that can reach both citizens and media;
- successful advocacy and impact by the Network with national institutions (after change of government), the EU and donors.

The evaluation included a detailed focus on 22 projects in this category, eight of which were multi-beneficiary projects. The projects in the sample cover a wide range of interventions, ranging from social policy development to youth empowerment and employment, from social and economic integration of disadvantaged and highly marginalised groups to promoting community development.

It is worth noting that the applicant organisations of almost all projects are well-established organisations, and structures (networks and platforms) with or without a legal basis. Most have established relationships with the decision-making mechanisms in their respective countries, and have

considerable experience in managing donor funded projects. Their partners, however, include smaller less-experienced, local, grassroots organisations — organisations that would have difficulty accessing funding without a partnership with more experienced and professional CSOs.

Most project have components/activities aimed at building the capacity of CSOs, including focus on:

- conducting situation assessment surveys;
- production of policy recommendations;
- methodologies for improvements to the implementation of national strategies;

23. <http://cep.org.rs/projects/mreza-23/>

- awareness-raising campaigns for the general public;
- advocacy campaigns with government agencies or institutions and with the general public.

The projects funded by the CSF, and implemented by CSOs, have **demonstrated a quality of approach and results**, even within situations that have been impacted by external factors such as the floods disaster in BiH and the attempted coup in Turkey. The ongoing political instability across the Western Balkans, illustrated by the repeated holding of elections, has also impacted on the ability of organisations to implement their actions in a timely manner. In general, however, funded organisations have maintained their plans and programmes, and are demonstrating steady approaches as organisations and as networks/platforms. Sub-granting is regularly visible in the implementation approaches of these projects.

The focus on capacity building in funded projects is **effectively addressing the needs of the CSOs** involved in the projects. Most notable results include:

- an enhanced knowledge base, developed through networking with partner/colleague organisations: this networking with counterparts in other countries is particularly useful in providing organisations with a better understanding of the state of play, across the region, and an opportunity for learning from each other;
- an enhanced capacity to work with communities through networking with grassroots organisations;
- a developed capacity in reporting and policy recommendations, leading to improved quality of evidence-based advocacy activities;
- the strengthened position of CSOs in public policy debate, although this is somewhat dependent on the external political situation in the different countries.

CSF assistance has provided organisations with an **opportunity to produce outputs and outcomes that improve their capacity to engage in active and constructive discussions with public bodies**. Most funded organisations had prior collaboration with the public, and the funding indicates an improved effectiveness in this collaboration — particularly the potential for impact in policy development and the planning of public services. The knowledge and skills acquired, within the frameworks of projects, is likely to be retained and contributes to organisational sustainability in the longer-term, particularly within funded organisations. The current political situation is generally conducive to the participation of civil society in decision-making on social policy issues, but there is no guarantee that this will continue to be the case.

Good governance (including PAR, rule of law, anticorruption)

While good governance is not a specific pillar of EU accession, it — in its broad definition (including human rights, PAR, rule of law and economic governance) — has been seen as a major cross-cutting issue or key pillars of the future cooperation partnerships between the EU and accession countries. The CSF has been seen as an instrument that responds to the growing demand for the inclusion of civil society actors in decision-making processes, including the EU accession process. As such, **the CSF ensures space for the exchange of views with non-state actors, as well as the building of their capacity to provide more quality and comprehensive inputs in policy-making**. Additionally, EU support through the CSF has created the space for technical assistance to governments, assisting them in improving mechanisms in order to meet EU requirements for target governments in creating opportunities for non-state actor participation in policy-making and implementation processes. In this context, the CSF can be understood as a cross-cutting cooperation instrument, complementing the EU relations instruments of political dialogue, conditionality and assistance.

Overall, CSF support and focus on building the capacities of CSOs (both large and small organisations) has had **positive effects on the ability of CSOs to provide more quality inputs in policy processes**, both at the local and national

levels. However, there are variations as per the size of organisations and also country contexts. Grassroots organisations are generally weaker, and their outreach is usually local or regional — hence, their capacities to influence policies are visible at the local level rather than widely. CSF support to networks has brought about positive results in the engagement of different organisations in policy dialogue, while at the same time offering space for peer learning and exchange.

CSF support in the reference period of this evaluation had a strong focus on **strengthening CSO watchdog functions**, and capacities and experiences in monitoring development and implementation

In creating opportunities for non-state actor participation in policy-making and implementation processes, the CSF can be understood as a cross-cutting cooperation instrument, complementing the EU relations instruments of political dialogue, conditionality and assistance.



INTEGRATED CS CONTRIBUTION TO PAR IN WB COUNTRIES

Project WeBER —
Western Balkans Enabling
Project for Civil Society
Monitoring of Public
Administration Reform
(Contract N° 370-038).

www.par-monitor.org.

Implemented by the CS consortium 'Thinks for Europe Network' (TEN) that is led by the European Policy Centre (CEP), the project's overall objective has been to increase the relevance, participation and capacity of CSOs and the media in the Western Balkans, and to advocate for and influence the design and implementation of public administration reform (PAR). Its specific objectives are as follows: i) facilitate civil society monitoring of PAR based on evidence and analysis in the Western Balkans; ii) facilitate sustainable regional- and national-level government-CSO consultation platforms, policy dialogue and quality media reporting on PAR; iii) enable local watchdog and grassroots organisations and media to work on local PAR issues; and iv) improve organisational and financial sustainability and transparency of TEN and its member organisations.

The project demonstrated:

- high relevance confirmed on the ground and by the EU's decision to provide two-phased financial support;
- very good visibility of CEP/TEN upstream and the capacity to mobilise national partners, who in turn relay the action downstream with local partners (financial and non-financial support);
- very interesting actions on defining CS indicators for PAR, which WEBER shares with RESPA and RCC and which is undertaken in cooperation with PAR Line ministries in all Western Balkan countries.

Projects like WEBER are long-haul efforts to bring in structural changes in an institutional environment that has recently become fairly acute and difficult (deterioration of the effectiveness of public administration, etc.).

of policies. For example, support to the projects KULT^{24,25} and Nasa Djeca²⁶ ("Our Children")²⁷ in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of the Network 23²⁸ in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, had strong components of policy-making and monitoring of implementation of relevant policies. Support to media projects has also achieved results in strengthening investigative journalism and media

reporting for various political and policy issues of relevance in the beneficiary countries.

CSF support was also directed at the strengthening of government mechanisms, for consultation and cooperation with civil society, through technical assistance. TA projects focused on developing the capacity of government institutions and civil servants to engage effectively in policy dialogue.

24. Contract number: 310583

25. <http://www.mladi.org/index.php?lang=en>

26. Contract number: 310808

27. <http://nasadjeca.ba>

28. Contract number: 333780

This refers to the dialogue that takes place between government institutions, citizens and CSOs regarding key questions related to the development and implementation of public policies. This support responded to the varying needs of government institutions, exemplified by, but not limited to, the following:

- **Building the awareness of the need for policy dialogue.** Based on the need for civil servants to become aware of, or strengthen their understanding of, the role that CSOs can play in the policy development cycle. Although countries have at least some form of regulations requesting public consultation on draft laws, these are not being implemented or this is limited. TA projects offered space to build the awareness of both civil servants and decision-makers about policy dialogue and what it can bring to their work, through presentations, public debates, round tables, workshops, training events and support for policy dialogue initiatives.
- **Building awareness of CSO work.** Currently, a majority of civil servants have little knowledge of the CSOs operating in their respective sectors, what these CSOs do, or how these CSOs can contribute to their own work. Likewise, CSOs have little understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the civil servants who are relevant to their work. Supported TA projects focused on the establishment or building of communication between the two sectors through communication activities, training, and support to policy dialogue initiatives.
- **Improving communication/access to information.** TA support was provided to public institutions to develop appropriate CSO information systems with all relevant data on registered associations and foundations and their activities. For

example, the CBGI project²⁹ in Bosnia and Herzegovina focused on the development of various information systems that would improve communication and access to information from both interest sides (a CSO information system, a common website of registered associations and foundations in BiH, and a grant management information system, etc.).

- **Building the capacity of civil servants to engage in policy dialogue.** Many civil servants currently do not have the skills and experience to undertake effective CSO engagement. TA support was directed towards increasing capacity through training and through support to policy dialogue initiatives, so that more effective policy dialogue can take place.

The effectiveness of this support has been variable, mainly due to factors beyond the control of TA projects. These variables are linked to turnover of staff, political factors and the absorption capacity of government institutions to take in the tools and knowledge provided. For example, TA in Bosnia and Herzegovina set rather ambitious targets, the achievement of which was hindered by the political situation and the fragmentation of government, as well as an uneven approach to the engagement of civil society in consultations. The Serbia TA followed a well-defined and agreed process for development of the strategy, but due to political factors this was not adopted.

The relevance must be stressed here of multi-beneficiary projects such as WEBER, which represent long-haul efforts to bring in structural changes in an institutional environment that has recently become fairly acute and difficult (deterioration of the effectiveness of public administration, etc.). For this reason, it is necessary to ensure that EU support can be planned over a sufficiently long period in order for these efforts to reach more sustainable goals.

29. Contract number: 307716



**CAPACITY
BUILDING OF
GOVERNMENT
INSTITUTIONS TO
ENGAGE IN POLICY
DIALOGUE
WITH CIVIL
SOCIETY IN BIH³⁰**

Contract no. 2012/1307-716
www.facebook.com/
CGBlinBiH/

Implemented by Kronauer Consulting in consortium with Eptisa, the project's overall objective has been to provide capacity building of the state, entities and district Brcko governments in development of institutional mechanisms for cooperation and more fruitful dialogue with civil society. Its specific objectives were as follows: i) support indigenous movement towards the adoption of a state government policy on cooperation with CSOs; ii) build the capacity of institutional mechanisms for government cooperation with CSOs; iii) provide for timely, proper and consistent implementation of new laws and policies through training for civil servants; iv) assist the identified governments in improvement of budgetary policies related to civil society; and v) assist with the implementation of the action plan after the strategy for development of more enabling environments for civil society development in BiH. The project under review was part of the longer-term sequenced support to the BiH government. In its totality, the project demonstrated:

- Its high relevance to the needs of the BiH government at all levels and also to civil society, as confirmed by the EU's decision to provide multiple-phase financial support;
- Its high effectiveness, particularly in terms of assisting government to establish the online CSO register and e-consultation tools; supporting dialogue between government and civil society in legislative/policy development; support for an institutional mechanism of collaboration between governmental and non-governmental sectors;
- sustainability prospects for established mechanisms (such as registers and online consultation tools) that are already in use and appreciated by stakeholders from civil society and government as confirmed in interviews.

Projects like CBGI contribute to structuring institutional mechanisms and enabling an environment for civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as linking different governance levels through one system that is useful for all.

Media and freedom of expression

The European Commission considers freedom of expression a basic human right (Article 49 of the Treaty of Lisbon) and a key indicator of a country's readiness to become part of the EU. It implies a commitment to democracy, good governance and political accountability.³¹ Political interference in the media, exacerbated by the economic crisis, leads to media concentration and various forms of harassment, including violence against journalists. As a complex and composite challenge, targeting identified challenges goes beyond transposition of EU rules: it calls for behavioural and cultural change in politics, the judiciary and media.³²

Since 2011, DG NEAR has organised high-level *Speak Up* conferences, with relevant media, government and international stakeholders, to discuss and agree needed progress on the media and freedom of expression. Similarly, for the civil society sector, where no strict EU *acquis* exists, it has developed the Guidelines for EU Support to Media Freedom

and Media Integrity (Media Guidelines), with a broad inclusion of stakeholders intended to provide consistency between policy support and assistance at both multi-country and national level.³³ The Media Guidelines focus on three concrete issues: an enabling environment for free expression and media; media outlets assuming responsibility for improved internal governance and production; and increasing capacity and representativeness of journalist professional organisations.

The EU support is composed of provision of legal assistance and guidance in drafting media legislation, thoroughly monitoring the policies of candidate countries and potential candidates in this field, and the provision of financial support through IPA programmes, including (but not exclusively) via the CSF. Within the CSF, the support has been focused on issues concerning media workers, journalists and improving standards of work, media and the quality (including ethics) of journalism. The approach has been implemented via both

30. <http://www.eptisasee.com/capacity-building-of-government-institutions-to-engage-in-a-policy-dialogue-with-civil-society/>

31. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/node/58_lv

32. Ibid.

33. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/press_corner/elarg-guidelines-for-media-freedom-and-integrity_210214.pdf



MEDIA

In this challenging and complex area, the CSF is able to cover only a smaller part of the needs in terms of media and freedom of expression. At the regional/ multi-beneficiary level, media support was directed to alignment with international standards in the media sector, media freedom and integrity, reform of public broadcasters, and prizes for investigative journalism.

Within the CSF more widely, the support has been focused on issues concerning media workers, journalists and improving standards of work, media and the quality (including ethics) of journalism.

regional/multi-beneficiary and country projects, some of which are implemented by international organisations such as UNESCO or the Council of Europe. In terms of the country approach, only several EUDs targeted media and freedom of expression with specific calls for proposals. ***In this challenging and complex area, the CSF is able to cover only a small part of the needs in terms of media and freedom of expression.*** At the regional/multi-beneficiary level, media support was directed to alignment with international standards in the media sector, media freedom and integrity, reform of public broadcasters, and prizes

for investigative journalism. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, support to fundamental freedoms and media integrity was planned, while in Montenegro the focus was on fostering conditions for independence and professionalism in media, including for the development of investigating journalism and higher ethical standards. There were 46 projects targeted at media and freedom of expression implemented in the evaluation period. Thirty-five (35) were implemented as action grants, one as a framework partnership agreement, two as operating grants, one as a TA, and four with financing to third parties. Eight (8) projects were selected as part of the sample, including three multi-beneficiary or regional projects and one in Albania, one in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and three in Serbia.

The relevance of supported projects is high, as they have mainly (although not all, or to an equal extent in all countries) addressed the identified changes being faced in the media and freedom of expression area by media stakeholders and civil society. One of the main characteristics of the assistance is that it is reactive to the worsening conditions, rather than geared towards improving structured defects and fine-tuning of the situation in this area.

Efficiency is satisfactory, but specific circumstances of the media sub-sector and its challenges need to be taken into consideration when designing the instruments. For example, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia one of the main challenges is that most media operators are managing their grants through a non-profit entity, rather than employing the non-profit cost principle (e.g. fund the activities via media-for-profit operator with clear demonstration that a sub-grant is used for non-profit purposes).

Effectiveness is also satisfactory, with media actors being inventive in utilising the CSF in addressing both societal (e.g. inter-communal and inter-ethnic relations between Serbia and Kosovo) and media-specific issues. Still, not all areas and results of the *Media Guidelines*, as a strategic results-oriented framework, are being equally addressed, hindering the overall effectiveness of media support within CSF.



*Where an international organisation leads, it should involve local media partners from the design stage to ensure best results. An increase in the overall portion of assistance to media and freedom of expression from the current 12% in the CSF would be useful in achieving some of the intended results framed in the **Media Guidelines**.*

Impact is strongly linked to political will and the external media environment, and can be expected in countries only with a stable political situation, functioning democratic institutions and over the longer-term.

At this particular time, **sustainability** is the key issue of concern for media projects to have lasting effects in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Longer-term grants and sequencing of support to the current, successful regional/multi-beneficiary projects, as well as country projects, is key. Projects led by local media actors or networks should be prioritised.

Reconciliation and cultural dialogue

Dialogue and reconciliation have been amongst the key priorities of the CSF, throughout its past period of implementation, with a particular focus on reconciliation and inter-ethnic dialogue, prevention of radicalisation and cultural heritage. In April 2012, the thematic evaluation covering the EU's support to civil society in the IPA region underlined the need for the EU to support stronger participation of civil society in territorial and socioeconomic development of IPA countries (IPA Component II,

CBC, sector programmes introduced under IPA, etc.), and of their role **as driving forces for further regional integration, including reconciliation** (e.g. thematic support to regional CS networks, etc.).³⁴

The CSF has supported a total of 32 projects in this thematic field, representing 9 % of the total number of supported projects, for an overall budget of over EUR 7.5 million (average grant budget per project EUR 240 000 euros). Of these 32 projects, 13 have been multi-beneficiary (more than one country) and IPA-wide (all IPA countries), with a total budget of EUR 4 032 116 euros (EUR 310 163 euros per project), some of which cover cooperation between Serbia and Kosovo stakeholders, and 19 projects were national, with a total budget of EUR 3 650 162 (EUR 192 137 per project), out of which 11 were in Serbia.

None of these projects focus on the crucial issue of cultural heritage per se, which is still very often a leverage for fuelling inter-ethnic and inter-cultural intolerance — in this context, such a focus is worth considering. Only one project has been funded in this field in BiH, a country with a still conflicted inter-ethnic and inter-cultural context, but there have been five projects in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The evaluation sample comprises five projects in this thematic field: three action grants (one each in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia) and two multi-beneficiary operating grants. Reconciliation remains a crucial issue and challenge in the WB region, in particular amongst the former-Yugoslavia countries, and the current support to civil society is already a significant contribution, paving the way for a longer and if possible more structured effort.

Environment, climate action, energy and agriculture

European environment policy rests on the principles of precaution, prevention and rectifying pollution at source, and on the 'polluter pays' principle. Multi-annual environmental action programmes set the framework for future action in all areas of environmental policy. These are embedded in horizontal strategies and taken into account in

34. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/financial_assistance/phare/evaluation/2012_eval_cs_final_report_2.pdf

international environmental negotiations.³⁵ The implementation of environment policies is crucial. Integrating environmental concerns into other EU policy areas has become an important concept in European politics (now enshrined in Article 11 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union). In recent years, environmental policy integration has made significant progress, for instance in energy policy, as reflected in the parallel development of the EU's climate and energy package, or in the roadmap for moving to a competitive low-carbon economy by 2050, which looks at cost-efficient ways to make the European economy more climate-friendly and less energy-consuming.

While there is a visible environmental presence across the CSF, it is not a key focus of the programme, given its focus more directly on civil society per se. The CSF portfolio has a total of 24 projects dealing with the theme of environment, energy and agriculture, 16 of which are implemented through action grants and eight through FPAs. All countries except Turkey are implementing action grants (from one in Kosovo to five in BiH). The number of multi-beneficiary projects is 10, two of which are implemented across the whole of the Western Balkans and Turkey. The evaluation looked at three multi-beneficiary projects, one each in BiH, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: all but one are implemented through action grants.

The projects are well-focused in the context of EU policies, and national strategies, and there is a high level of relevance to the needs of CSOs working in the field of environment. All projects are designed to build the capacity of CSOs, through networking, training, sub-granting and in-kind support to partners, and then have a focus on activities that are intended to improve cooperation with the public institutions and to enhance the participation of CSOs in policy development, legislative improvements and/or enforcement of relevant legislation. Two projects in the sample dealt with energy issues; one multi-beneficiary project (South

Eastern Europe Sustainably Energy Policies (SEE-SEP³⁶)), the other implemented in BiH on energy efficiency (EFFECTive (Environment-Friendly Energy Coalition Team) Action³⁷).³⁸ One project in Albania dealt with 2020 Climate and Energy Policies with a focus on environmental impact assessment (EIA) and sustainable environmental assessment (SEA); EIA and SEA being the focus of a multi-beneficiary project. These capacity-building approaches develop visible improvements in knowledge and skills, and contribute to civil society approaches; but, as with all component subjects of the CSF, across the whole of the programme, support from government, and the (lack of) willingness on the part of government to engage directly with civil society is a critical aspect of all funded projects. Generally, the support of national governments to include CSOs in decision-making processes is only given reluctantly, and project delivery and outcomes are impacted by this reluctance. This is not the case with initiatives in and collaboration with municipal authorities, as well as collaboration with technical agencies, where a more constructive relationship is apparent.

There are strong arguments, in terms of the need for a focus on environmental initiatives and the role of civil society in framing the agenda and approaches of national governments in relation to the environment, to give more specific consideration to a focus on the environment in calls for proposals at both the national and regional levels. There is a real need for greater focus within national governments (agencies) for policy development in line with EU frameworks, coupled with the institutionalising of good governance practices and the monitoring of environmental indicators to guide policy development. All of this requires systematic mechanisms and longitudinal data sets — areas of support and development where national and regional project initiatives can provide direct assistance to government. In this context, public CSO partnerships should be a specific focus of funded initiatives.

35. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuld=FTU_5.4.1.html

36. Contract number: 307460.

37. Contract number: 310826.

38. <http://energis.ba/efective-environment-friendly-energy-coalition-team-action/?lang=en>



REC
Shqipëri

**ACHIEVE —
ALBANIAN CIVIL
SOCIETY FOR
A EUROPEAN
ENVIRONMENT**³⁹

ACHIEVE addresses the needs of the civil society development and environment sector for a stronger involvement of ECSOs in two directions that are important for the accession process:

- CSO participation in policy development and in legislative harmonisation with EU acquis.
- Enforcement of environmental law.

From a civil society development level, it addresses the concerns raised in the National Plan for European Integration 2014-2020 on the contribution of CSOs in Parliament's consultation process. It is in line with the renewed impetus of the Government of Albania (GoA) and the civic sector on improving joint dialogue. From an environmental perspective, the project feeds in to the MoE's objectives of the Environment Inter-Sector Strategy 2015-2020, relevant to Chapter 27 of EU acquis. By targeting medium and grassroots ECSOs and environment-related public institutions, the project engages with a well-defined range of beneficiaries and stakeholders as key agents of change.

The ACHIEVE implementation arrangement represents a unique approach, adopted by the EUD with regard to CSO support in Albania. The project is implemented as a grant contract by a local organisation that will distribute at least 70 % of the contract value through sub-granting using a cascade approach. The project is implemented by REC, which has established a sub-granting mechanism fine-tuned with beneficiaries' capacities by envisaging two distinctive grant lines, one for consolidated ECSOs and the other for less-experienced small ECSOs. Within the same spirit, the eligibility and applications criteria are more flexible and easier to comply with for the second group of ECSOs

The project is paving the way to creating bridges of collaboration for ECSOs in joint design policy interventions with public institutions, and in having a greater voice in spotting environmental law violations. Consequently, the project positively affects both the civil society development and environmental sectors. An additional added value of this project will be increased EC visibility in local communities, as it will further emphasise EUD's efforts in assisting the environment sector. In addition to sub-grants, the project is enabling ECSOs to undertake future exercises for monitoring the implementation of environmental legislation through capacity-building assistance. The summer school for young ECSO members or junior members of consolidated ECSOs is a praiseworthy initiative that can lay the basis for future interventions. REC is orienting existing groups of ECSOs according to their fields of expertise and is not encouraging the establishment of new and redundant institutional networks. These mechanisms and approaches, combined with capacity-building activities, give ECSOs the necessary instruments and mind-sets to undertake combined actions in the medium term.

Overall the project support demonstrated the following:

- At least 60 % of Albanian ECSOs have increased capacities in relation to waste management, nature protection air quality and horizontal legislation, aligned with EU acquis and Albanian harmonised legislation.
- At least four groups of ECSOs, one each for air quality, nature protection, waste management and horizontal legislation, will work at the national level on a programme to improve the rule of law, fight corruption and reduce environmental pollution in these areas.
- ECSOs are actively involved in legislative reform, and in support of approximation process with the EU (especially related to Chapter 27).
- At least 60 % of ECSOs participating in the programme are involved in the promotion of regional and EU values and initiatives, in the areas related to environment and climate change.

Contract number 2014/353-791
www.rec.org/project-detail.php?id=205

INSTRUMENT ANALYSIS

This section provides a focused discussion on each of the assessed financial instruments used by the CSF. Some introductory comments are necessary. The ToR defined five 'implementing instruments' of the CSF. As detailed in the Introduction

above, and discussed in detail below, these five 'instruments' have been used in the analysis of the evaluation. However, the actual structure of the CSF, as defined in the database, does not use these five 'instruments' — there is a wide range of definitions of the 'nature' of a grant and definitions of 'contract type.' During the inception phase,

39. <http://www.rec.org/project-detail.php?id=205>

the evaluation team analysed the CSF portfolio of projects to develop a sound methodology for the selection of projects for detailed analysis. Included in this analysis/methodology was a definition of each project in the portfolio against a structured thematic and a structured instrument set of criteria. The discussion below follows the analysis of instruments as defined during inception.

In summary, as it is relevant here, in the analysis of instruments the CSF must develop a 'structured data' approach to all aspects of theme, instrument, geography and contract type. This is the only way an effective approach to the analysis of the CSF can be organised, and the only way to ensure effective reporting. This is an issue of the structure and content of the CSF database, as discussed both above, and in detail in *Annex 14 — The Database*.

The data from the survey supports this, as **79.52 % of respondents are supportive of the CSFs contribution** to easier cooperation with other CSOs.

SCORE	COUNT	PERCENTAGE	SUMMARY
1	5	2.01 %	5.62 %
2	9	3.61 %	
3	37	14.86 %	14.86 %
4	87	34.94 %	79.52 %
5	111	44.58 %	
TOTAL	249	100 %	100 %

According to survey responses, the different CSF modalities **allowed for piloting and developing new methodologies** for monitoring policies in our thematic area, and **63.45 %** of respondents supported this view.

SCORE	COUNT	PERCENTAGE	SUMMARY
1	7	2.81 %	15.26 %
2	31	12.45 %	
3	53	21.29 %	21.29 %
4	87	34.94 %	63.45 %
5	71	28.51 %	
TOTAL	249	100 %	100 %

Survey respondents indicated that the different CSF modalities have contributed to a **better cooperation with a country's authorities** (national and local). Over half of the respondents support this view to a high degree, and one-third of respondents are somewhat supportive.

SCORE	COUNT	PERCENTAGE	SUMMARY
1	6	2.41 %	13.65 %
2	28	11.24 %	
3	81	32.53 %	32.53 %
4	77	30.92 %	53.82 %
5	57	22.89 %	
TOTAL	249	100 %	100 %

The different CSF modalities **allowed for the development of thematic networks** and partnerships for long-term, sectoral influence on policies and their implementation, and **75 %** of survey respondents agreed that the modalities have allowed for development of thematic networks.

SCORE	COUNT	PERCENTAGE	SUMMARY
1	4	1.61 %	6.4 %
2	12	4.82 %	
3	46	18.47 %	18.47 %
4	99	39.76 %	75.10 %
5	88	35.34 %	
TOTAL	249	100 %	100 %

There is an initial summary of responses to the stakeholder survey, followed by a discussion of each instrument. The CSF approach of having a variety of funding instruments was one focus of the stakeholder survey, in which organisations were asked to *rank the ways* in which the different CSF modalities (action grants, FPAs, operating grants, funding to third parties and technical assistance) have contributed to achieving CSF aims and objectives. The ranking was carried out on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, and four ways in which the modalities contributed were addressed. The CSF modalities were very successful in gearing CSOs/beneficiaries towards easier cooperation with other CSOs.

Balance and effectiveness of instruments

The balance of instruments being used, both in EUDs and at DG NEAR, changes over time, although there is a significant focus, particularly with EUDs, on short-, medium- and long-term action grants. Feedback across the region, through the survey and in interviews, indicates support for both types of instruments and how they are being used to contribute to the CSF's desired outcomes. The growth in grant timeframes is strongly supported, meaning a higher visibility of longer-term action grants, FPAs and operating grants, and in some ways longer-term action grants and FPAs are almost the same instrument. While there is expressed support for a greater emphasis on operating grants, it is also understood that the nature of the demand, compared to available resources, does not allow such a focus.

What is as important as the instruments themselves, in terms of delivering effective outcomes, is the apparent willingness of EUDs and DG NEAR to be open to which instrument is appropriate for a particular call, and to be flexible within the frameworks of specific calls for proposals to have a real focus on using the CSF as a tool for the growth of civil society. Generally speaking then, the balance of instruments is appropriate in that it changes and given that the focus of EUDs and DG NEAR is to consistently find appropriate measures to address needs and priorities.

One mentioned area of concern is when an EUD moves too strongly in one direction in terms of

types of instruments in use. While not strictly speaking an 'instrument,' in the context of the ToR, sub-granting (through FPAs or action grants) has become a significant focus of calls for proposals. It has also become a very effective and efficient use of CSF funding. The expressed concern is that a move too far in the direction of a single type of granting, for too long a period, is likely to have a negative impact on CSOs that are not able to 'find themselves' in this type of calls for proposals. The amount of data and feedback from the field research cannot be definitive, but it does allow the issue to be flagged, so that EUDs and DG NEAR can be aware and make decisions to mitigate to potential impacts. As indicated above, what is important on the part of EUDs and DG NEAR, is to maintain the current method, which has a flexible approach to type of instrument, time frame, size and focus, as a way of ensuring that opportunities for assistance are provided to all organisations over time.

Short-, medium- and long-term action grants: single country and multi-beneficiary

As is seen throughout this report, the CSF uses a mix of funding instruments to respond to different types of CSOs, the needs of beneficiary organisations and country and regional contexts. It does this in a relatively flexible, transparent and generally efficient way, using a results-focused approach. In developing its mix of instruments, the EC framed a number of priorities, each of which has an impact on the instruments overall, and on the action grant instrument. These priorities include a focus on longer-term grant contracts, moving away from project-based support to a more flexible approach, fostering partnerships and coalition-building, and a greater outreach to grassroots and community-based organisations.

Within this context, the mix of instruments includes short-, medium- and long-term action grants, which are in fact the core instrument across EUDs and DG NEAR. In total, 272 of the 362 grant contracts from the period under review are this type of instrument, and at such a large percentage of the overall grant contracts, action grants are clearly visible in the national programmes of all EUDs and in the regional/multi-beneficiary programmes of DG NEAR. Indeed, in Serbia 81 out of 84 grant contracts are action grants, while in the former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia, all but one contract are action grants. Action grants with CSOs demonstrate a high level of effectiveness.

Across all geographical components of the CSF, and in line with the EC priorities stated above, there has been a steady growth in the potential length of grants, which has been both noted and supported by civil society and public authorities. While true across the CSF, regional initiatives in particular require a longer timeframe, specifically in those instances where the thematic area or the network itself are new, or where the intent is to impact policy frameworks or practice. With these types of initiatives, the heavier emphasis on long-term action grants and on other longer-term instruments is demonstrably effective. This lengthening of grant timeframes has had a positive impact on potential for sustainability. The impact of a '2 plus 2' or a '3 plus 3' approach is relevant to a number of areas of the evaluation, and the positive benefits of increasing timeframes is visible. DG NEAR and EUDs would benefit from sharing the lessons learned from the varying approaches taken across the CSF to the framing and implementation of action grants.

While these longer timeframes have been an important contributor to results and sustainability, they are not the only key to the future. Organisations must also improve the diversity of their funding sources. It is understood that it is difficult to find a balance between areas of need and types of grants. The reality is that CSF funding is project-based, and for a fixed time frame, and that there is a need to address the full range of requirements through a diversity of modalities.

Framework partnership agreements (FPAs)

All framework partnership agreements in the CSF are implemented as regional/multi-beneficiary projects. There are 33 project, which cover all the thematic areas of the CSF: 10 projects on good governance (including PAR, rule of law, anti-corruption); five

projects on civil society development and local democracy; six projects on social inclusion, anti-discrimination, gender and the fight against poverty, youth; eight projects on the environment, climate action, energy and agriculture; two projects on the media and freedom of expression; and two projects on reconciliation and cultural dialogue.

Of upmost relevance in discussing the importance of the FPAs, is how this funding modality is linked-in to the range of comments throughout this report about the importance and effectiveness of regional networks. A number of examples are noted, although these are not the only FPAs working effectively: SIGN (the Southeast European Indigenous Grant-makers Network)⁴⁰ — which is also discussed in the sub-granting section, below; PERSON (Partnership to Ensure Reform of Supports in Other Nations)^{41,42} and the Balkan Civil Society Acquis — Strengthening the Advocacy and Monitoring Potential and Capacities of CSOs^{43,44}

Section 4.4.1 looks in particular detail at these regional networks, and their importance as a component of the CSF and to CSF outcomes. The Balkans needs to be developed regionally, due to its cultural frameworks and historical experiences, and there are two key reasons for support to regional networking: discrepancy in the development of civil society in the region through *peer-to-peer* capacity building and addressing the divisions that exist in the countries of the region that hamper all ongoing and general development.

Operating grants

Operating grants, also called functioning grants, finance the operating expenditure, or the permanent, usual and regular (core) activities of organisations. The CSF portfolio being evaluated has a total of 32 operational grant contracts,⁴⁵ 26 of which are multi-beneficiary projects, including seven implemented across the whole of the Western Balkans and Turkey. The remaining six projects under this instrument were implemented in Kosovo. A TA proj-

40. Contract Number: 351410

41. Contract Number: 351686

42. <http://www.eu-person.com/about-us/>

43. Contract Number: 351412

44. <https://philanthropyinfocus.org/2013/07/17/balkan-civil-society-acquis-strengthening-the-advocacy-and-monitoring-potential-and-capacities-csos-project/>

45. Some of these 32 contracts are funding for different years/time periods for the same project.

ect in Turkey entitled 'Sivil Düşün' provided in-kind support, which was treated as a functioning grant during its first implementation phase between 2012 and 2016.

The evaluation survey included four multi-beneficiary projects and one project from Kosovo. Of these five projects, two were on reconciliation and peace-building: a multi-beneficiary project to establish a youth exchange programme and a project in Kosovo to build capacity at the grassroots level. The thematic field of the other three projects were capacity development of civil society, more specifically the trade unions, good governance and the rule of law and social inclusion.

The relevance of operational grants, in general, is high in terms of responding to the needs of CSOs. Many CSOs are highly dependent on assistance to ensure their financial sustainability, which usually boils down to paying their rent and staff while trying to implement their activities in line with their institutional mandates. Some organisations indicate that if it was not for the support and the CSF they would not have been able to establish their organisation. This is especially true for organisations representing marginalised and vulnerable groups with little chances to receive funding from other sources. Operational grants allow organisations to focus on their strategies and action plans while leaving room to implement activities to strengthen their networks and ties with their constituencies.

The effectiveness of interventions funded through operating grants is mixed. In terms of partnerships/networks, an operating grant provides room for organisations to build on their own capacity and to assist the capacity building of their partners, and to ensure a common ground for further work by organisations with similar goals. It is worth noting that some projects have managed to generate additional funding, either through lead organisations or through partners with independent legal identities. Some have also developed monitoring mechanisms. In Kosovo, this

financial assistance has contributed to an increase of the participation of CSOs in policy-making, and a better operating environment and has helped CSOs in some of crucial sectors such as media, LGBTI and community-relations. Effective use of an operating grant builds trust in relations between the donor and the beneficiary.

Direct grants to international organisations and CSOs

In its analysis in this categorisation during the inception phase, the evaluation team focused on a group of nine projects that are in fact direct grants, and not specifically related to 're-granting schemes.' So the focus of the analysis below is in line with this categorisation.

Article 190 of the Rules of Application⁴⁶ lists the exceptions to calls for proposals (Article 128 of the Financial Regulation) as follows:

1. Grants may be awarded without a call for proposals only in the following cases:
 - a. for the purposes of humanitarian aid and civil protection operations or for crisis management aid within the meaning of paragraph 2;
 - b. in other exceptional and duly substantiated emergencies;
 - c. to bodies with a de jure or de facto monopoly, duly substantiated in the award decision;
 - d. to bodies identified by a basic act, within the meaning of Article 54 of the Financial Regulation, as beneficiaries of a grant or to bodies designated by the Member States, under their responsibility, where those Member States are identified by a basic act as beneficiaries of a grant;
 - e. in the case of research and technological development, to bodies identified in the work programme referred to in Article 128 of the Financial Regulation, where the basic act expressly provides for that possibility,

46. COMMISSION DELEGATED REGULATION (EU) No 1268/2012 of 29 October 2012 on the rules of application of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union

- and on condition that the project does not fall under the scope of a call for proposals;
- f. for actions with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative power, on condition that the actions concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals;
 - g. the cases referred to in point (f) of the first subparagraph shall be duly substantiated in the award decision.
2. Crisis situations in third countries shall be understood as situations of immediate or imminent danger threatening to escalate into armed conflict or to destabilise the country. Crisis situations shall also be understood as situations caused by natural disasters, manmade crisis such as wars and other conflicts or extraordinary circumstances having comparable effects related *inter alia* to climate change, environmental degradation, privation of access to energy and natural resources or extreme poverty.

The CSF data base has nine projects implemented through financial assistance to third parties in line with clauses c, f and e, above.

The project implemented through financial assistance to third parties included three multi-beneficiary projects, three projects implemented across the whole of the Western Balkans and Turkey, two projects in BiH and one project in Serbia. The assistance was given to UNDP (3) UNESCO (2), the Council of Europe, the Humanitarian Law Centre and 'Savet Za Stampu' (Press Council), Serbia. Four projects focused on media freedom of expression, two projects on civil society development, one project on reconciliation, one project on good governance and local democracy and one project on social inclusion. The budgets for the projects ranged from 200,000 euros to 2500,000 euros, all of which had re-granting schemes.

The sample selected for the mid-term evaluation contained two projects under this category:

'Reinforcement of Local Democracy,' implemented by UNDP in BiH, and a multi-beneficiary project, 'Media Accountability in South East Europe.' Both projects are relevant to the overall objectives of CSF — one with a highly inclusive approach to reaching out to grassroots organisations in rural areas. Both projects require state-of-the-art approaches inherent in their designs. However both projects have experienced challenges, one due to a low level of participatory culture in BiH and one due to the critical nature of the theme: media and freedom of expression.

The results are mixed; impact prospects depend on the socio-political environment and can only be assessed in the longer run. Stakeholder ownership is high for both projects, but sustainability will depend on the socio-political environment as well as continued funding.

Technical Assistance (TACSO + TA for Governments/EC), including regional and national events and study visits (P2P programme)

Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations (TACSO)⁴⁷

The EU has addressed the weaknesses of CSO capacity in the Western Balkans and Turkey through the EU-funded action 'Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations' (TACSO), which commenced operations in August 2009. The second phase of the action, which started in September 2013, offered technical assistance to civil society in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. This second phase lasted four years, and ended in November 2017. TACSO's general objective was to strengthen the overall capacity and accountability of CSOs within IPA beneficiaries, to guarantee the quality of services of CSOs, and a sustainable role for CSOs in the democratic process. Services provided by TACSO included the following: the organisation of events; implementation of a variety of training programmes; implementation of the People to People programme (P2P); help-desk services; visibility actions to inform citizens about the contributions to society made by civil society; information sharing through the TACSO web page; and other similar activities. Local advisory groups

47. <http://tacso.org>

(LAGs), consisting of representatives of civil society, donors, governments, media and the private sector, have been established in all beneficiary countries in order to provide guidance to TACSO at the national level. In order to ensure the continued delivery of TACSO services at the national level beyond November 2017, when current project support ended, national resource centres were identified in all beneficiary countries and will assume responsibility for the delivery of services offered by TACSO, being funded separately from national CSF budgets.

Stakeholders from both civil society and government agree that TACSO has been a relevant and needed support, particularly for capacity building, empowerment of organisations and exchange processes. For example, TACSO BiH had a strong focus on grassroots organisations and their capacity building. However, there is an apparently uneven approach from national TACSO offices and/or national resource centres, stemming from different approaches to capacity building, which has affected the extent to which comparable or cumulative results across the civil society spectrum in the Western Balkans and Turkey can be achieved. On the one hand, the ‘individual,’ country-specific approach of national TACSO offices and resource centres has been supported by key informants in individual countries, and is seen as needs-driven. On the other hand, this approach has sometimes diminished the regional perspective of the project. TACSO balanced this by organising a range of regional events and training initiatives and having a strong internal coordination between the TACSO regional office and national resource centres.

The future of technical assistance to civil society is, apparently, within a decidedly national framework, with resource centres focused on capacity building and, given current discussions about and designs for ‘TACSO 3,’ a support function in terms of coordination, exchange (P2P, regional thematic conferences) and guidelines-monitoring only at the regional level. As indicated above, a national focus for TACSO support can emphasise the needs of CSOs in any given country, but the regional context should not be lost as it gives the CSF its special weight, and its special relevance. As discussed throughout this report, the particular nature of the Western Balkans is

that its history and development, and the similarities in situation across beneficiary countries, demand a regional approach to ensure the effectiveness and coherence of approaches. As also discussed, where a lack of coherence has been visible, between national programmes (i.e. between EUDs) and between national programmes and regional/multi-beneficiary initiatives (i.e. between DG NEAR and EUDs), the effectiveness and potential for impact are lessened. The loss of a regional perspective in TACSO 3, which would be most visible in the disconnection of the national resource centres from regional perspectives, strategies and approaches, might threaten to diminish the overall effectiveness of the TACSO approach. A TACSO regional framework that is not linked *structurally* to the national resource centres can cause a situation in which the regional TACSO becomes separated strategically from the resource centres, to the detriment of both, and to the detriment of the CSF. There is potential for diminishing the strength of the original TACSO structure, which included the joint regional and national focus and the inherent inter-linkages; the focus on adapting national contexts within a regional framework — with an underlying commitment to a regional context and approach; and the bringing on board of all relevant stakeholders, with a focus on both civil society and government.

Sub-granting

Sub-granting has become a significant component of the funding instruments of the CSF for both EUDs across the region and for DG NEAR. Sub-granting is accepted as an effective tool to reach out to — and built capacity amongst — grassroots organisations, community-based organisations and newly established, small CSOs. Many donors refrain from supporting small organisations, because of the difficulty of financial management, particularly the high administrative investments in overseeing a large number of contracts. The sub-granting approach of the CSF is intended to address this difficulty, and does so effectively, although there are a number of complexities, and variations to approach, that are discussed below.

Variations across EUDs — There is a wide variety of approaches to sub-granting instruments across EUDs and DG NEAR. The variations include:



THE SIGN FOR SUSTAINABILITY METHODOLOGY⁴⁸

Contract N° 360-172
www.sign-network.org/activities/2014-06-04-21-49-22

One example of a particularly effective approach to sub-granting is the SIGN for Sustainability project, delivered regionally by the TRAG Foundation in Serbia, which developed and implemented a methodology that is demonstrably replicable by other organisations/projects, across the region.

The key point of the SIGN For Sustainability methodology is that it shows CSOs can survive on local resources, and that that CSO support can, to a large extent, come from local resources. This is the SIGN For Sustainability Methodology:

- An open a call for organisations. SIGN ultimately matches the grantee CSO's own fundraising from *corporate and private donors*. Other types of donations are encouraged, but these are not matched. Matched contribution are only a cash contribution — nothing in-kind.
- SIGN supported between 10 and 12 organisations with training for each open call. There are three modules in the SIGN training component, which cover a number of subjects. It is expected that by the end of the training, grantee CSOs will 'pretty much have their processes figured out.' Subject include:
 - a. strategic planning
 - b. fundraising principles, techniques, approaches
 - c. the CSO's 'idea' about what they will do
 - d. communication and outreach
 - e. CSO fundraising strategies for both individuals and businesses
 - f. what is out there (a map of their context; who can open doors; who can give them what)
 - g. practice (actual practice in fundraising)
 - h. their fundraising plan (detailed).
- At this point, SIGN gives grantees EUR 1000 to implement their fundraising campaign, with 6–7 months to conduct their campaign.
- When they get their money in, their donation documentation is analysed, and SIGN matches the donations that fit the criteria.
- In the first phase, funded organisations raised about EUR 90 000 and in the second phase EUR 110 000.

- differences in the importance of sub-granting to national programmes (from being the only type of instrument to being considered only a very small part of the CSF programme);
- differences in the overall size of the grants that will then be provided to sub-grantees;
- differences in the percentage of the overall grant that can be retained by the granting organisation;
- differences in the length of sub-grants;
- differences in how granting organisations approach (and are allowed to approach) the granting process, as well as management and administration of the sub-grants.

There would be value to EUDs, as well as for CSOs, if there was a greater sharing of approaches, processes and results, and the lessons learned from these, across EUDs and with DG NEAR.

Impact on granting organisations — Sub-granting processes can be a significant burden on the granting organisation, particularly where they do not have prior experience or established methods to assist the sub-grantees, or if re-granting is not a focus for the organisation. Re-granting was never the focus of most organisations, and is on top of their other work, or takes away from the original and ongoing reasons for becoming established. Grant managers simply must give significant focus, and expend significant time and energy on overseeing sub-grantees.

48. <https://www.tragfondacija.org/pages/sr/naslovna.php>



SUB-GRANTING SCHEME FOR GRASSROOTS CSOS ADVOCACY INITIATIVES IN KOSOVO⁴⁹

Contract no. 2015/371879
www.kcsfoundation.org/
eugrants/en/home

The sub-granting scheme is managed by the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF), an experienced local grant-making organisation, but for which the scheme was the first experience in reaching out to grassroots advocacy initiatives all over Kosovo. The scheme's objectives are as follows: (i) offer support, through establishment of the sub-granting scheme, for participation of grassroots CSOs in decision-making and policy processes; (ii) generate advocacy initiatives from grassroots CSOs on issues of their interest, at local and central level, through the provided financial support; and (iii) strengthen capacities for effective advocacy and project management of the awarded grassroots CSOs. The project planned EUR 486 000 funds for grants, or 27 grants per EUR 18 000, but based on the first call, the budget ceiling has been lowered to EUR 12 000, which is more appropriate for grassroots organisations in Kosovo. The main strength of the project is that it did not dictate the thematic priorities for grassroots organisations seeking sub-grants, but rather allowed for bottom-up articulation and definition of thematic priorities for advocacy at local level by supported grassroots organisations. However, the capacities of such organisations (in some cases even informal initiatives) is very low, so much more effort is invested into supporting the development of projects: guiding and coaching the organisation in combination with monitoring to enable them to grow and develop capacity to manage the grants and projects.

Key lessons learned:

- Higher than appropriate budget ceiling for individual sub-grants (planned EUR 18 000 per grant; realised that grassroots organisations being targeted do not have capacity to manage such amounts; in second call lowered to EUR 12 000 per grant).
- Target (eligibility) conditions to grassroots organisations (the issue of how to define grassroots organisations) and application procedure (need for easier, simpler approach).
- Extensive and basic capacity-building support to sub-grantees and monitoring support (has been enhanced after ROM).
- Definition of success and targets (expectation level of grassroots organisations had to be lowered compared to what is expected from national CSOs).

The grassroots CSOs in Kosovo are demand-driven and dependent on international support. In addition, they do not have the capacity to absorb more elaborate funding schemes, both in terms of the project management and the performance. The KCSF, as one of the major CSOs in Kosovo, has a large portfolio of internationally supported projects, and has represented a driving force of the sector in pushing forward the reform processes in the country. Conversely, major CSOs in Kosovo, due to ample international donor support provided so far, had become rather institutionalised, losing touch with their constituencies at grass-root levels. The sub-granting fund provided under the CSF scheme can represent a good opportunity for the KCSF to reconnect with the communities that the CS sector is representing and act as an intermediary between the upper and lower levels of the sector. Once the international donor support to the CS sector in Kosovo begins to dissipate, those CSOs capable of extensive networking with local communities can have a competitive advantage in the donor fundraising efforts. From another angle, the grassroots organisations strengthened and supported through the donor funding schemes can, in turn, substantially increase their prospects of winning the required funding support by keeping the results of funding schemes alive and visible, for example through social media. Thus, a more strategic approach to fundraising is needed if the grassroots and major CSOs wish to make results of their efforts affordable on a long-term basis. Also, through the operation of other, more demanding, grant support programmes such as Swiss DSP, Luxembourg, some of the initiatives are now being supported by KCSF via this more advanced support, which allows KCSF to help them grow the organisations and follow-up with the basic support offered via the CSF scheme.

Experience to date, across the region, indicates a number of keys *factors of success*:

- Grant manager organisations need a long and strong relationship with their EUD.
- Simplification of procedures is particularly beneficial for smaller organisations.
- Larger CSOs should avoid competition with smaller organisations, some of which

are members of their networks, in small national calls for proposals.

- Preparatory training with the prospective grantees contributes to likelihood of success.
- Different schemes are appropriate for established, medium-sized organisations and the less-experienced, grassroots and/or community-based organisations.

49. <http://www.kcsfoundation.org>

- Simple and clear guidelines and application packages in local languages.
- A well-designed monitoring scheme to ensure smooth implementation, along with technical and thematic assistance/guidance contributes to the likelihood of success for sub-grants.

There is a notable focus in current re-granting approaches on the building of capacity of CSOs in project implementation, which **contributes significantly to organisational development**. However, the building of the capacity of smaller CSOs in the technical knowledge and skills specific to their field of focus is equally important. Granting organisations need to be aware of, and appreciate the need to, include in their sub-grant management team relevant technical experts for the thematic focus of the call for proposals for sub-grants.

TA to government

The relevance of TA to government has been high in all countries, as the TA included interventions that address the needs of government structures for civil society. However, the **level of uptake of the mechanisms and proposals for reforms and/or the introduction of new measures has varied amongst countries**. The main factor influencing this has been the extent to which there was recognition of, and/or a determined action on the part of respective beneficiary governments, to push forward and promote a greater inclusion of CSOs in public debates and policy-making processes — variations are visible in the commitment to and effectiveness of liaison between CSOs and line ministries and the effectiveness of awareness-raising of the mechanisms and benefits of cooperation with civil society.

While many results have been achieved by these projects, most remain at the individual level, or are related to technical capacities for consultation processes. Training that has been organised for government representatives and CSOs is generally

seen as useful, although the evaluation could not establish any systematic evidence of outcomes from these training measures. TA projects in different countries (e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina) also established consultation mechanisms that encourage a more intensive consultation process and input from CSOs in policy development processes. Where political will has been demonstrated, the concrete outcomes are visible (e.g. the establishment of an online consultation platform and publishing of the first report on state funding for CSOs in Kosovo), whereas, negative impacts of the currently weak government are evident in CS dialogue in Montenegro, which directly hampers the effectiveness of the ongoing TA project.

Co-financing

Both generally and within the CSF programme, EU grants may not finance the entire cost of the action of a single project. The aim of the co-financing requirement is to make beneficiaries responsible for the operational and financial viability of their projects, as well as to create ownership of their intervention. According to PRAG rules, sources of financing other than an EC grant may take the form of:

- revenue generated from the action;
- own resources of the beneficiary body (self-financing);
- financial contributions from other donors;
- contributions in-kind from third parties (in duly justified cases).

While the percentage of the co-financing requirement in different EU programmes varies considerably, the most common practice for the evaluation period within CSF has been a request for 10 % co-financing by the applicant(s) or beneficiary of the project. There was a case where 20 % co-financing⁵⁰ was requested, as well as cases when no co-financing⁵¹ was requested.

50. Partnership Programmes for CSOs: Support to regional thematic networks/Framework Partnership Agreements and associated Implementation Grants, 2012. Call Reference: EuropeAid/132438/C/ACT/Multi.

51. Strengthening European Integration (SEI) and Civil Society Facility: Reconciliation in the Western Balkans through the analysis of the recent past, reporting on transitional justice and advancement of investigative journalism, 2014. Call Reference: EuropeAid/135428/DH/ACT/MULTI, Civil Society Facility; IPA CSF Turkey Programme, 2013. Call Reference: EuropeAid/134367/L/ACT/TR, Civil Society Facility; IPA CSF Turkey Programme, 2014. Call Reference: EuropeAid/135836/DD/ACT/TR; Support to Country Thematic Partnerships & Networks for CSOs, 2013. Call Reference: EuropeAid/134-588/L/ACT/MK.

The implementation of this principle in practice has proved to be one of key challenges faced by CSOs and beneficiaries. In both interviews and the survey, this challenge was reported by both larger more established and smaller grassroots organisations. For some organisations, co-financing presents a difficulty in terms of *access to* IPA CSF as well as other EU funding. This is the case especially with smaller grassroots organisations who did not apply for funding as a result of lack of sources for co-financing. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, this is the single most important reason organisations reported not applying for CSF grants. It is also a considerable factor for CSOs in *managing* grants. With limited self-financing, most CSOs resort to third sources for co-financing, i.e. other foreign donors and in a much more limited way for public funding (local or state).

The issue of ***co-financing is also closely related to the sustainability of project outcomes***, and of beneficiaries themselves. The co-financing requirement is clearly important to demonstrate the ownership and partnership of beneficiaries in the project, but it is clear that it adds considerably to the application and management burden for beneficiaries, which takes their focus and energy away from achieving project objectives and expected results. Also, in terms of grassroots and community-based organisations, the issue of co-financing is a *barrier to entry* into application processes, even as a partner organisation. Such organisations are afraid to enter into EU projects as their inability to access sources of co-financing outweighs any benefits they see in being part of an EU-funded project.

Here, there are two main strategic approaches to be considered for the future. It is crucial for beneficiaries to have the ***ability to access different sources of funding*** from which they can co-finance CSF and EU projects. As foreign donor funding is decreasing and is not available for the full range and type of activities supported by CSF, public funding (local and state) and private (individual and corporate), and to a lesser extent own sources (e.g. membership fee, income), appear to be the only sources on which beneficiaries can base their co-financing. (A reading of the SIGN for Sustainability narrative below, in the section on Sub-granting,

is very relevant to this discussion.) While there are a few examples of *state public funding* being allocated to co-financing CSF and other EU projects, they are quite limited, and it is important to support CSOs/ beneficiaries in their efforts to convince state and local authorities to either create specific budget lines or to allow for applications for CSF co-financing within existing lines. A ***more flexible approach to defining the level of co-financing requirement***, that takes into consideration the different situations, types and actions of CSOs (for example the creation of a service delivery function as opposed to an advocacy action) could help to mitigate to some extent the management of the co-financing requirement. When considering *sub-granting schemes* addressed to grassroots and community-based organisations, no co-financing requirement should be required. For such small CSOs, co-financing is clearly a barrier to access both CSF and other funding, so such a request has a significant impact on whether they are able to apply to and benefit from the CSF programme.

IMPACT

It has been very difficult to measure accurately the extent to which the CSF programme helped ‘development of an active civil society capable to participate in the public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law, as well as to influence policy and decision-making processes’ in the absence of a functioning monitoring and evaluation systems for CSF but also lack of consistent data on civil society in the countries where CSF was implemented. Impacts are most visible at the local level, where CSF-supported projects report that, in many instances, they initiate the dialogue between local authorities and CSOs, resulting in more involvement of CS in decision-making, and more evidence-based local policies and measures. However, these **impacts are uneven** and projects do not consistently achieve them, fragmenting CSF impacts to local initiatives. Some CSF projects also result in new legislation or policies and/or amendments thanks to tools for CSOs to provide direct input in drafting: either through project support or through results of CSF’s TA support to government (to improve consultation process). Such CSF interventions provide for important changes in how dialogue between government and CSOs happens, yet impacts of this dialogue vary and are affected by different factors, as described in Section 4.4.2, below.

Civil society sees potential **impact coming from the work they do with both authorities and the wider public**. Topics specifically mentioned in the stakeholder survey as benefitting from CSF funding include:

- Civil society development
- Human trafficking
- Environment (as a no-border issue)
- Children’s rights
- Youth participation
- EU accession reforms
- Rule of law
- Promoting new forms of assistance to marginalized groups
- LGBTIQ rights and needs
- Regional evidence-based research
- Better informing citizens about EU membership benefits
- Improving data collection

FIGURE 13: CSO advocacy work with authorities

Responses to the stakeholder survey provide insight into impact prospects. Over 50 % of respondents agree that the CSF funding has assisted in bringing

about lasting change to a significant or large extent. This very positive message is supported by 35 % of respondents that see somewhat of a contribution to lasting change.

THE CSF HAS ASSISTED US IN BRINGING ABOUT LASTING CHANGE IN IN OUR MAIN AREA OF WORK

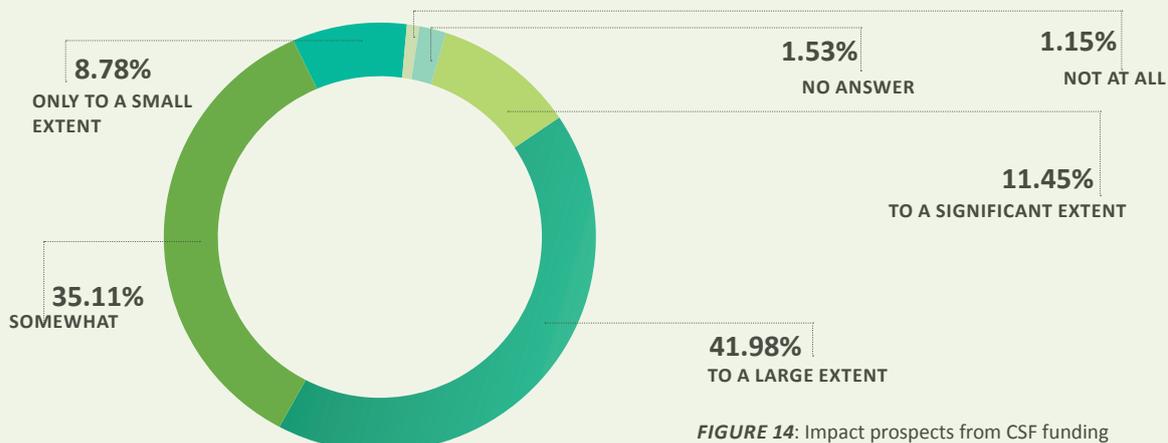


FIGURE 14: Impact prospects from CSF funding

The evaluation found evidence on a range of outcomes visible from the funding provided by the CSF, related to the change that is supported within organisations and across networks/coalitions.

Supported CSOs are better at what they do — They are learning in their own focused capacity-building exercises, in the implementation of their projects, in their network approaches and in sharing in regional programmes such as those provided by TACSO. **Advocacy:** new capacity is visible in advocacy techniques and approaches, in how to dialogue with and negotiate with government agencies and representatives, in how to build public presence and visibility. CSOs point particularly to their mapping activities, both nationally and regionally and to their work on database development, wherein they have greater *knowledge, systems and capacities for building and using databases for evidence-based advocacy*. **Management:** organisations are also better at their internal management processes, from *strategic management* to human resource management to financial management.

Outreach as a tool for impact — Improved reach to smaller, grassroots organisations, is important for those organisations. However, it is just as critical for their missions. The focus on reach is delivering stronger organisations, and is important also for the issues they focus on. The importance of strategic partnership with local intermediaries cannot be underestimated. **Organisational visibility** is improving, and contributes to the potential for impact. **Issue visibility** is stronger and also contributes to the potential for impact.

REGIONAL NETWORKS

Per the evaluation ToR, the impact of regional networks on advocacy for policy reforms was a specific area of enquiry.

As is visible in a number of areas in this report, and the particular focus of evaluation enquiry in terms of multi-beneficiary and regional projects, ***the CSF focus on regional networking, networks and coalitions is a very important component of the work and focus of the CSF***. There is a clear view that the Western Balkans is a region that needs to be developed regionally, due to its cultural frameworks

and historical experiences. As much as there are apparent differences across the region, so too are there significant similarities. Moreover, there is a notable desire in the countries of the region to not be outshone by their neighbours, which can be a motivating factor in reform processes.

There are two key reasons for support to regional networking. There is a discrepancy in the development of civil society in the region, and exchange of knowledge, skills and experience across CSOs through *peer-to-peer* capacity building is important for civil society development overall. Having the regional approach has seen the development of some significant regional discourses — this has been a real contribution of the CSF. This, and a related cross-fertilisation, has been one focus of the TACSO approach regionally. Secondly, the historical divisions that exist in the countries of the region hamper all ongoing and general development. All development is hurt by historical divisions, as is seen in the recent rise of nationalism across the Western Balkans. Regional CSOs networking directly and specifically addresses these issues, within civil society as well as more widely. It is a type of countermeasure to the division. There is a need for high level, political cooperation, and this is working and viable to a certain extent, but what happens within the wider society is critical. Connections across borders add to stability, and CSOs set the tone for cooperation, addressing divisions, and contributing to the underlying value of good neighbour relations.

REGIONAL NETWORKING ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

Advocating for policy reforms is a very important criteria for discussion, given the role being played by funded regional networks within the CSF. This role is discussed in detail above, in the Relevance and effectiveness section. Some key aspects are noted here:

- Regional initiatives focused on anti-corruption.
- A regional strategy focused on improvements in public procurement.
- Regional approaches to development of a quality and independent media, shielded from outside political interference.
- A regional network focused on developing monitoring and advocacy capacity of CSOs in an enabling environment.
- A regional initiative in disability, focused on establishing a civil society that is actively participating in public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law.
- A regional initiative focused on conducting research that can be used by stakeholders — evidence-based support to civil society.
- An initiative focused on civil society indicators for PAR, which is undertaken in cooperation with PAR line ministries in all Western Balkan's countries.
- A network in the field of aging, including data collection, fact collection, and cross actions through partnerships.
- TACSO Technical Assistance, and the People to People initiative managed by TACSO, as tools for developing institutional capacity.
- A regional rural development network with strong links to national authorities in rural development.
- A regional initiative is focused on establishing a complete picture of the past, which can only ever be seen in a complete way when it is 'seen as joint, as shared.'
- A project dealing with youth and reconciliation.
- A regional initiative focused on youth, advocacy for youth participation and the role and place of youth and accession agendas and reporting.

FACTORS INHIBITING IMPACT

There are a number of factors that inhibit impact, and potential for impact from the CSF's funded initiatives.

One key to effective democracy that is not visible enough currently is the building of effective dialogue by CSOs up to authorities and down to citizens/civil society more generally. This process of dialogue is as important as the activities of CSOs and is missing to a certain extent, which is detrimental to the potential for impact.

A range of external factors also hamper impact from CSF-funded initiatives. **There is political instability** in the region — the priorities of governments are heavily focused on survival, and actions related to power, more than governance. There are additional, but related factors in Turkey. There is a **lack of commitment on the part of governments** to an enabling environment. The **level of distrust**

between government and CSOs, such that cooperation requires significant enhancement. This lack of trust has flowed in to society in general, and there remains a significant 'image problem' for non-governmental organisations across the Western Balkans and Turkey. There is a linked, and prevalent, **developing 'clientelism' in government processes** that impacts on the view wider society has of CSOs and detracts from civil society effectiveness. There is a relative **lack of capacity in government agencies** relevant to a range of CSF-funded projects. There is some attribution of the lack of public consultation on legislation to this lack of capacity, i.e. that this failure is related to knowledge and skills, not a wish to avoid consultation.

While the lengthening of grant timeframes has been noted and is supported, the development of an effective dialogue process and relationship with government authorities is a long-term process. A

lack of surety of funding, or the potential to apply for funding, hampers the impact, and greater emphasis is needed in ensuring the sequencing of calls for proposals so that funded organisations are in a position to apply for follow-up funding in those cases where a greater level of impact can be achieved through further work or where there are clear, new directions opening up that can be of importance to the organisation, the network or the region in general.

EU visibility in assistance remains an issue and all possibilities of its reinforcement via deepened outreach have not been exploited.

SUSTAINABILITY

There are a number of areas in the CSF support where the possibility of sustainability of actions and sustainability of results has improved, directly as a result of CSF assistance. These areas are most notable on the organisation side. The ***most important sustainability aspects for organisations are visible in their own processes.*** Particular mention is made of the improvements funded organisations have seen in their ability to think strategically, to plan strategically and to act strategically. This change has occurred as a result of training they have received, such as that provided through TACSO, and through peer-to-peer learning.

Organisations point to improvements in ***management capacity, in administrative, human resource and financial knowledge and skills.*** The administrative and financial requirements of the CSF were raised by funded organisations extensively during the evaluation field work. While many organisations think requirements should be less complex and less demanding, there is significant support for maintaining this complexity: organisations point to how they have benefited overall, in terms of their professionalism, for having to raise their own administrative capacities in order to fulfil CSF project requirements.

There is an increase in ***organisational visibility*** as a result of their participation in CSF-funded projects. While this is noted strongly with smaller, grassroots organisations that have received a sub-grant for

local activities, it is also noted at the regional level from organisations engaging with regional partners in activities that are at a higher level of advocacy and civic engagement. Related to this increase in organisational visibility is an increase in visibility of the issues of importance to organisations funded through the CSF.

The ***lengthening of grant timeframes has had a positive impact on sustainability.*** The impact of a '2 plus 2' or '3 plus 3' approach is relevant to a number of areas of the evaluation, and the positive benefits of increasing timeframes is visible in a number of areas. While these longer timeframes have been an important contributor to results and sustainability, they are not the only key to the future. Organisations must also improve the diversity of their funding sources. Notable in the SIGN project (see the Effectiveness section, above) is a focus on up-skilling organisations for this diversification. Fundraising is a skill — indeed a whole set of skills — and greater emphasis is needed on improving this skill set in CSOs across the region.

In the stakeholder survey, responses to this question are generally positive: there is a significant percentage (12.98 %) that believe the CSF makes a significant contribution to sustainability, but there is also a significant percentage of respondents who are only relatively positive (37.4 %) and 8.78 % who think the contribution is minor. These results should be given credence, particularly in light of the very supportive responses to most questions, as they are indicative of where further work is needed.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS CSF FUNDING ENSURED SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES?

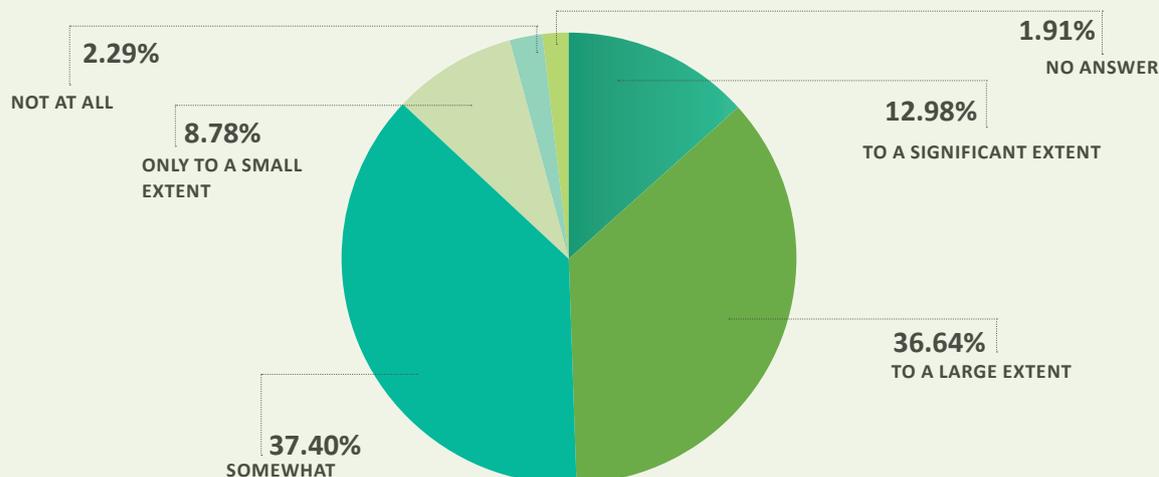


FIGURE 15: Contribution of the CSF to project sustainability

However, sustainability of civil society as a whole is very much dependent on external funding through instruments such as the CSF. This is due to the fact that government funding in all countries is still not based on transparent criteria and there is still low recognition of role of civil society and its contribution to society. Alternative sources of funding remain limited, including from both public and private sources.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

There is a clear and acknowledged focus in the CSF's frameworks on human rights, and particularly on gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The focus of the EC, and also the CSF, for funded organisations to take gender into account is clear and visible. Wider thematic areas in terms of human rights are not so visible in documents and priority frameworks. While human rights per se are notable, there is only limited mention specifically of the LGBTI community, the disabled, the aged, youth or any of a wide range of marginalised groups in the

community. These groups are visible in projects, but are not generally the focus.

There is a sense that *the expressed focus on human rights, and gender equality in particular, is not so clearly a focus of funded organisations or of funded initiatives*. Specifically, there is a concern that the organisational focus in grant applications is formulaic, as opposed to real; that organisations know they need to say something about 'gender' as opposed to exhibiting a real commitment to bringing a real focus on human rights and gender mainstreaming into their programme designs and implementation.

What is not well understood within funded organisations is that the intent of cross-cutting themes is to ensure in every funded initiative there is a genuine focus in design and implementation for considering and respecting all human rights.

Responses to the effectiveness of the CSF in ensuring a focus on human rights and gender equality are strong.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE CSF IN ENSURING CSOS ARE FOCUSING ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY?

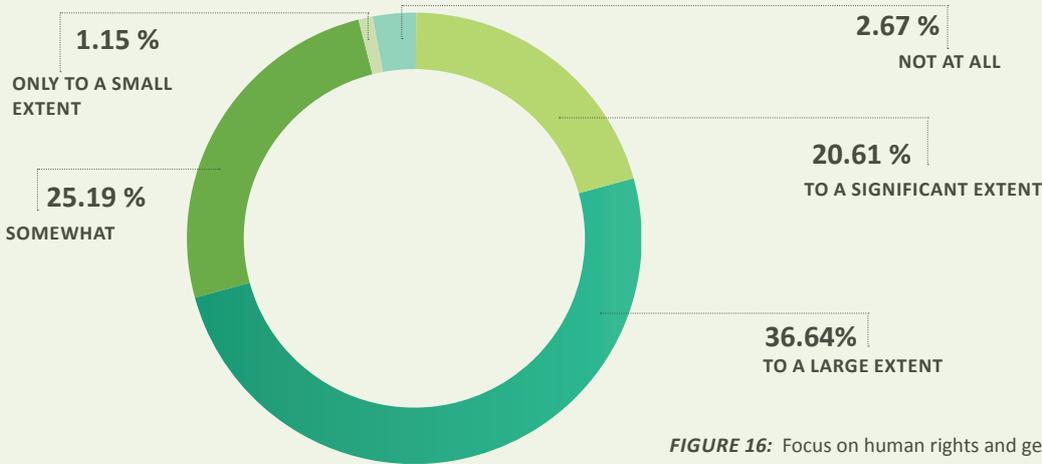


FIGURE 16: Focus on human rights and gender equality

There is a clear and acknowledged focus in the CSF's frameworks on the environment. The focus of the EC, and the CSF, for funded organisations to take the environment into account is clear and visible, and there are a range of funded initiatives, particularly through EUDs that address the environment. However, there is a divergence from beneficiary country to beneficiary country.

COHERENCE, COORDINATION AND CONSISTENCY

As noted above, at the structural level there is a *well-founded and well-implemented coordination process in relation to the CSF*.

There is a clear complementarity in the work of the CSF with EIDHR, although areas of potential overlap are noted. In its 'support to democratic processes,' the EIDHR has a specific focus on 'cooperation between civil society and local authorities and relevant state institutions,' which, while complementary to the CSF, can be seen also as clearly overlapping with the CSF's objectives with public authorities, and advocacy in support of democratic issues and participation in the democratic process. The CSF focus on social inclusion, anti-discrimination and gender complements EIDHR priorities, but also can be seen as overlapping with the EIDHR's strong emphasis on vulnerable groups.

There are, however, visible and not unimportant issues related to coherence to be addressed

across/ within the CSF. These issues are visible in a number of ways. There is a *lack of consistency between EUDs and between EUDs and DG NEAR in the frameworks of calls for proposals*. While not strictly speaking a 'problem,' this lack of consistency is indicative of a lack of coherent direction. *EUDs do not know enough about multi-beneficiary/regional projects*, generally and in their country. There is a related lack of correlation in the responses provided by EUDs and DG NEAR to questions from funded organisations. There is not enough learning across or between EUDs and up to DG NEAR, particularly in relation to successful approaches and strategies.

Coherence and coordination with other donors takes place in all geographies of the CSF, to a greater or lesser level of effectiveness, and generally could be improved. There are a range of processes in place to ensure the work and priority of other donors and the EU are coordinated, and these generally work well but tend to be more at the level of reporting on priorities, directions and funded activities, rather than on coordination of efforts — on sharing of information rather than on any focused attempt at coherence.

VISIBILITY

Obligations of funded organisations in relation to fulfilment of the visibility strategy are completely clear and understood, and implemented to a high level.

Having said this, CSF-funded projects have been implemented in the absence of an updated and reinforced manual on EU visibility guidelines, with a particular focus on the specific facets of civil society projects. It has been underlined, in the process of preparing the IPA II Monitoring, Reporting and Performance Framework, that small, local and grassroots organisations can and should provide an optimal vector and leverage for qualitative reinforcement of EU communication and visibility, whether in civil society, local economic development or cross-border cooperation projects, and this opportunity has not yet been addressed by the current visibility guidelines. In this context, meeting the requirements of the visibility strategy does not necessarily give the desired results. There are two areas of weakness, one that is relevant to funded organisations and one that is relevant to the EU. While being in receipt of EU funds can be important to organisations in terms of respect, in the current climate of distrust this visibility can also create issues for organisations as a key criticism of CSOs in the region is that they are acting as agents of external powers. More relevant to the EU, and expressed more generally in the evaluation's field processes, is the view that ***the fulfilment of visibility requirements does not mean that the project, nor EU funding support more generally, nor the importance of EU support to national strategies, are being heard or understood by the wider community*** in any of the beneficiary countries. There is evidence to suggest that the assistance of the EU to national reform processes is not well understood and there remains a lack of relevant information in the community.

ADDED VALUE

The key added value of the CSF is that it is an instrument that is totally independent from government or actor other than civil society. The fact that the CSF is programmed centrally removes any concern that there can be government influence in the selection of priorities for funding.

Where there is a focus on sectoral coordination, greater results and impact are possible. This is particularly visible where a sectoral focus, including with projects implemented under the national IPA,

that can bring CSOs into direct and meaningful dialogue with national and municipal authorities in areas of concern to all parties. The improved capacities within CSOs (both knowledge and skills), as well as their growth in experience, mean they are able to contribute more effectively in working groups, with input to legislative, policy or strategy discussions carrying more weight. With the adoption of the Minimum Standards for Consultation, and TA support to the online consultation platform, individual CSF projects focused on sectoral/thematic issues (or such networks supported via network grants) will be able to contribute effectively to the country's regulatory framework and strategies being developed by public institutions.

Partnerships between CSOs are a good opportunity to increase the capacities of the CSOs, particularly where these partnerships provide a type of mentoring from larger, better-established organisations and less-experienced and/or grassroots community-based CSOs.

A range of areas of added value are visible through the regional initiatives funded by the CSF. Collaboration and competition is a way of building effective partnership across borders. As well as being effective in the context of a given project, this approach deals indirectly with the divisions from the past. There has been a real growth in expertise — individual experts — across the region, through their engagement in expert roles in a variety of projects. Political influences are enhanced by regional networks, particularly where national partners use the developments and innovations of their partners in their advocacy work with national authorities. There are a number of examples of empirical research from CSF-funded initiatives contributing directly to advocacy work on policy and legislative frameworks with national authorities. The growth in capacity in CSOs is most noted in their strategic capacities — thinking and planning. This was not necessarily a focus of initiatives, but was the area that grew most noticeably. Mapping and database activities have been completed by CSOs nationally or regionally — developing knowledge, systems, and capacities in this area in ways that contribute to evidence-based advocacy.



TRAG activities

RELEVANCE

There is a clear relevance to CSF objectives, in the context of the EC Enlargement Strategy, the objectives and priorities of the country strategy and policy documents and programmes, and to the content, analysis and priorities of country reports. CSF objectives are generally clear and realistic, and priorities are well aligned with the needs of civil society in the country — capacity building, dialogue with authorities and empowerment. There are a number of systems and processes in place that ensure links between the objectives of the EU's support to civil society and civil society itself, and there is

a significant correlation between the objectives of EU support and the activities and results of funded projects. There are a range of mechanisms used in CSF design and implementation that are focused on ensuring effective linkages between CSF priorities and funding and those of other key donors. One weakness is that objectives are not further elaborated to render them measurable, including introduction of SMART indicators, which would enhance CSF monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

EFFICIENCY

The CSF is relatively efficient. There is a clear focus on, and delivery of, a wider range of instruments to ensure a greater reach into civil society with CSF funding. The project 'portfolio' of the CSF includes long-term action grants, operating grants, FPAs, direct grants to international organisations and CSOs and technical assistance, so in the context of a mix of funding this area of the CSF covers the full range of possibilities. It is not just that the full range is covered, but that there is a clear intention to find appropriate approaches to improve reach and effectiveness. The CSF is developing and implementing innovative approaches, although there are organisational and administrative constraints, as limited staffing constrains possibilities in terms of the numbers (and sizes) of awarded grants. The availability of action grants, FPAs and operating grants all offer options for funding that can be of benefit to a variety of organisations. Flexibility is not so visible in the relevant EC finance departments, although this is potentially more significant at EUDs than for DG NEAR-funded calls for proposals. The use of systems for application and reporting that have not been developed (and implemented) in an integrated fashion, specifically for the CSF, constrains CSF efficiency and impacts negatively on funded organisations. CSF processes of call for proposals, assessment, award and contracting are lengthy, and as such there can be a disconnect between project design and the real situation on the ground at the time of award. The absence of an inception period, and allowance for project re-design, particularly for larger or longer projects, detracts from CSF efficiency and project/CSF effectiveness. There are a number of grant schemes operated by CSOs or foundations in the region, with CSF funding, that offer innovative and effective approaches to provision of assistance to CSOs of a variety of sizes, in a range of thematic areas and geographies.

EFFECTIVENESS

The CSF is effectively contributing to addressing the needs and priorities of civil society in the region. The single most important factor is how the support from the CSF contributes to building the capacity of the organisations in strategies and techniques for advocacy with local and national authorities and the upgraded skills and knowledge of CSO representatives. Critical aspects of this include a focus on evidence-based advocacy, using empirical research in dialogue with authorities on policy and legislation, focused training with authorities (courts, police, ombudsman's offices) and the media. Another visible area of effectiveness is the range of innovative initiatives for the provision of grant funding to smaller, community-based and grassroots organisations.

The CSF is making a significant contribution to the achievement of its stated objectives and priorities:

- Promoting and enhancing accountability, credibility of the civil society sector and improving the institutional and operational capacity of CSOs in relation to all stakeholders in the region and EU, from large public bodies to decision-makers.
- Reinforcing dialogue and strengthening ties between CSOs within the region and with their counterparts from the EU.
- Encouraging sustainable CSO partnership and networks, including with public authorities.
- Promoting transfer of knowledge and experience.

- Developing the CSO advocacy role in supporting democratic issues and advising citizens and public authorities.
- Encouraging CSOs to play an increasing part in the adoption and implementation of the EU acquis in policy areas where they have an implementation and advocacy role.
- Raising citizen understanding of the role of CSOs, and participation in the democratic process.

Where the CSF has not been effective in the region is in assisting governments and CSOs to actually implement, and work together within the framework of, an enabling environment as defined in the *Guidelines*. Much more work is required to address these critical areas:

- An appropriate legal, judicial and administrative environment for exercising the freedoms of expression, assembly and association.
- An enabling financial environment is required to make it possible to transpose these rights into practice.
- Suitable structures and mechanisms for CS cooperation with public institutions as well as free, clear and accessible flows of information on matters of public interest through structured durable mechanisms are of critical importance

IMPACT

Impact prospects of the CSF are mixed. CSF-funded organisations show a visible improvement in what they do and how they do it. The most important impact in this growth in knowledge and skills is externally in how organisations advocate with authorities and with the public, and internally in how they think and plan more strategically and how they manage their organisations more effectively. Much of this growth in capacity has been driven through networking, and other modes of peer-to-peer learning. A feature of the Western Balkans is the wide variance in capacity within CSOs across the region — the networking focus and the peer-to-peer learning addresses this in an effective way. While capacity is being built, these regional processes directly and indirectly address historical divisions. The clear and effective focus on deepening and widening the reach of the CSF funding is impacting on grassroots organisations across the region, and on their missions. As a result, grassroots organisations are more effective and more visible, and the issues that are important to

them are also more visible through the actions in which they are engaged.

However, these impacts are uneven. While CSF projects result in new legislation and policies, and CSF interventions provide for important change in how dialogue happens between government and CSOs, impacts of this dialogue vary and are affected by a range of factors. The vast majority of these factors are external to target CSOs and to the CSF itself, and include the following: political instability in the region; the lack of commitment by governments across the region to the enabling environment; the level of distrust between governments and CSO, such that cooperation requires significant enhancement; the developing ‘clientelism’ discussed above; and the relative lack of capacity in many government agencies that are relevant to CSF-funded initiatives.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability prospects are moderate. There are a number of areas in CSF support where the possibility of sustainability of actions and sustainability of results has improved. This is most notable on the organisation side, as opposed to external change. Funded organisations have improved their ability to think strategically, to plan strategically and to act strategically, as a result of training received and through peer-to-peer learning. There are also visible improvements in management capacity: administrative, human resource and financial knowledge and skills. There is an increase in organisational visibility due to their participation in CSF-funded projects, and in the visibility of the issues of importance to organisations funded through the CSF. There are a number of innovative approaches to partnership and to grant-giving that are contributing to organisation and network sustainability, and particularly to sustainability of funding — these innovative approaches are replicable across the CSF, by EUDs and DG NEAR. The lengthening of grant timeframes is contributing to sustainability, as organisations are better able to plan and implement, and — in this way — to build their own, more sustainable approaches.

However, sustainability of civil society as a whole is very much dependent on the external funding through instruments such as the CSF. Government funding for civil society, across the region, is limited, and in any case it is not distributed on a transparent basis, and there is still a low recognition of the role of civil society and its contribution to society. Finally, alternative sources of funding remain limited, whether from public or private sources.

CROSS-CUTTING AREAS

There is a clear and acknowledged focus in the CSF frameworks on human rights, and particularly on gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The focus of the EC, and also the CSF, for funded organisations to take gender into account is also clear and visible. There is evidence that this focus is not so clearly a key component of funded initiatives, and in particular that there is more a formal, rather than substantive commitment to human rights and gender mainstreaming in project design and

implementation. Funded organisations would benefit from an improved understanding of (and ability to act on) the intent of cross-cutting themes (i.e. that they are given consideration across all aspects of all initiatives) so that in every funded initiative a genuine consideration is given in design and implementation to ensuring all human rights are considered and respected.

COHERENCE

There is a complementarity in the work of the CSF with EIDHR, although there are areas of potential overlap. In its ‘support to democratic processes,’ the EIDHR has a specific focus on ‘*cooperation between civil society and local authorities and relevant state institutions*,’ which, while complementary to the CSF, can be seen also as clearly overlapping with the CSF’s objectives with public authorities, and advocacy in support of democratic issues and participation in the democratic process. The CSF focus on social inclusion, anti-discrimination and gender complement EIDHR priorities, but also can be seen as overlapping with the EIDHR’s strong emphasis on vulnerable groups. There are some issues of coherence to be addressed across or within the CSF, including the need for greater sharing of successful innovations and approaches and a greater focus on shared learning, between EUDs and with DG NEAR.

Coherence and coordination with other donors takes place in all geographies of the CSF, to a greater or lesser level of effectiveness, and generally could be improved. There are a range of processes in place to ensure the work and priority of other donors and the EU are coordinated, and these generally work well but tend to be more at the level of reporting on priorities, directions and funded activities, rather than on coordination of efforts — on sharing of information rather than on any focused attempt at coherence.

VISIBILITY

Visibility of the CSF is reasonable. Obligations of funded organisations in relation to fulfilment of the visibility strategy are completely clear and understood, and implemented to a very high standard. However, meeting the requirements of the visibility strategy does not necessarily give the desired results. While being in receipt of EU funds can be important to organisations in terms of respect, in the current climate of distrust this visibility can also create issues for organisations, as a key criticism of CSOs in the region is that they are acting as agents of

external powers. From the perspective of the EU, the fulfilment of visibility requirements does not necessarily mean that EU funding support, nor the importance of EU support to national strategies, are being seen or understood by the wider community. There is evidence to suggest that the assistance of the EU to national reform processes is not well understood and that there remains a lack of relevant information in the community.



Output 2.2 Improve technical and facilitation Capacity within the Advisory Sector

2.2.1 Deliver Tech of Proj farm

Output 2.3 Improve Support to Advisors through Establishment of MDTs

2.3.1 Use M in es Process

2.3.2 Network MDTs on Regional Level

2.3.3 Study for

Output 2.4 Strengthen National and Regional Support Structures for Advisors

2.4.1 Continue and further Projects Participation in Agriculture Project Alliance

2.4.2 Facilitate links between Project Participants, the APP, Research Inst

3.2 SUPPORTING PARTNER DAIRIES IN COMPLYING WITH EU REQUIREMENTS

3.2.1 IDENTIFY, QUANTIFY AND MONITOR PRACTICES HAVING A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON MILK QUALITY AND COST EFFECTIVE COLLECTION AND MILK COLLECTION AIDS

3.2.2 MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING THESE PRACTICES AND FACILITATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

3.2.3 DISCERN, DOCUMENT AND SHARE LESSONS LEARNED

3 SUPPORTING PARTNER DAIRIES IN EDUCATING CONSUMERS ABOUT DAIRY PRODUCTS

3.1 ENCOURAGE PILOT ACTIVITY IN CONSUMER AWARENESS AMONGST DAIRIES IN COOPERATION WITH THE DAIRY INSTITUTE

3.2.2 WORK WITH THE DAIRY INSTITUTE AND DAIRIES IN THE PREPARATION OF MATERIALS FOR NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

LESSONS LEARNED

The following are *expressions of lessons learned and good practice visible in CSF implementation*. Further detail can be found in both the main body of this evaluation report and in the report annexes.

There is a clearly stated and visible intent to maintain a *link between the Guidelines and the priorities of calls for proposals*, although it is noted that the *Guidelines* do not have a thematic bearing — they provide a unified framework on which programming for civil society is performed. There is a careful focus on framing calls for proposals in such a way that CSOs are able to define objectives themselves, within a framework that gives indications on what possible actions will be supported. There is a strong focus on wording that allows organisations to pursue their own action plans, in the framework of CSF priorities. Examples of the relationship between CSF priorities and projects include the following: where Western Balkans countries have begun developing anti-corruption systems; where there is an initiative on anti-corruption in procurement systems; where there are a number of projects focused on the media, in the context of the transforming aspects of the accession process, media accountability and media

transparency; and the number of projects that focus on a dynamic civil society actively participating in public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law, and the capacity to influence policy and decision-making processes. Further, there is a focus on evidence-based contributions to public policies and reforms. Projects such as WEBER represent long-haul efforts to bring in structural changes in an institutional environment that has recently become fairly acute and difficult.

The greatest relevance of the CSF to CSOs is not in relation to their ‘missions,’ or their thematic focus, but in relation to their own functioning. Here the CSF is delivering *strong outcomes — in building the capacity (knowledge, skills and experience) of funded organisations*. The CSF is continuing to promote and enhance the accountability and credibility of the civil society sector, through improvements to the institutional and operational capacity of CSOs.

The regional and EU-wide initiatives provide useful *knowledge, data, skills and approaches*, both *down*, from EU-based partners, and *up* to those

partners. Another important factor that indicates the effectiveness of CSF support is the practical contribution to policy and legislative change. This contribution includes the following in a wide range of areas: empirical research that contributes to effective dialogue about policy and legislation; the provision of focused training for authorities, including the courts, police, and ombudsman; the provision of training for the media; social dialogue; youth issues and advocacy; and the development of tools for monitoring. These tools, and this monitoring, provide objective data for analysis. There are a number of databases, monitoring tools and indices that have been created through CSF funding.

There is a consistent focus on civil society actions, particularly in terms of *local democracy*. These include an emphasis on EU accession activities and on the development of democratic processes and citizen engagement. Each of these areas of focus are visible across a range of funded projects, and includes the development of *CSO advocacy roles*, the support of actions related to a growth in awareness about democratic issues, the provision of advice to citizens and public authorities, and encouragement to CSOs to play an increasing part in the adoption and implementation of the EU acquis in policy areas.

The focus on capacity building in funded projects is effectively addressing the needs of the CSOs involved in the projects. This includes an *enhanced knowledge base*, developed through networking with partner/colleague organisations. This networking with counterparts in other countries is particularly useful in providing organisations with a better understanding of the state of play, across the region, and an opportunity for learning from each other. Learning has developed a capacity to work with communities through networking with grassroots organisations, improved capacity in reporting and policy recommendations, and a better position of CSOs in public policy debate.

The key added value of the CSF is that it is an instrument that is totally *independent from any government or actor other than civil society*. This takes away any concern that there can be government influence in selection of priorities for funding.

The CSF has been focused on the EU political agenda, and important issues are being covered by the CSF and the projects it funds. This focus includes anti-corruption, justice, human rights, good governance, freedom of expression, and media freedom. CSF assistance has had a strong

focus on ***empowering civil society organisations to take an active role in decision-making processes*** and to fulfil their mandates. Further, the financial assistance has strengthened the role of CSOs in working groups, through an enhancement of the knowledge base of CSOs in the accession process that has led to a more inclusive CSO representation in these working groups, and where networks that are members of working groups convey views discussed by the network.

A separate and focused grant scheme, through a local implementing organisation, has provided space for a ***differentiated approach to reach out and support community-based organisations***. The sub-granting schemes have contributed stronger capacity-building (especially in terms of research and advocacy), and a growing number of thematic/sectoral networks. The introduction in the CSF of a blend of financial (sub-grants) and non-financial (capacity building) support, targeting grassroots CSOs, has substantially improved the balance of funding.

There is significant focus on ***accountability and credibility***, on dialogue and the strengthening of ties between CSOs in the region, on the transfer of knowledge and skills, on EU accession activities

and on development of democratic processes and citizen engagement.

There are two key reasons for providing ***support to regional networking***. Firstly, there is a discrepancy in the development of civil society in the region, and exchanges of knowledge, skills and experience is important for civil society development overall. Secondly, the divisions that exist in the countries of the region hamper all ongoing and general development. Regional CSO networking directly and specifically addresses this issue, within civil society and more widely.



RECOMMENDATIONS

TRAG activities

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 There are some issues of coherence to be addressed across/within the CSF, and internally to EUDs, including the need for greater sharing of successful innovations and approaches and a greater focus on shared learning, between EUDs and with DG NEAR.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Shared learning. It is recommended that DG NEAR and EUDs take an improved approach to shared learning, across the administrative components of management of the CSF. This approach improve the coherence of CSF approaches, adding to CSF efficiency and effectiveness, and would emulate the regional peer-to-peer learning being funded by the CSF that is delivering impact with funded organisations.

There are a number of key components to this improved approach to shared learning that require focus from CSF management:

- **A greater focus is needed on shared learning events**, for relevant EUD and DG NEAR personnel. Shared learning should be more than a desirable concept — it needs to be a focus, and built in to annual planning.
- A specific focus of the sharing is a more detailed **sharing of the effective approaches being undertaken with funding instruments**. The innovative and successful grant scheme approaches in one country need to be considered, in detail, and replicated across the CSF where appropriate.
- Consideration should be given, as possible, in each EUD to **linking the oversight of CSF projects in a given field directly to EUD staff with sectoral responsibilities** in that area. Such an approach can ease oversight burdens while creating cohesion across funding mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- 2 There are a number of grant schemes operated by CSOs or foundations in the region, with CSF funding, that offer innovative and effective approaches to provision of assistance to CSOs of a variety of sizes, in a range of thematic areas and geographies. These grant schemes include innovative approaches to granting and replicable approaches to local fundraising and the development of philanthropy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Replication of innovative approaches. Linked to the shared learning recommendation, there is significant room for replication and further development of the innovative approaches to sub-granting and local fundraising that are discussed throughout the report. In order to encourage other CSOs or foundations to replicate these approaches, a detailed understanding of frameworks and systems is required. *It is recommended* that a detailed analysis is undertaken of a number of these sub-granting projects being implemented across the region by CSOs and foundations, with a view to *building an understanding of the specific approaches and criteria of success*. Further to this, a specific framework could be drawn up that allows these, and potentially other regional organisations, to play a greater role in the re-granting processes within the CSF.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- 3 CSF processes of call for proposal, assessment, award and contracting are lengthy, and as such there can be a disconnect between project design and the real situation on the ground at the time of award. The absence of an inception period, and allowance for project re-design, particularly for larger or longer projects, detracts from CSF efficiency (timely and cost-efficient approaches) and project/CSF effectiveness (achievement of intended results).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Inception phase. *It is recommended* that an inception phase be implemented within contractual frameworks for CSF grants. The ***intent of an inception phase is to allow for modifications to certain aspects of a project's design.*** Revising this approach will allow organisations to address changes in the external situation (particularly where the call for proposal, award and contracting processes are lengthy), partner status or growth in knowledge and skills, and will assist organisations to better focus their actual activities, improving outcomes across all levels. Certain key criteria and processes will need to be defined by DG NEAR and EUDs prior to implementation of an inception phase; these criteria and processes require immediate definition by CSF management, but some recommended criteria and constraints include:

- The criteria under which an inception period will be allowed. It is recommended that:
 - any contract of three years or longer automatically includes an inception period;
 - any contract above a fixed amount (to be determined by CSF management) automatically includes an inception period;
 - any grant contract that extends across more than two countries in the region automatically includes an inception period;
 - any grant contract that comes from a call, award, contracting process that is longer than 18 months automatically includes an inception period.
- The process for implementation of an inception period. It is recommended that changes to project outcomes, activities and partners be allowed where:
 - newly defined outcomes remain clearly within the criteria of the original call;
 - newly defined activities clearly support delivery of the redefined outcomes;
 - changes in the timeframe of implementation remain within the implementation criteria defined in the original call for proposals;
 - changes in partner only occur where there is significant and well-documented justification;
 - there is no change in the project budget.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- 4 One weakness is that objectives are not further elaborated to render them measurable, including introduction of SMART indicators, which would enhance CSF monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
- 5 The focus of the EC, and also the CSF, for funded organisations to take human rights and gender into account, is also clear and visible. There is evidence that there is a formal rather than a substantive commitment to human rights and gender mainstreaming in project design and implementation. Funded organisations would benefit from genuine consideration, in design and implementation, to ensuring all human rights are considered and respected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Monitoring and evaluation. *It is recommended* that the CSF be improved through:

- Introduction of (SMART) indicators at all levels of results.
- Introduction of a ***mandatory evaluation of some projects***, based on size and duration.
 - It is recommended that any project of 3 years or greater in length be subject to an evaluation.
 - It is recommended that any project with a budget above an amount to be fixed by CSF management be subject to an evaluation.
 - It is recommended that any project delivered in more than two countries in the region be subject to an evaluation.

Cross-cutting themes. *It is recommended* that significant emphasis is placed on the ***provision of assistance to funded organisations*** on the inclusion of human rights and gender in the development of their initiatives and applications for funding. It is proposed that this assistance involve external support, which can be provided across the whole of the CSF. Key components of this approach include the following: a focus on assisting and ensuring that CSOs understand the intent of cross-cutting themes and approaches; assistance to CSOs to understand the potential outcomes of this focus; and assistance in developing project-level approaches that genuinely address human rights and gender in project design and implementation.

In this context, *it is recommended* that DG NEAR and EUDs consider ***engagement of an external resource*** (potentially an international CSO with specialist expertise) to develop an introductory workshop on the concept and application of a 'cross-cutting approach' that is applicable specifically to gender-equal approaches, but that can be applied to any cross-cutting criteria. It is imagined that the workshop would last 2 days (although this will need to be developed further in a detailed planning session), and would include criteria and concepts, and practical assistance to participant organisations in development of their specific cross-cutting approaches within the framework of their funded initiative.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- 6 Obligations of funded organisations in relation to fulfilment of the visibility strategy are completely clear and understood, and implemented to a very high level. However, meeting the requirements of the visibility strategy does not necessarily give the desired results. From the perspective of the EU, the fulfilment of visibility requirements does not necessarily mean that EU funding support, nor the importance of EU support to national strategies, are being seen or understood by the wider community. There is evidence to suggest that the assistance of the EU to national reform processes is not well understood and that there remains a lack of relevant information in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective visibility approaches. *It is recommended* that visibility of the CSF support is improved by **introducing a clear visibility plan** for the CSF-supported actions. Key components of this approach are as follows: a focus on assisting and ensuring that CSOs understand the intent of the EU's visibility approaches; assistance to CSOs to understand the value to them of these approaches and the potential outcomes of this focus; assistance in developing project-level approaches that genuinely address visibility in project design and implementation; and ensuring, in these approaches, *both* project/CSO needs and EU needs/priorities.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CSF DATABASE

TRAG activities

The database for the CSF, including project, contract and beneficiary/contractor data, was a specific area of enquiry for the evaluation. The analysis carried out, and the conclusions and recommendations that have been reached, are relatively extensive. As a result, an annex to this report has been created that incorporates the full discussion of findings, conclusions and recommendations. This **full discussion of the CSF database can be found at Annex 14 — The Database**. Conclusions and recommendations are **summarised** below.

CURRENT STATUS/ISSUES

The database as provided is an MS Excel spreadsheet, although it is based on the EU's CRIS database. Each contract is contained in one row of the spreadsheet. There are a number of issues with the database, summarised below, that require analysis and rectification:

- Use of MS Excel — while strictly speaking it is not a problem to use MS Excel in place of an application designed within a database programme, MS Excel is limited in scope and ease-of-use for a database such as the CSF's, which is distributed across a wide geography with many potential users.
- Unstructured data — there are no data validation approaches (structured data or drop down lists) in use in the current database. Aggregation and analysis of data is almost impossible in this situation.
- Multiple data in specific cells — there are many examples of multiple pieces of data in a single cell, making aggregation or analysis impossible.
- Field limitations — there is currently a small number of fields (columns in the spreadsheet) available, severely limiting the potential for aggregation and analysis.
- Partner/contact details — there are a range of issues in the current database with partner/contact details:
 - incompleteness of organisational/partner data;
 - duplication of organisational/partner data;
 - inability of organisational/partner data to be extracted in a reasonably straightforward way;
 - inability of organisational/partner data to be effectively analysed;
 - lack of ease in accessing relevant, up-to-date contact information for contracted partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 7: The evaluation recommends the development of a purpose-built MIS solely for the CSF. While it is the view of the evaluation that this MIS should be linked directly to PADOR for contact information, and should ultimately be linked as well to OPSYS, it is not seen as appropriate for there to be any delay in first scoping a purpose-built MIS and, subsequent to this work to have the MIS tendered, designed and implemented.⁵²

Management information system (MIS) — The CSF requires a ‘structured data’ approach to all aspects of theme, instrument, geography and contract type. This is the only way an effective approach to analysis of the CSF can be organised, and the only way for effective reporting to be ensured. This is an issue of the structure and content of the CSF database, as discussed above, in a number of sections, and in detail in *Annex 14 – The Database*. Research into the design and implementation of a management information system (MIS) for the CSF is warranted. There are the following areas of critical concern in the building of an MIS for the CSF:

- partner organisation data (maybe in a link with PADOR or a specific table in a CSF database);
- data on the focus of specific calls for proposals;
- data on awarded contracts;
- financial data.

Database enhancement — areas of improvement to the database — results-based data — It is expected the integration of such an (or equivalent) results-based grid or matrix into the wider frame of the new CSF database would provide a comprehensive basis for a qualitative ‘results-based’ identification and monitoring of the CSF projects, including the identification and aggregation of all significant results achieved, in line with the EU Results Framework List.

Database development — proposal for participative approach — One of the weaknesses of the current database has been absence of its shared use by both the DG NEAR and EUDs, which could have led its gradual improvement and consolidation. It is recommended to set up a participative approach, associating DG NEAR, one pilot EUD, and one pilot regional network. DG NEAR would keep the role of coordinator and decision-making body as concerns the concept, scope and access to and use of the database, and the pilot EUD would contribute with a country-scale approach while the regional network would horizontal inputs for the construction of the typology and grids of indicators.

As noted above, a fuller description of all the above-discussed issues and recommendations can be found in *Annex 14 – The Database*.

52. The EU-funded Regional Housing Programme has implemented an MIS that is not dissimilar in size (although it is likely that a CSF MIS would be smaller and less complex). It would be of value for CSF management to discuss with relevant representatives of the CEB, or the RHP’s Technical Assistance, the process through which the MIS was developed in order to have a more detailed picture of the potential benefits of a CSF MIS, and its potential cost in time and finances.



ANNEXES/ APPENDICES

REC. Shqipëri, Projekti ACHIEVE

- 1 Evaluation Terms of Reference
- 2 Evaluation Approach and Methodology
- 3 Evaluation Matrix Albania
- 4 Evaluation Matrix Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 5 Evaluation Matrix Kosovo
- 6 Evaluation Matrix former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- 7 Evaluation Matrix Montenegro
- 8 Evaluation Matrix Serbia
- 9 Evaluation Matrix Turkey
- 10 Evaluation Matrix Multi-beneficiary and Regional Projects
- 11 List of Key Informants
- 12 List of Documents Reviewed
- 13 Evaluation Matrix
- 14 Findings and Recommendations for the CSF Database
- 15 The Stakeholder Survey



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