# STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

# REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT HUB

# PILOT PERIOD 2019-2021

## CONTEXT

## 1. RATIONALE & PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The presence of a vibrant, strong and free civil society is essential in order to guarantee sustainable development and to provide incentives for social and democratic change. Connected like never before, civil society actors around the world have found new ways to organize, demand greater government accountability and assert their voices in policy debates. At the same time, as citizens' voices have grown louder and more influential, many governments have responded by cracking down on civil society.

Only in the past couple of years, the space for effective civil society development and operation in the Western Balkans and Turkey (WBT) has been shaken immensely, with numerous incidents and violations being reported and enacted through legislation that often hinders the interests of CSOs, and thus of citizens. Politicians in power have created a hostile environment, smearing CSOs as foreign agents, while journalists and activists have been targeted for their investigative work. In almost all the countries, public funding has been distributed in a non-transparent and selective manner, often favouring pro-government organizations.

Unstable political climates and developments with wider, even global impacts, such as migration and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic, showcase the fragility of the sector. In a less-welcoming space for cooperation with public authorities, CSOs in the WBT region have partially lost their influence on decision-making.

In this challenging situation, there are possibilities for positive uptakes, new forms of collaboration and an opportunity for civil society to regain its relevance to citizens. Regionally, CSOs have showcased a higher amount of mutual understanding, collaboration and have the potential to play a crucial role in maintaining prosperity in the

region. The reasons to support further regional CSO cooperation, including the benefits, are noted in the mid-term evaluation of the European Commission's facility for supporting civil society in pre-accession countries[1].

The first reason for the regional approach is to address discrepancies in the development of civil society in the region through peer-to-peer capacity building, the exchange of knowledge, skills, and experience across CSOs. These countries have a similar cultural framework and face the same socio-economic challenges. The second is to address divisions in the countries that hamper the ongoing and general development of the region.

"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 the effectiveness of outcomes (through learning processes, and particularly peer-to-peer learning) as well as in addressing historical issues between countries...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" [2].

There is a third reason why the regional approach for promoting civic space is more effective: it creates a platform for solidarity and cooperation in case of need, allowing alternative venues for advocacy and for taking actions. Drawing from our experience through the years, this has proven to be the case, especially in our strategic aims to facilitate common understandings of a civil society enabling environment among a variety of stakeholders throughout the region and to promote and recognize civil society organizations as competent and democratic partners in the EU integration process. Most recently, the need for solidarity, the exchange of information and cooperation across the region has been further enhanced by the crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects and impact on civil society in our region.

Although few research results (including the 2019 TACSO Needs Assessment Report prepared by BCSDN), point to the conclusion that networking in the WBT region is common with positive examples of successful cooperation across the region, **there is significant lack of funding in the region for regional CSO initiatives.** Regional CSO cooperation is driven by donors' agendas with funding for such initiatives available only for particular purposes and projects, driving the creation of networks that are often not sustainable beyond the life of the project. Therefore, strengthening regional connections and cooperation by providing opportunities to build stronger regional alliances to promote civic space in the Western Balkans is a goal of crucial importance.

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1 [1]Mid-term Evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey; December 2017; European Commission, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR) Contract N°2016/380154/1; available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/csf_evaluation_report_wbt_dig.pdf

[2]Ibid.

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

## 1. OVERVIEW: REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT HUB

BCSDN, through a project "Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub" funded by SIDA, aims to establish a Regional Civil Society Development Hub as a regional center with a global impact that will create and share knowledge and innovation on CSOs' roles in promoting democracy and supporting the development of civil society in the Western Balkan countries[2] in the long term. The Hub will support effective, transparent and accountable CSOs that will contribute to protecting civic space by enabling the use of new and established funding mechanisms, working methods and means of cooperation.

The **overall objective of the Hub** is strengthened regional cooperation to promote civic space in the Western Balkan countries. This will be achieved by addressing the following **specific objectives**:

**SO 1**: CSOs contributed to a conducive environment for civil society development that enables them to be influential actors in society.

**SO 2**: CSOs contributed towards effective, transparent and accountable work in protecting civic space.

This will be supported by the use of new and established funding mechanisms, working methods and means of cooperation towards vibrant, pluralistic and rights-based civil society in the Balkans.

The Hub's activities are focused on two complementary pillars:

1. ***Systematic monitoring of the environment for civil society development and the state of CSO capacities*** and accountability, conducted by BCSDN and its members in the 6 Western Balkan countries, based on a standardized methodology (the Monitoring Matrix for the enabling environment, and the development of a new methodology to monitor CSO capacities and accountability).

2. ***A re-granting component enabled with the Regional Fund***, which will provide different types of funding mechanisms to respond to the needs of civil society in the Western Balkan. This grant scheme will support regional initiatives to address challenges identified with the annual monitoring and ad-hoc support for innovative uptakes and the immediate needs of CSOs to reclaim civic space. The thematic priorities will concern enabling civic space for human rights, gender equality, diversity and inclusion and the environment, as well as for sharing expertise and peer-to-peer support among CSOs in the region in the areas of civic space and accountability.

The re-granting component of the Regional Fund will be an essential part of the Hub as it will enable necessary financial support for the wider participation of civil society groups from the WB countries to jointly contribute to the identified bottlenecks for civil society development in the region. The implementation period for the pilot phase of the SIDA funded project is 2 years and has been set as from 1 September 2019 until 31 August 2021. The total budget available for the re-granting component for this pilot phase is EUR 1.030.000,00.

[2] Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia

# 2. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES / RELATED CHALLENGES

## SO 1. CSOS CONTRIBUTED TO A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT THAT ENABLES THEM TO BE INFLUENTIAL ACTORS IN SOCIETY

In order to operate effectively, civil society must have the space to speak out, to educate, to mobilize and to ensure that everyone can participate in the democratic processes of their country. The set of conditions that impact the capacity of citizens to participate and engage in the civil society arena in a sustained and voluntary manner is what defines an enabling environment. BCSDN started dealing with the concept of enabling environment for civil society development because it constitutes the basis of functioning democratic institutions and processes in a given country and it facilitates the long-term sustainability of the sector. In 2012, BCSDN with support of its member CSOs, partners and legal experts, developed the first **Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development** (CSDev) and a Tool-kit for measuring the health of the legal, regulatory, and financial environments in which CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey (WBT) operate. The Monitoring Matrix is a valuable advocacy tool regarding national governments and the EU, and a reliable method for observing changes in CSOs' operational environments.

The latest Monitoring Matrix findings of 2019 show that CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey (WBT) operate in a relatively enabling and stable legal environment; however, numerous challenges exist in the environment, hindering CSOs' influence as societal change actors. These challenges can be summarized as follows:

**Deterioration of the state of fundamental freedoms:** Notwithstanding relatively good legal guarantees of basic freedoms, the exercise of the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in practice has not been optimal. The latest monitoring results show that restrictions relating to the place and/or time of gatherings still persist, and activists and journalists in all of the Western Balkan countries remain targets of hostility, threats, labelling, and even arrests. There is a general perception that not enough is being done by the responsible authorities to solve the cases of assaults against journalists, while the growing number of cases of hate speech and fake news are further threats to the freedom of expression.

**Weak cooperation between civil society and public institutions:** The relationship between civil society and public institutions is formalized, however, genuine cooperation is lacking in all countries in the region. This is seen in the absence of high-quality dialogue between civil society and public institutions, and most-notably the low influence of CSOs in the decision-making processes. CSOs are not sufficiently appreciated by the public institutions when it comes to service provision and in most countries, CSOs do not receive sufficient funding to cover basic costs of the public services that they are contracted to provide.

**Unfavorable legal framework and practices regarding employment and volunteering:** In most of the WBT, it has been noted that the existing laws and policies on employment do not adequately reflect the specific nature of CSO operations. There is a lack of incentives for employment; the concept of volunteering is not well developed within the legal framework and burdensome administrative procedures hinder the options for CSOs to have volunteers and interns, especially from abroad. In most cases, CSOs are not subjected to equal employment benefits available for businesses.

**Lack of sustainable funding:** Uncertainty when it comes to long-term funding possibilities, as well as income diversification, is an issue in the WBT region. Namely, CSO representatives have stressed the need for increased tax benefits, bearing in mind that CSOs are non-profit organizations and paying all taxes as companies or corporations does affect the volume of services they can provide. This is in particular related to tax benefits for economic activities which are currently burdensome and not fit for the conditions of CSOs. There is also a lack of tax incentives for individual and corporate giving, which are insufficiently practiced regarding the civil sector mainly due to unsupportive administrative procedures. Moreover, public funding and its distribution remain problematic with a lack of clear procedures resulting in increasing possibilities for arbitrary decision-making and, as a result, reduced trust from the CSOs.

**Lack of broader CSOs coordination for promoting a more enabling environment:** So far, the agenda for promoting civic space has been led by a handful of knowledgeable organizations. However, while regulations and practices that interfere with the work of CSOs should worry civil society organizations, we should have in mind that civic space is not only about formal organizations. Civic space, after all, is about the fundamental challenges of citizens to demand and promote social change. Thus, while CSOs work on improving the operating environment of civil society, the issue of shrinking civic space affects everybody. To effectively promote civic space, CSOs need first to partner up with other CSOs working on similar topics, but also to build coalitions with a broader scope of stakeholders such as trade unions, religious communities or informal activists and groups. Cooperating and joining forces with many organizations, formal and informal civic initiatives is much more effective than just a few organizations safeguarding civic space on their own. Such coalition building should start locally, but there is a need for stronger solidarity, and collaboration across the region too. Lessons from the region teach us that when civic space and democracy are under attack in one country, demonstrating wider solidarity on regional, international and global levels might be a game-changer. Moreover, negative trends in one country tend to spread to neighbouring countries, too, so CSOs can help each other by sharing experience and lessons learned by acting preemptively.

## **SO 2.** CSOS CONTRIBUTED TOWARDS EFFECTIVE, TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE WORK THAT CONTRIBUTES TO PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE

Apart from improving civil society's performance by creating an enabling environment for civil society development, improvement "from within" is also necessary - CSOs in the WBT region need to improve their standards, to increase levels of trust from their constituencies, citizens, donors and policymakers. Civil society has an important role in holding all stakeholders, including itself, to the highest levels of accountability.

In 2016, BCSDN became a partner of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability initiative, together with eight other well-established civil society networks from around the world. The overarching aim of this initiative is to strengthen the effectiveness of CSOs worldwide by devising a collective accountability standard and a point of orientation for CSO accountability globally. At the heart of the Global Standard is the concept of Dynamic Accountability, an approach to accountability where the feedback and voice of people that CSOs work for and with, drives organizational decision-making. It requires processes grounded in meaningful stakeholder engagement that are inclusive, participatory and continuously practiced.

As indicated by the TACSO Needs Assessment Regional Report 2019 prepared by BCSDN, **one of the biggest capacity-related challenges for CSOs in the region is connected to transparency and accountability.** Namely, although there is growing awareness of the importance of transparency in a time of shrinking civic space, the level of transparency in CSOs is generally rather low in practice. A large number of CSOs do not publish annual reports, or they publish them without an accompanying financial report. And even when CSOs report on their activities, they tend to focus on outputs rather than on their impact. In absence of impact measurement methodology, CSOs must focus on knowledge, resources, and proper communication tools to reach their constituency to and maintain trust among citizens. However, the level of communication skills in CSOs is still rather basic, focusing more on promotion and using technical project language, not engaging in narratives and story-telling. This results in having a distorted presentation of CSOs activities to the public, which ultimately increases the gap between CSOs and their constituencies. Adding to this challenge is the fact that the activities of CSOs are mostly motivated by donors' priorities which often makes discrepancies between donors' agendas and CSOs core focuses. Orienting towards donors' priorities could mean that some CSOs are partially neglecting their initial core activities, thus leading to a decreased level of trust from their constituencies. Therefore, investing more effort in successfully executing in practice the investment in the Dynamic Accountability approach should be a starting point towards improved trust and legitimacy of the CSO sector and increased capacity.

# 3. LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

## SO 1: CSOS CONTRIBUTED TO A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT THAT ENABLES THEM TO BE INFLUENTIAL ACTORS IN SOCIETY

To achieve this objective, the HUB will rely on two types of interventions:

1. Systematic and regular monitoring of the civil society operating environment conducted by BCSDN members in each of the six Western Balkan countries through a unified methodology of the Monitoring Matrix.
2. Grant support enabled through the Regional Fund: Grant scheme for regional action grants aimed at promoting civic space, and ad-hoc grants for addressing immediate challenges to the civic space or for enabling innovative actions to promote the enabling environment.

**Expected Result/ Outcome:** Increased understanding and involvement of key actors in the improvement of the environment for civil society development in the WBT.

### ACTIVITIES:

#### 1. MONITORING THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- Conducting the research on the enabling environment (EE) based on the indicators stipulated in the Monitoring Matrix, applying the agreed and unified methodology for data collection, data analysis and interpretation;
- Preparation of annual Country Reports for to monitor the EE for each of the six countries in the WB region, based on the research performed, providing details about CSOs' operating environments per country and thus contributing to the needs assessment and definition of the actions to be financed by the Regional Fund;
- Preparation of annual Regional Report for the monitoring of the EE, summarizing the findings in the Countries Reports and providing analysis and a needs assessment for WB region for the re-granting component;
- The country and regional reports will also serve as a baseline for the Hub's result framework, allowing for the assessment of progress and the contribution of the Hub towards the overall environment.

#### 2. REGIONAL FUND

#### ➢ REGIONAL GRANT SCHEME

Grant support for regional initiatives or actions aimed to address any of the following key issues and challenges concerning the civil society operating environment:

- To advance the state of fundamental freedoms (freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly);
- To support resource mobilization for promoting civic space;
- To improve civic dialogue and the cooperation between civil society and public institutions;
- To advocate for the improvement of the operating environment for CSOs before the EU, national governments and other stakeholders;
- To improve the legal framework and practices concerning the financial viability of civil society;
- To encourage innovative mechanisms for fundraising;
- To encourage broader CSO and multi-stakeholder coordination and cooperation for promoting civic space;
- Other initiatives contributing to an improved environment.

### ➢ AD-HOC GRANTS

The ad-hoc grants are aimed to support CSOs to respond rapidly to changing conditions and immediate needs to address new challenges. Fast responses to incidences of shrinking civic space are particularly important for an organization as there can be sudden obstructions to the free and safe operating environments for CSOs that have to be addressed immediately. Therefore, it follows a simplified and accelerated review procedure to ensure timely response to the interest of the cause or issue.

The ad-hoc support is aimed to address some of the following key issues:

- To advance the state of fundamental freedoms (freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly);
- To improve civic dialogue and the cooperation between civil society and public institutions;
- To improve the legal framework and practices concerning the financial viability of civil society;
- To encourage broader CSO and multi-stakeholder coordination and cooperation for promoting civic space;
- To support resources mobilization for promoting civic space.

The ad-hoc support will provide two different types of support:

***SUPPORT FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS***

This type of support is aimed to allow organizations to address "immediate needs" at any level of intervention. The essence of this support is to stimulate active regional cooperation by enabling mobilization and resolving important societal issues "here and now" by an expert mission, peer exchange or learning from one country to another. Such actions can be opinions on a new law; support in advocacy strategy to address a crisis, support in the organization of a campaign when civic space is shrinking, or when there is an opportunity for positive advancements to promote civic space.

This mechanism should be used where there is an immediate need for civil society actors, where a regional exchange can help find solutions to the existing problems facing CSOs and when there is insufficient time to operate through the standard grant award procedure.

***SUPPORT FOR INNOVATION***

Innovative uptakes to the fight for enlarging the civic space will also be supported, such as exploring the collective power of different groups (e.g. young people, women and vulnerable groups) to lead and transform their communities and gatherings that would work to find solutions to restrictions. The support can be for community actions, regional gatherings or other activities that will mainstream civil society enabling environment standards in thematic areas of human rights, gender equality, diversity and inclusion, sustainable development and the environment. The actions should aim to address the challenges through an innovative approach which we have defined according to the Innovation for Change definitions of innovation:

| | |
|---|---|
| New solution in a new context | Established solution in a new context |
| New solution in established context | Established solution(s) recombine to serve an objective |

## OUTPUTS

1. Twelve annual Country Reports to monitor the EE prepared for each of the six countries in the WB region (six for 2019 and six for 2020);
2. Two annual Regional Reports to monitor the EE prepared (one for 2019 and one for 2020);
3. At least seven regional action grants implemented that promote civic space in the Western Balkan region;

4. Fourteen ad- hoc grants awarded for:
    - Four actions of innovative uptakes for mainstreaming CSO enabling standards in policy areas to promote human rights, gender equality, diversity and inclusion, sustainable development and the environment;
    - Five expert missions facilitated and supported, on the request of CSOs to address specific issues concerning civic space: e.g. an opinion of new law; support in advocacy strategy and so on;
    - Five regional gatherings to support the participation of CSO representatives on peer learning exchanges of expertise.

## **SO 2:** CSOS CONTRIBUTED TOWARDS EFFECTIVE, TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE WORK THAT CONTRIBUTES TO PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE

To achieve this objective, the HUB will rely on two types of interventions:

1. Continuous promotion of good practices and developing a joint methodology to monitor the state of CSO capacities and accountability, as well as conducting monitoring by BCSDN members;
2. Grant support enabled through the Regional Fund: Grant scheme for regional action grants aimed at improving CSOs' accountability as an important aspect to better promote civic space, and ad-hoc grants for addressing immediate challenges faced by CSOs and their capacities.

***Expected Result/ Outcome:*** Improved use and promotion of best accountability practices of CSOs in the region.

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. CSO CAPACITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Development of a joint research methodology for monitoring the state of CSOs' capacities, agreed to by the 6 WB members;
- Conducting field research by BCSDN's members and collecting inputs on national levels about CSOs' capacities according to the agreed research methodology;
- Methodological Workshop on EE and CSOs' accountability organized by the Executive Office (EO) with the participation of members;
- Preparation of Regional Report about CSOs' capacities in the WB region. The report will be integrated into the result framework, allowing for the assessment of progress and the contribution of the Hub towards the overall environment.

### 2. REGIONAL FUND

#### ➢ REGIONAL GRANT SCHEME

Support for regional action grants will be provided to regional networks to promote their dynamic accountability practices, such as:

- To support CSO constituency and trust-building, like innovative outreach activities, CSO rebranding etc.;
- To encourage meaningful participation of stakeholders at all levels;
- To encourage feedback culture among CSOs and close the feedback look;
- Other dynamic accountability practices.

### ➢ AD-HOC GRANTS

The ad-hoc support will be aimed at addressing immediate challenges and urgent threats to the integrity and accountability of a CSO in any of the six Western Balkan Countries. Like for SO1, the ad-hoc support follows a simplified and accelerated review procedure to ensure the organization in need can respond timely to address the specific issue. Unlike under the previous specific objective, where the ad-hoc support is available for innovative actions, ad-hoc support under this objective will be provided only for IMMEDIATE NEEDS.

In this respect, expert support will be provided to organizations to improve their accountability mechanisms and standards in cases when the organizations' integrity has been threatened. For illustration, such activities can be: for the preparation of a response to hostile attacks on the work of an organization or for the preparation of internal policies that are to safeguard an organization's integrity.

## OUTPUTS

1. Joint research methodology for monitoring the state of CSOs' capacities developed;
2. One Regional Report about CSOs' capacities in the WB region prepared;
3. At least five regional action grants implemented that promote the dynamic accountability of the regional networks;
4. Twenty ad-hoc grants awarded for:
    - Fourteen expert missions facilitated and supported aimed at improving internal accountability mechanisms;
    - Six regional gatherings – to support participation in peer learning, the exchange of expertise and experience in improving internal accountability mechanisms.

REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT HUB

# THEORY OF CHANGE

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| OVERALL OBJECTIVE (IMPACT) | **Strengthened regional cooperation for promoting civic space in the Western Balkan countries** | | | |
| SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE | CSOs contributed to a conducive environment for civil society development that enables them to be influential actors in the society | | CSOs contributed towards effective, transparent and accountable work in protecting civic space | |
| | IMPLEMENTED BY BCSDN | IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE REGIONAL FUND | | IMPLEMENTED BY BCSDN |
| OUTPUTS | • Annual Monitoring Matrix reports on the enabling environment for civil society development in the region | • Standards on Enabling Environment (EE) mainstreamed among wider CSO | • Support to networks in their dynamic accountability practices | • Methodology for monitoring the state of CSO capacities and accountability in the countries<br>• Report on CSO accountability in the countries;<br>• Good practices on accountability promoted |
| ACTIVITIES | • Regular monitoring incl. exchange and standardization of methodology (Monitoring Matrix to be used by BCSDN members) | • Ad hoc grants for mainstreaming EE standards for CS development • Action grants for key EE issues, as identified with the monitoring | • Action grants for networks to improve accountability practices • Ad hoc support to CSOs for improved accountability practices | • Development of methodology for monitoring the state of CSO capacities and accountability region and preparation of a report;<br>• Promoting the Global Standard and identification and sharing of good practices from the region and beyond for promoting CSO accountability |

# 4. REGIONAL FUND: TYPES AND MODALITIES OF SUPPORT

For the pilot phase 2019-2021 the Regional Hub will provide the following grant-making opportunities through its re-granting component (the Regional Fund) for which CSO organizations from the region can apply for:

## I. REGIONAL – MULTI-COUNTRY ACTION GRANTS

The main target group for the regional grants consists of civil society networks that wish to promote their causes through collective actions. Already established formal or non-formal platforms of collaboration can benefit from these grants, with the encouragement of peer-to-peer learning and sharing, as can new action learning networks when new formations are necessary.

The grants will be awarded to the regional networks and initiatives submitting the most promising proposals on how to advance civic space in the region. For this purpose, a call for proposals with detailed guidelines for applicants will be published to ensure a competitive process by specifying the selection criteria for the potential applicants and project applications.

The award decision will be based on the impartial assessment done by external evaluators. These evaluators will be recruited through an open call, based on selection criteria about their previous experience in performing evaluations and demonstrated knowledge for the thematic areas specified in the call, with a focus on civil society development. The EO shall conduct its deliberations based on evaluators' assessments while preparing the evaluation report. The evaluation report shall provide recommendations to the Steering Group on which project proposals should be selected for funding based on the scores assigned to each project proposal by the evaluators. The Steering Groups will provide the final approval of the project proposals.

The first call will be published as a one-stage application process, meaning the applicants will provide full applications. Having in mind the implementation period of the Project's pilot phase, for the first call there are significant time constraints that may jeopardize the implementation period set in the agreement signed with SIDA if the two-stage application process is applied. Moreover, as the funding is planned for regional networks and initiatives, the one-stage application process will not be a great burden for the evaluation process as there are not many regional networks or initiatives that may apply for the call.

However, the two-stage application process (concept notes first, and then full applications) will be considered in later stages i.e. for further calls for proposals.

Regional grant recipients may not also apply to the ad-hoc grants scheme while they are implementing a project.

The minimum duration of action will be 6 months and the maximum will be 10 months.

The minimum amount per grant will be EUR 20.000,00 and the maximum will be EUR 70.000,00. More details about the indicative amounts of the budgets for the applications about EE and accountability will be elaborated in the respective call, where the possibility of reallocation of funds between the two priorities will be introduced to have flexibility in case of greater interest for one or another priority.

## II. AD-HOC SUPPORT TO CSOS IN THE WESTERN BALKAN REGION

Ad-hoc support can be provided through an actual grant awarded to the CSOs requesting support or by directly funding expert support provided by individual experts or other societal actors such as media, research institutes, think tanks or universities, providing the needed expertise to support CSOs in times of crisis. The organization of a thematic gathering in line with the priorities of this Strategy can be also supported with funding.

The assistance provided through this instrument can be awarded for:

## Expert Missions

The use of identified expert support (experts can be individuals or private entities) can be funded in a case where an organization from the WB region requests peer advice and the exchange of experience on specific civic space topics: e.g. an opinion of a new law; support in advocacy strategy, support in improving internal accountability mechanisms, support in the organization of a campaign, etc. In order to comply with the principle of "regional approach", the expert from one country will be assigned to share their expertise and experience with a requesting organization from another country. The expert missions can be implemented in two ways:

a. The organization requesting the expert support can apply for funding and can include in the project proposal and the respective budget of the costs for an already identified expert who will perform the assignment and who will be the subject of evaluation;
b. The organization requesting the expert support can apply for funding elaborating the immediate need for a particular type of expertise, and the expert will be identified and appointed by BCSDN from the expert database in an agreement with the successful applicant.

The **expert database** will be established to provide the necessary expertise for different types of assistance requested by organizations. This database will consist of experts demonstrating a good understanding of current civic space trends in the region and experience on issues related to civil society: democracy, human rights, good governance and transparency, gender equality, social justice, environment and climate change, etc. The experts will be selected based on predefined selection criteria and will be invited by BCSDN to provide their services when needed.

This database will consist of experts coming not only from the Western Balkan region but also from other countries in Europe where BCSDN has its members[3].

## Regional Conference/Workshops/Community Actions

The organization of the regional event(s) with regional participation that will contribute to the overall objective of the Hub and will focus on proposing innovative solutions, topics and thematic approaches to the identified needs of the Strategy can be funded by the ad-hoc support grants. Single events may be organized in one country from the WB region on a particular thematic area where regional experts may be invited to share their experience. Multi-country events on a particular thematic area may be organized in several countries from the WB region simultaneously or consequently in a short period, where regional experts may be invited to share their experience.

Regional gatherings of CSOs, civil society actors, and their constituencies will be encouraged to interact and to share their problems and solutions (ideas), promote their causes, learn together and establish consensus on their needs and the priorities that must be acted upon in the short, medium or long term. The regional gatherings can be both in line with the immediate needs stream or innovation stream of support. In order to comply with the principle of "regional approach", organizations from at least three countries of the Western Balkan region should actively be involved in the organization of the events.

One of the priorities of this component will be mainstreaming human rights, gender equality, environment and a healthy planet as topics, as well as organizations that deal with these themes. The primary aim of this support would be space for their actions and support for their participation in policy and decision-making. Innovative uptakes to the fight for reclaiming civic space will also be supported such as exploring collective power of different groups (e.g.

[3] http://www.balkancsd.net/about-us/members/

young people, women, and vulnerable groups) to lead and transform their communities; hackathons that would work to find solutions to restrictions of civic space and so on.

For the ad-hoc support grants, an open call for proposals to receive funding will be open throughout the Project's implementation period. This call will contain details about the type of funding that will be provided, who is eligible to apply for funding and what the eligible activities are. The applicants will be able to express their interest and provide information about the respective problem to be solved or reduced. They will describe a proposed solution to solve the problem or make a change and who the target groups and beneficiaries are.

The instrument of ad-hoc support grants is established to respond rapidly to changing conditions and emerging needs, being flexible to support civil society's needs and address new challenges as they arise. Therefore, it will follow a simplified and accelerated review procedure to ensure timely response to the interest or issue. The applications will be reviewed at least once per month by the Executive Office and will be approved in an agreement between the chairperson of the Steering Group and the project manager.

The individual grant awarded under the ad-hoc support mechanism cannot exceed EUR 10.000,00 per action, and the maximum duration of action will be 1 month.

## III. TARGET GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The Fund will be open and inclusive. It will encourage the participation of all types of regional networks, platforms and organisations as long as these are:

a) Non-governmental, and

b) Not for profit.

This means that the following types of organisations can participate:

**A)** ***Regional networks of CSOs***, associations and foundations, including non-governmental, not for profit, coalitions, partnerships, networks, sectoral or thematic interest groups, media outlets, research institutes, and think tanks, which are registered in at least one of the 6 Western Balkan countries (Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia) and have member organizations in more than 2 countries from the region. These groups of organizations can benefit from all services offered by the Fund.

**B)** ***Informal regional networks of CSOs,*** notably non-registered platforms of associations and foundations, including non-governmental, not for profit, coalitions, partnerships, networks, sectoral or thematic interest groups, media outlets, research institutes, and think tanks, which have member organizations in more than 2 countries from the region. Those types of networks can apply with one organization leading the network or through a consortium of organizations. These groups of organizations can benefit from all services offered by the Fund.

**C)** ***Individual organizations,*** associations, foundations and networks, registered in one of the 6 countries of the Western Balkan region, ***can be beneficiaries of the ad-hoc support offered by the Fund,*** to support their regional activities through the following two streams of support: expert support and/or regional gatherings.

Note that the Fund will not exclude certain CSOs or regional actors from participation for its entire duration, but it retains the possibility to do so for specific grants and specific Calls for Proposals. More information on the eligibility criteria will be available in the respective Calls for Proposals.

In addition to CSO networks and organizations from the region, the Fund also includes CSO constituencies as a target group. The broader constituencies are civil society in the region, the governments of the Western Balkan countries, the donor community present in the region and the general public, all to shape their understanding and support for free civic space and empowered civil society. The constituents can directly benefit from their participation in CSO or CS-actor led activities funded through this initiative. The Fund's portfolio related to CSOs accountability will focus on

providing CSOs grants and other types of support targeting constituency building and dynamic accountability that puts constituents at the core of CSOs accountability.

### IV. GRANT ALLOCATIONS

The Regional Fund for the pilot phase period (2019-2021) has EUR 1.030.000,00 available to support initiatives to promote civic space. Out of those funds, EUR 690.000,00 will be awarded to regional action grants through an open competitive procedure, where the best applications for regional and multi-country initiatives will be awarded grant contracts. The remaining amount of EUR 340.000,00 will be awarded through the ad- hoc support streams.

The maximum budgets and duration for different types of actions will be defined with the respective call for proposals. Regarding the call for regional grants, more detailed information about the budget ceilings per priority areas (EE and accountability) will be provided. However, the call will contain a stipulation that BCSDN retains its right not to allocate part of the available funds and to re-allocate them to other types of assistance depending on the outcome of the calls for proposals. This will allow for flexibility in the case of greater demand for funding for a particular priority or actions.

## 5. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

During these two years of the pilot phase, comprehensive monitoring of the Hub's activities shall be enforced to regularly follow the implementation of the Strategy, to measure the achievement of the outputs and the overall goal, and to identify areas of where and how to further expand or scale up the Hub's activities through a strategic learning system. This would be essential for the next programming period for the Hub's Strategy, in which the lessons learned from the implementation of the pilot phase shall be taken to decide the Hub's future scope of work and intervention levels.

Focused Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework will be designed, developing an internal strategic and operational learning system of the Hub, to better tailor the priorities, types of initiatives and criteria of the future interventions and calls for proposals and to demonstrate accountability to the stakeholders. The Hub lays strong emphasis on identifying lessons, on learning and continuous improvement for the recipients of funding, so that learning can be extracted and projected more widely for the sector.

BCSDN through contracting one of its members will produce a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework and Plan before the contracting of the regional grants. The plan will be built upon the existing tools such as the Results Framework of the funding that will be provided through the Fund and the overall Hub's priorities. In time all grants and support provided through the Fund shall be integrated into the Framework, allowing national monitoring and evaluation officers from BCSDN members and Task Force Group members to follow the grantees work and report to the Executive Office. Upon the closure of the awarded grants, the MEL report will be prepared to allow BCSDN and SIDA, as its main donor, to evaluate the intervention logic and the further investment in the initiative.

The expert who will be contracted will perform more rigorous and extensive analysis than the monitoring performed during the individual project's implementation. The evaluation will look beyond activities and outputs on contract level and will focus on actual results and changes created, and contributed to, by the funding provided through the Hub. This analysis will lead to learning that will be shared with partners and other stakeholders, using the knowledge to improve future decision-making. The evaluation will strive to develop a knowledge base on the types of projects and policies that are successful and more generally, what works, what does not and why. In this context, organisational learning will be promoted, allowing the organizations to learn from experiences, to improve practices and activities in the future.

## 6. INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

BCSDN will integrate the work of the Regional Hub into its regular Information, Communication and Outreach. A brief Information, Communication and Outreach plan will be prepared before awarding the grants allowing the creation of a soft visual identity, promotion and visibility guidelines for the grantees and the overall action.

## 7. GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT

The Regional Hub, including the Fund as its integral part, depends on effective and accountable governance and implementation. The governing bodies of the Hub are the following and maintain all functions for the fulfilment of this Strategy:

- BCSDN Board
- Steering Group
- Task Force Group
- BCSDN Executive Office (EO).

- **BCSDN Board**

The Board is the governing and supervisory organ of BCSDN. The main responsibilities of the Board related to the functioning of the Hub are reviewing and approving the strategic documents necessary for the smooth implementation of the Hub's activities and this Strategy. In this respect, the Board shall approve and supervise the implementation of the Hub's Strategy, the procedures regulating the work of the re-granting mechanism (the Fund) and all other strategic documents that will contain information about the work of the Hub. The Board will appoint the members of the Steering Group based on previous experience and proven expertise in the area of CSO development, accountability and transparency.

- **Steering Group**

The Steering Group is established to support and supervise the work of the Regional Civil Society Development Hub. It is comprised of BCSDN experts, external experts and donor representatives who demonstrate regional experience and knowledge about civic space developments and CSOs' capacities.

The strategic and operational direction will come from the Steering Group which will oversee the Hub's work. The Steering Group have a decision-making role in the selection procedures for the funding available with the re-granting mechanisms, by approving the selection reports prepared for the evaluations of project applications and ensuring that the principles of impartiality and objectiveness are duly respected. The Steering Group has also an advisory role in knowledge provision and orientation and determines the thematic priorities for the call for proposals for the regional and ad-hoc support grants, including the approval of these calls. Also, the Steering Group will discuss and make decisions about complaints, if any, resulting from the selection processes. The Group shall discuss the progress in the implementation of the Hub's Strategy and shall verify and approve the respective monitoring results.

The work of the Steering Group may be supported by observers who may be nominated from the donor- SIDA representative.

- **Task Force Group**

A Task Force Group is established to support the establishment and the functioning of the Hub and in particular the implementation of the procedures regarding its re-granting component. It is composed of BCSDN members which have reputable civil society expertise with a track record of funding CSO development, a good understanding of civic space trends, well-established networks of civil society contacts across the countries to be covered with the Hub and have the necessary resources available to support the work of the Hub.

The Task Force Group members are appointed by the BCSDN Western Balkan members that are implementing partners in the Hub's performance or are appointed by a BCSDN member that is not an implementing partner but it is invited by the EO because of exceptional knowledge and experience in providing funding for CSO development and understanding civic space trends in the region.

The Task Force Group includes one appointed person per organization who will work in the re-granting programmes of the Hub on the national level. Task Force members will ensure that national expertise and experience are shared with the regional staff. In this respect, the TFG will ensure the capacity building component to the EO, providing support and input in the preparation of all documents regarding the re-granting and implementation procedures that will be financed through the Fund. They will also support the Executive Office in monitoring the implementation of the grants contracts and will provide logistics and necessary facilities for conducting smooth monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process of the grants awarded in their country, by hosting and facilitating the work of contracted experts.

- **BCSDN Executive Office**

BCSDN Executive Office is hosting the Hub and is the overall prime grantee of the donor(s) to the project. The Executive Office is accountable for the management of the funds, legal and fiduciary obligations, and all donor requirements.

Executive Office responsibilities include the preparation of all necessary documents for the processes that will be implemented by the Hub, including the re-granting processes, and the implementation and monitoring activities for the awarded grants. This includes the preparation of all respective procedures and guidelines, calls, reports and the organization of all processes like evaluation, contracting, monitoring, etc. necessary for the successful implementation of this Strategy and the Hub's objectives.

The EO will support the governance structure, the Board and the Steering Group in performing their tasks and responsibilities. It will also make sure that all activities undertaken concerning this Strategy and the results achieved are published widely, giving recognition for the donor's funding.

## 8. SUSTAINABILITY

The first 2 years of the Hub's functioning are considered as a pilot phase and through the monitoring and evaluation process, key aspects of the Hub's sustainability will be developed: institutional, programmatic and financial. At the moment BCSDN efforts guarantee sustainability through:

**Institutional Sustainability/Organizational:** BCSDN is a longstanding partnership between 14 civil society organizations that have been an example of regional cooperation and sustainable actions related to civil society development in the region. BCSDN has highly developed governance structure since 2009 that has been active and constantly reviewed to ensure an effective and accountable organization in service to its members and wider CSOs in the region. BCSDN Governing bodies and members have shown a commitment to the smooth operation of the proposed action and their involvement has been carefully planned in different parts of the governance structure of the Hub and the overall action. The division of roles, responsibilities and BCSDN's proven organizational sustainability in the region guarantees the institutional sustainability of the action.

**Programmatic Sustainability:** It may be anticipated that, initially, BCSDN members will play a primary role in delivery at the national and regional level of the proposed action. In due course, as the programme gathers speed, this role will be increasingly assumed by the wider group of CSOs as primary deliverers of the programme (the grantees). Leading members at these different levels may take key responsibilities in promoting civic space. These organizations

will be supported by the BCSDN executive office, which will coordinate, facilitate and enable the process, and will take lead responsibility for its overall administration.

**Financial sustainability:** BCSDN has a proven track record of financial sustainability for civil society development action. The research activities that are foreseen in the scope of the Hub are activities that are core to all activities that BCSDN is conducting and BCSDN has already demonstrated the capacity to sustain this action through different initiatives and donor-funded programs. The Regional Fund as an integral part of the Hub has been inspired by those actions and the members' re-granting schemes, but it is going to be a pilot of a such action on the regional level. Financial sustainability at this point could be assured only on a national level as BCSDN members provide similar support to CSOs through their resource centers and grant facilities. The pilot phase will determinate the future financial sustainability of the actions implemented with the Fund, once evaluated it will be proposed to other donors such as the SDC, which already supports 4 of our members in re-granting in their countries. The Fund could also serve its role in the exit strategy of SIDA from the region.

The already conducted evaluation identified several strengths that could benefit the overall sustainability of this intervention:

"The initial activities implemented by the Regional Hub in the past months were a good test for the functionality of the established structure. Based on the review of documents and the interviews with representatives of the different bodies across the Hub's institutional set up among its **major strengths** are":

- Good strategic leadership provided by the Board and the Executive Office and established culture of consultative processes allowing for participatory development of the idea, strategy and the structure of the Hub
- There is real content-wise connection among the participating BCSDN members, as well as outside experts based on common values, shared understanding of the needs in the region, a sense of belonging to the network as a regional representation and voice of civil society.
- All interviewed representatives of the different bodies of the Hub have strong motivation and commitment to its idea and success. There is a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities.
- The Executive Office team has excellent capacities in facilitating effective and efficient communication with and among the different levels of the Hub, as well as for adaptive management of the Fund based on input from the implementing partners. This is highly appreciated by the participating members of the BCSDN.
- Another important added value is that the Hub is matching internal with external expertise – the Steering Group can contribute to the effectiveness of the Hub with outside perspective but also with good knowledge of both the region and the network.

**Attachment:**

**Annex I-** Result Framework- Funding Scheme