



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

MAPPING AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

of the Regional Networks and Regional
Projects Funded within Civil Society Facility
in the Western Balkans and Turkey

- CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS -





Conclusions

1. General Conclusions

- CSOs' networking in the region of Western Balkans and Turkey is developed. In total, **119 active networks** have been identified which operate in many different sectors;
- EU support, namely for funding the **CSF regional projects, plays a significant role** in the development, operation and existence of networks. From 2012 to 2020, the EU has supported **71 regional projects that encourage cooperation and networking of organisations in the region**, through five different calls;
- The enabling environment for CSOs and networks in the WB region is solid; they can freely associate, operate, communicate and connect with each other. The **general legal framework for freedom of association and specifically for CSOs' networking is in line with the recommended international standards and practices**. Organisations can freely associate, form coalitions and platforms outside their countries, and in all areas and sectors of operation. Communication is enabled in every sense and without restrictions. **Turkey is an exception when it comes to the enabling environment**, where the process of registration of organisations and networks in the country is complex, requiring detailed checks before an approval is obtained. However, there are numerous organisations from Turkey taking part in networks across the WBT region.

2. CSOs' involvement in regional networking

- **CSOs in the region are significantly networked**. Each individual organisation which participated in this analysis is a member of almost two networks/regional projects/informal platforms and coalitions (i.e. 1.8 networks reported on average);
- Organisations' motives for networking are different, but most of them outlined that the need to **advocate** for certain thematic issues was the main reason for joining;
- The greatest benefits of networking for organisations are seen in opportunities for exchange and cooperation, and particularly **access to funding** and **capacity building** in the form of attending events, e.g. conferences, seminars, and trainings;
- Insufficient financial resources within organisations, lack of human capacities, project-based work and lack of invitations to join, are the key **obstacles** identified by organisations impede becoming part of a regional network.



3. Capacities of regional networks

General

- Networks are mostly **focused on civil society development**; human rights, Rule of law, good governance; and education. No networks have been identified as operating in the field of health and sports;
- The majority of networks stated that their network's role is to **implement joint projects** and programmes, which was followed by implementation of joint advocacy activities;
- The majority of identified networks are **formal** with established organisational structures, rules and procedures, have separate governance and executive bodies and membership criteria. While almost one-third stated that they were informal and usually act on an *ad-hoc* basis without a particular formal structure or written rules and procedures.

Vision, mission and goals (VMG)

- Reasons for coming together in a network are diverse. The majority of CSOs reported **the need for advocacy** as a primary reason, followed by raising professional standards of work and solicitation of funding for their area of work;
- The majority of networks in the region have a **clear and formally formulated vision and mission**, and they are guided by it in their work. network members are the key actors in defining the VMG.

Active membership

- The large majority of networks have **clear membership policies**, practice full membership, and only a quarter of networks have affiliate membership;
- Network **members are very active** in the work of the networks (88%), whereas two thirds of the respondents believe that the majority of members actively participate in planning, budgeting, programming and evaluation activities of the network;
- The **main benefits for members** from the network's operation include: the existence of joint applications for financing projects of common interest; opportunity for cooperation between members; contribution to social changes; capacity building and professional development, etc.



Network structure, governance and leadership

- The majority of networks (over 80%) have established a **clear organisational structure**, while a half have a clear division of responsibilities between executive and governance bodies. However, one third do not.
- The majority of networks (67.92%) have **written internal documents** which regulate the networks' relations and work. Almost half of them have membership criteria and regulation, statute and a multi-annual work program. One third of the organisations have a Code of Conduct, and significantly less have gender equality policies (15.09%). On the other hand, the majority of networks do not have or do not know if the mechanism for resolving the conflict of interests exists.
- Networks have developed **mechanisms for internal communication and cooperation**, for some these are more structured, and for others more informal and predominantly based on e-communication exist. Networks mostly meet in regular annual meetings. Involvement in the implementation of joint projects also helps to establish and/or improve coordination as it serves the needs and structure of projects.
- Networks base their work on **pre-defined strategic plans**. Three-quarters of networks reported monitoring their work, but mainly at project-level rather than at the level of their overall work. The same logic applies to the evaluation of the network operation.

Secretariat/executive office and network board relations

- The majority of networks have **secretariats or executive offices**, although practices differ. For some, there is a completely separate office, for others it is within one of their member organisations, usually on a rotating basis or depending on the financial capabilities of members, i.e. the network;
- Two most important roles of the secretariats are **information sharing** and **coordination of activities**. One-third of them report that the role of secretariat is to strengthen network capacity, followed by fundraising and leadership;
- In 80% of the networks which have secretariats, there is also some kind of **mechanism to guide and evaluate the performance** of both governance board and secretariat in their respective roles.



Network sustainability

- Regional networks are **not financially sustainable** in the long-run. Although a high percentage of them (83.2 %) has secured funding for one year, less than one-fifth of them have secured funding for the consequent three years;
- **Diversification of funds** is a big challenge for networks. The majority of them are dependent on one or two donors. They are mostly funded by the EU (almost 73%) and other bilateral donors such as the USAID, SIDA. All other possible sources of funding comprise less than a quarter of networks' budgets, including membership fees, private and corporate donations and economic activities;
- Almost **half** of the networks have confirmed that they **have fundraising plans**. When it comes to mobilisation of funds, often, networks do it together with their members;
- **Membership fees are not paid regularly**, even when there is a clear policy on this issue. However, member organisations contribute with their activities to the general portfolio of the network and they are very complementary and supportive to the secretariats, without generating competition.

Public trust, transparency and accountability

- Networks are very **effective in engaging with external partner(s)** to pursue their mission and are very active in establishing cooperation with other stakeholders when it comes to achieving networks' goals. Most often, cooperation is practiced with other networks or organisations from the region, followed by state and EU institutions;
- The majority of networks **receive positive feedback** from target groups and other stakeholders about their programmes and services. At the same time, opinions and other **contributions of networks** to other stakeholders are **highly valued** as very useful including in cases when networks contribute to a particular policy, conduct trainings and provide technical support;
- Networks report being **open and transparent in their work** and information about their organisational structure is available on their websites. Furthermore, the majority of networks prepare annual narrative and financial reports, but these reports are not always published on their websites.



4. Needs for strengthening networks' capacities

General

- The greatest need for strengthening the capacity of networks is closely related to their financial sustainability. More precisely, strengthening their **fundraising capacities and strategic long-term organisational planning** are the two needs that stand out from the rest. These are followed by the need to strengthen advocacy capacities, managing campaigns and networking skills. Interestingly, networks do not consider themselves in need of capacity strengthening for accountability and transparency;
- In terms of methods of support, networks need **trainings**, followed by **networking** with other organisations and networks, and **mentoring**;
- The need to increase specific expertise is also of significant importance to networks. Most of them want to gain knowledge in the area of: **socio-economic development**, i.e. supporting start-ups, access to funding of SMEs, research and innovation, employment and social reforms; **digitalisation**, i.e. eGovernment, eProcurement, eHealth and digital skills; **rule of law**, good governance, anti-corruption, justice; support for the social sector, in particular **education and health**.

Specific needs

- Networks most of all need **resources**, e.g. human, material and **direct financial support**, regardless of whether this is for strengthening capacities to fulfil their VMG or to strengthen membership, accountability and transparency;
- When it comes to **VMG** and the type of learning, networks mostly need to have resources, followed by skills and knowledge. In terms of support methods, direct financial support is considered most useful, followed by trainings, peer learning and mentoring. The target group with most benefit from the appropriate support are network members;
- Concerning the **active network/active membership**, the most useful is considered direct financial support, followed by greater skills primarily to improve written internal procedures and to increase advocacy capacities. In terms of methods, in addition to direct financial support, trainings are also required;
- Furthermore, resources and direct financial support are needed for the area of **structure, governance and leadership**, mostly for holding regular network meetings and other activities. Skills and knowledge are needed more than resources only when it comes to better differentiation between the roles of governance and executive bodies. There is also a need for trainings and workshops;
- Regarding relations between **secretariats/executive offices with governance bodies and members**, there is a difference compared to other issues. Actually, resources and direct financing are not considered the most vital ways of support. They are recognised as important for functioning of secretariats/executive offices, but skills and knowledge are essential for all other issues. Train-



ings, workshops and information sharing are the most needed methods of support. The need to increase knowledge is particularly emphasised as it refers to understanding of official responsibilities and lines of authority in the network;

- As expected, resources and direct financial support are needed the most for **networks sustainability**. The exception is diversity of sources of funding, and the need for mentoring to create a fundraising strategy which requires new skills, mentoring and information sharing;
- In terms of **public trust, transparency and accountability**, the support that is most needed is that of resources. Knowledge is necessary for the regulation of conflict of interest and good governance. Trainings and workshops, information sharing and direct financial support are needed for better engagement of stakeholders in networks' work.

Linkages

- Organisations in the region are **well networked** and their cooperation takes place at all levels. The greatest cooperation exists with organisations at the national level, followed by regional organisations and networks, and with EU- based organisations and networks. There is less cooperation with grass-roots organisations operating at the local level. This is expected given their insufficient access to information and linkages that are limited to the community level. Furthermore, the least cooperation reported is at the level of global organisations and networks;
- Organisations and networks see **the highest benefit of networking in sharing information and access to non-financial support** including: training, knowledge, mentoring, etc. Regarding the needs for support, particularly for maintaining relations, the most common benefits include: resources, primarily human resources for establishing and maintaining contacts; then financing; improved visibility, etc.

EU accession

- The **vast majority of networks (over 90%) report having certain activities related to EU accession**. They are aimed at improving the situation in some specific areas or for particular target groups to adjust it to the standards practiced in the EU. Some of the networks monitor state policies and their harmonisation with the EU regulations, including fulfilment of the benchmarks given in the annual EC progress reports for each of the countries.

Gender mainstreaming

- **Gender mainstreaming is reported to be highly practiced in the networks' operation**. Most of the networks apply gender equality at the level of internal policies and practice and some of them have separate policies in this area. However, it is most often used as a cross-cutting issue, including at the programme level. Additionally, the **existence of strong networks which focus their work on gender-related issues** has been identified at the national and regional level.



Recommendations

Region civil society networks in the WBT region should remain supported in the future. They have great value and their benefit is reflected in increased knowledge, skills and improved results of networks and its members.

1. Recommendations to networks and CSOs

General

- CSOs should continue **building relations, links and cooperation** in the future, and discover new perspectives for networking. These can include new topics that are important for the region and the citizens or innovative communication methods and tools, especially given the new digital technologies that could reduce the cost of sustaining the work of networks;
- Organisations need to continue to **learn from each other** and take the greatest sources of knowledge and inspiration from each other. Cooperation is necessary to take place at all levels. It is especially essential that higher capacity CSOs lend a hand to smaller grass-roots organisations, in order for them to be properly informed, to gain knowledge and skills;
- Organisations should **remain in solidarity** and this will be most evident through cross-border cooperation, especially on issues related to fundamental freedoms and rights, civic space, democracy and the rule of law, as well as EU accession as a common aspiration across the region;
- Evidence-based advocacy is a very important advantage of networks, especially in advocacy. Thus, networks need to stay professional and active and particularly to continue to develop their **research capacities and monitoring tools**.

Specific

- Organisations should continue to be **guided by their own, well-defined VMG** and occasionally revisit them to make sure they are on the right track. Networks should also be prepared to cease to exist, especially in cases when established on *ad-hoc* basis and when the goals for which they had joined have been met;
- **Active members** are the most important driving force, which can contribute the most to networks' sustainability. Therefore, it is necessary for each member organisation of the network to occasionally self-assess and self-reflect on its contribution to the network as well as the benefit it gets from networking. Member organisations should make their capacities available for the network's needs as much as they can, each from their own perspective and ability to contribute, i.e. depending on its social capital, human resources, financial resources, skills and knowledge. Networks should have a policy and practice of valuing every member's contribution equally;



- **Internal relations in the networks** need to be improved. It is especially important to follow the principles of good governance and to make a clear distinction between governance and executive bodies, regardless of the network's formal status. It is advisable for even completely informal networks to establish certain internal written rules that will guide them in their work, especially if the sustainability and long-term viability of the network is considered. It is recommended that networks practice written codes of conduct to regulate potential conflicts that may arise in a network;
- One of the most discussed issues in networks is their mutual relations and above all the **relations between secretariats/executive offices and boards**, as well as with its members. The recommendations that came primarily from donors and other stakeholders are that for networks to be sustainable, it is necessary to maintain the balance between members and executive and governance bodies, especially to take care not to create mutual competition. Hence, in this case also, it is advisable to have a clearly defined code of conduct by which competition and possible conflict of interest and unethical acts can be avoided or regulated;
- **Financial sustainability** of networks is a big challenge. It is obvious that in the long-run, networks are unsustainable. Therefore, what they can do is to continue to improve mutual communication and to contribute to the network's work, each member from its own perspective. Connections with other networks and organisations should be improved by perceiving every potential benefit that can come from further networking. All opportunities for strengthening skills and knowledge for sustainability should be used, including fundraising strategies that will lead to reaching to available funds;
- In order to be sustainable, it is necessary for networks to increase their own **transparency and accountability** and to **contribute to an improved public image** for themselves and for civil society as a whole. It is necessary for networks to make all organisational documents publicly available, including information on organisational structure. VMG to be publicly accessible, as well as internal policies and relations in general. Regular information about networks achievements is needed, which can be easily published through annual narrative and financial reports. Networks should also be open to other external parties to receive feedback and suggestions for improved operations and to involve other stakeholders in their activities. There is still a great need for civil society in general to confirm its contribution to society through the achieved results, knowledge and proper communication of its achievements to the public.



2. Recommendations to the European Union

General

- The EU for its part, undoubtedly plays the main role in supporting regional networks, and thus the need to remain its primary supporter in the future. Almost without exception, networks that are part of this analysis confirmed that their growth and progress is evident after they have received financial support from the EU, i.e. through an FPA, Action Grants and Operating Grants. Having been aware of the risk of CSO donor dependency, the **EU should continue its support** as essential to allow networks to facilitate the voice of the public and contribute to raising and addressing the issues of common concern for citizens in the region, particularly, in the given situation.

Specific

- The EU, should, as for the networks based in the EU, develop long-term partnership relations with these regional networks and provide regular **financial support** through operating grants. For specific areas, thematic support is still needed, and especially sub-granting as an important tool for networks to reach to small local and grass-roots organisations;
- According to the discussion with several representatives of networks, **sub-granting** also contributes to greater sustainability of small-sized organisations and their learning of how to build alternative ways of funding. It also offers a possibility for regional networks to obtain useful information from local communities, which they rarely do and should aspire to in the future.



3. Recommendations to EU TACSO

General

- EU TACSO 3 is perceived as **the key stakeholder** in providing **non-financial support to networks and organisations in the region** and should continue doing so. In this, it should consider that the need to strengthen knowledge and skills is infinite, the sector is fluctuating, the needs are varying, and the actors are changing;
- Regional networks require a tailored approach, differing from that of individual CSOs. It was pointed out that special skills are needed to manage and maintain complex structures comprising of different stakeholders. Also, a set of thematic knowledge is needed to ensure workflow is properly channelled.

Specific

- EU TACSO 3 should **support regional annual networking events** which, in addition to sharing networks' experiences, will provide for an opportunity to share practices of networking from Europe and other regions of the world. These would also provide the chance to hear experiences of other donors and create synergies with their plans to support civil society in the region;
- EU TACSO 3 should encourage and **facilitate annual donors' coordination**, i.e. international, multilateral, bilateral and private, in order for donors to share their strategic plans to support civil society and, above all, regional networks;
- Capacity development and People-to-People Programme should provide an **opportunity for mentoring and peer-to-peer learning** in strategic planning, good governance and mobilisation of funds. Furthermore, the space should be created for study visits of regional networks to related networks from the EU and other regions in Europe;
- It is especially important that EU TACSO 3 supports **basic training on the essence of networking** and its basic principles, since the level of development and understanding of networking is very different among CSOs;
- EU TACSO 3 should support the implementation of a **networking analysis** that would clearly identify the links between organisations in the region. This would bring a clearer picture on networking and an idea of the strengths and weaknesses of networking. It would also contribute to ensuring information for an even more tailored approach of donors' support;
- EU TACSO 3 should act as a **forum for discussion between DG NEAR and regional networks** to instigate concrete debates, which could help facilitate dialogue and networking of CSOs with other stakeholders;
- EU TACSO 3 should maintain a **database of networks** and make it publicly available. This could contribute to better insight of all relevant stakeholders into the field, as well as increased cooperation and networking among CSOs.



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