

On the basis of the Grant Agreement No. 12715 01 signed between the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), for the provision of financial support to the Project “Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub” (hereinafter referred as to the “Project”), the Balkan Civil Society Development Network publishes

Open Call For Ad Hoc Support to Research and Regional Knowledge Exchange for Promoting Civil Society Enabling Environment in the Western Balkans (April 2023)

Background

Ad-hoc support is an instrument of the BCSDN Regional Civil Society Development Hub that was initially established to respond to immediate threats to the civic space or windows of opportunity for promoting civil society development that enables CSOs to be influential actors in the society.

The purpose of the ad-hoc grants is to support the mainstreaming of the standards for the enabling environment. The result which is expected to be achieved is to have increased understanding and involvement of key actors in improving the civil society environment.

In the previous period, the instrument of ad-hoc grants was used to support prompt response by CSOs to emerging challenges by enabling CSOs to benefit from expert missions or to support the organization of joint regional CSO actions.

Three years after the implementation of this project and nearing the end of the pilot period we have revised the call. Taking stock of our lessons learned, the valuable feedback gathered from beneficiaries and stakeholders, and combining it with the evidence gathered through our research and monitoring of the civil society operating environment and the civil society capacities we have revised the ad-hoc support mechanism to support actions that enable knowledge sharing and evidence gathering.

The essence of this support is to tap into the power of regional exchange and cooperation for the transfer of learning from one country to another, to support evidence-based advocacy for promoting a more enabling environment for civil society in the Western Balkans.

Aim of the call

The call is in line with the overall objective of the Hub to strengthen regional cooperation to promote civic space in the Western Balkan countries. **The aim of this call, therefore, is to support CSOs to conduct research, evidence gathering, and knowledge creation to address urgent threats to the civic space or specific windows of opportunities for prompting policy and legal change affecting the enabling environment for civil society development.**

The Hub will support research **aimed to collect evidence and or knowledge from the region**, that is specifically aimed to contribute towards the first specific objective of the Hub - **A conducive environment for civil society development that enables them to be influential actors in society.**

Activities and areas to be supported

Under this call, applicants may submit research proposals needed to support their advocacy actions to protect the civic space in one or more of the Western Balkan countries that would benefit from a regional perspective, collaboration, or exchange. Comparative regional research aimed at influencing public opinion and policy processes for protecting and promoting the civic space and the civil society enabling environment is specifically encouraged.

The support can be provided **only for research and subsequent advocacy actions (if planned)** that are aimed at **current, ongoing** practices or policy processes that affect the enabling environment for civil society development. Support can be provided for research proposals that examine and mainstream the respect and implementation of standards for enabling environment for CSOs working on thematic issues such as gender equality, environmental and climate change, and human rights and democracy.

The funding cannot be used for activities that assume sponsorships, financial support to individuals, or used for co-funding.

Preference will be given to research proposals that address the key findings from the latest BCSDN Monitoring of the civil society enabling environment that in a nutshell has flagged the following issues affecting the civil society operating environment:

Area 1: Freedom of Association, Assembly, and Expression

Inadequate policies and practices concerning freedom of association, increased state interference in the internal work of CSOs; Violations of freedom of expression and assembly, lack of strategic approach towards the increasing number of SLAPP lawsuits, problematic regulations on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism.

Area 2: Framework for CSO Financial Viability and Sustainability

Fiscal treatment of CSOs and donors that is not stimulative and not contributing to the CSO financial sustainability and viability; Ineffective tax incentives and complicated procedures for tax exemption; Systems for public funding that are not transparent, effective, and accessible for CSOs.

Area 3: Government-CSO Relationship:

Downward trend in effective and genuine consultations with civil society throughout the region, limited CSOs' influence in policy and decision-making processes.

The latest comprehensive Monitoring Matrix Regional Report for 2022 is available here: <https://www.balkancsd.net/monitoring-matrix-on-enabling-environment-for-civil-society-development-regional-report-western-balkans-and-turkey-2022/>.

All monitoring reports, including the detailed country reports, can be found here: <https://www.balkancsd.net/publications/monitoring-matrix-reports/>

➤ **Who Can Apply?**

All types of CSOs, platforms, organizations, and academic institutions, operating in at least one of the countries of the Western Balkan region- Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and the Republic of North Macedonia, as long as these are:

- a) Non-governmental and
- b) Not for profit.

➤ **What is the funding limit?**

The maximum grant limit for this type of support is EUR 6.000,00. The overall amount available under this Call is EUR 50.000,00.

➤ **Eligible costs**

The support may be used for engaging an expert, HR costs, direct costs related to the research process and/or for subsequent advocacy activities if planned as a result of the research.

Eligible costs are those incurred by the grant's beneficiary to implement the activities foreseen with the application form.

To be considered eligible, costs should meet the following criteria:

- a) are necessary for the implementation of the project and the achievement of the indicated project results;
- b) are reasonable, justified, and comply with the requirements of sound financial management including fair and market-based calculations and cost-efficiency;
- c) are in accordance with the applicable tax and social legislation requirements.

Ineligible costs

Ineligible costs include:

- a) Co-funding for other projects/ activities;
- b) Costs related to the preparation of the project proposal;
- c) Costs covered from other sources;
- d) Rent costs;
- e) Excessive and reckless costs.

➤ **Deadline for submission of applications:**

This call is open from the date of publication onwards until all funds are fully disbursed respecting the principle "first come, first served". Applications will be approved continuously.

The activities shall be implemented no later than the 15th of June 2023.

➤ **When is an answer received?**

If the application meets the above criteria and is approved, the applicant will be duly informed. The assessment and decision regarding the approval/disapproval of applications will be made swiftly.

BCSDN may request additional information or clarifications from the applicant regarding the project proposal including the budget. The entire communication with the applicant will be done with the email address of the applicant, which is stated in the application form (e-mail address of the contact person).

➤ **Provisions for the implementation of contracts**

Upon receipt of a decision on project financing, the applicant will receive a grant agreement prepared according to a standard sample. The grant agreement shall contain information on the action that will be implemented, the period for implementation, payment terms, and reporting requirements.

Before signing the contract, negotiations between the applicant and BCSDN are also possible for the final definition of eligible activities and costs.

➤ **How to apply?**

Applications should be submitted electronically to regionalhub@balkancsd.net with the subject: **Application for Ad-Hoc Support Grant - Regional Hub.**

➤ **Mandatory documents**

- a) Application for ad-hoc support grants;
- b) A copy of a valid document for the establishment of the organization/ the applicant;
- c) Basic act (statute) of the applicant;

Please note that:

Applications should be written in English ONLY.

The applicants should strictly follow the template enclosed in this call. All parts of the application have to be filled in:

- The applicant's data;
- The application;
- The budget for the project with justification for the proposed budget.