

## Joint Civil Society Accountability Efforts in the Balkans: Call for Participation in the Regional Accountability Community of Practice

### Introduction

The [Balkan Civil Society Development Network \(BCSDN\)](#) is a network of 14 civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Balkans with a mission to empower civil society and influence European and national policies towards a more enabling environment for civil society development aiming to ensure sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans. Principles of respecting basic rights, cooperation, partnership, tolerance, and dialogue are sustained in our [Code of Conduct](#) and are the values on which we base our work ethics and trace our future actions.

By participating and actively engaging in global alliances, such as the [Global Standard for CSO Accountability](#) and the [CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness \(CPDE\)](#), BCSDN has gained valuable experience based on internationally recognized common standards that have helped us improve our own accountability practices, positioning the concept of [Dynamic Accountability](#) in the core of our actions and helping us resist and respond to ongoing challenges, and governments' restrictions, negatively affecting the overall civil society development in the Balkans. Through our [Regional Civil Society Development Hub](#), we aim to strengthen the regional cooperation to promote civic space and contribute towards effective, transparent, and accountable work of CSOs in our region.

As part of these efforts, we came up with the idea of launching a **Regional Accountability Community of Practice (RACoP)** that will strive towards continuous learning, improving CSOs work, and advancing accountability understanding and practices. Accountability can be a **lever for change**, and with the RACoP group, we offer an opportunity for discussion and sharing of good practices on how we can respond to the negative trends in our region, particularly the shrinking of the civic space.

The idea for creating the regional community results from BCSDN's membership in the *Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice*. This joint, global initiative by [CIVICUS](#), [Restless Development](#), [Keystone Accountability](#), and the [Global Standard Partnership](#) is a space where a wide range of civil society practitioners jointly share good practices, discover valuable resources, and mutually learn about the topic of Dynamic Accountability. This concept is explored in length by the [Global Standard](#) - a reference

standard for CSOs based on [12 commitments](#) that try to capture a shared understanding of accountability from CSOs worldwide.

## Context and Rationale

In its latest report, [People Power Under Attack 2021](#), Civicus Monitor noted that many of the population worldwide live in countries with restricted civic freedoms. In Europe, and more precisely in the Balkans, the governments use various methods to obstruct CSOs' work. These include harassment and physical attacks on journalists, detention of protesters, enacting restrictive laws, using adverse narratives, etc. Despite all pressures and criticism, CSOs should remain consistent and work according to their vision, mission, and goals, building strong alliances or strengthening the existing relationships with the people they work for and with. In order to enhance the external environment and contribute to civil society development in shrinking civic space, CSOs should invest in transformational relationships and [improve themselves "from within."](#)

According to BCSDN's latest research on [Constituency-led Accountability](#), CSOs in the Balkans should dive deep into the essence of accountability and transparency of their work, especially in their effort to create more robust support for defending the civic space. To increase the trust of their constituencies, among which the citizens, donors, and policymakers, CSOs should invest in their internal mechanisms and capacities, putting constituencies and constituencies' feedback at the core of their work and not mainly being tied to donors' funds and requirements. This confirms the need to position the concept of [Dynamic accountability](#) at the core of our work.

Facing similar challenges, while localizing the whole context and recognizing the need for a holistic approach to CSOs' work in the Balkans, BCSDN recognized the need to replicate the global community of practice into the regional context through the Regional Accountability Community of Practice Group (RACoP).

## How will the community function?

The Regional Accountability Community of Practice (RACoP) will serve as a **regional forum** that will contribute to CSOs' efforts in building a more just, effective, and resilient society in the Balkans, supporting the organizations operating in a period of shrinking civic space.

It will serve as a space for CSOs and networks in the Balkans to share their experiences and good practices, build knowledge and find synergies with different initiatives in the region on the topic of Dynamic Accountability, as well as gather various perspectives and explore

different solutions on how CSOs can **use this concept** to foster a **more participatory and inclusive approach** in their operations.

BCSDN will be responsible for the **overall coordination of the RACoP**, such as organizing meetings, preparing agendas, and communicating with RACoP members.

BCSDN will ensure ongoing conversations around different accountability issues of interest to the RACoP members by providing a **safe convening space** for exchange and discussions, **online or in-person**. In consultation with the members, **key topics of interest** will be identified (*e.g. localization of the accountability discussions, communications to improve CSO legitimacy and public trust, etc.*). To support these activities, on a later stage, BCSDN will be developing and regularly updating a **database of resources (open library)** for regular information sharing on both regional and global accountability developments. BCSDN will also ensure further regional **alignment with the global community of practice**, aiming to create **synergy and enhance shared learning**.

### Regional and Global Dynamic Community of Practice

As the establishment of the RACoP has been inspired by the Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice (DACoP), BCSDN will ensure **further alignment** of the regional with the global community of practice, aiming to create synergy and enhance shared learning. With the Global Standard commitments being used as a conceptual framework to lead contextual conversations around Dynamic Accountability relevant for the organizations from the region, BCSDN and Global Standard partners could work together on identifying common actions/ stories between them and create interesting, related peer stories coming from different parts of the world (example: environmental protection, attacks on/ protection of journalists, gender equality etc.). Further joint actions would also be considered (e.g. participation at events, sharing success stories, direct consultation etc.) according to the needs and interest expressed on both sides.

### Who can join the RACoP group?

RACoP group will function on voluntary basis and be open to Regional Civil Society Hub Grantees, and to any other organization, or CSO networks operating in the Balkans willing to enhance their legitimacy, transparency, and accountability, and contribute to the overall civil society resilience in the region.

## How can an organization join the RACoP group?

All CSOs and networks in the Balkans interested in our joint accountability discussion while enhancing their accountable work, could join the community, by expressing their interest at: [executiveoffice@balkancsd.net](mailto:executiveoffice@balkancsd.net).

## Next step

An **online kick-off meeting** will be organized in late November 2022 to introduce community members to each other so to define the community's structure that will be flexible and supportive of the planned joint activities. The kick-off meeting will be the community's launching event and will introduce the forthcoming actions and priorities.