



COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FORUM SHORT REPORT

20– 21 October, 2021
Belgrade, Serbia & virtually
SUMMARY REPORT

In the framework of the EU-funded Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organizations in Western Balkans and Turkey (EU TACSO 3) project, as part of Capacity Development Programme package, **Community Resilience Forum** took place between October 20-21, 2021 in Belgrade, Serbia.

The Forum had the following objectives:

- To introduce CSOs from WBT with new approaches and good practice models **to activism and community mobilisation**;
- To support **exchange of CSOs practices and skills** in citizens' activism, participation in decision making and community mobilisation;
- To raise the **issue of constituency building** and discuss strategies to promote and support activism and community mobilisation in the WBT;
- To increase ability of CSOs to **respond to basic freedom violation**.

On both days, the Forum **gathered 117 representatives** (including 11 virtual) of CSOs, grassroots, community foundations, CSOs providing grants and capacity building for grassroots, networks, women's CSOs and representatives of the DG NEAR and Delegations, s, donors, experts and other stakeholders in the area of civil society development in the region of the Western Balkans and Turkey.

The Forum was organized at the regional level to facilitate learning, exchange and discussion among CSOs so they can think collectively of resilient modes of activism, particularly in challenging circumstances. The event also served to bring back the enthusiasm and strategic orientation in rebuilding trust and strengthening relations with key constituencies. The Forum provided the platform for discussion and action planning for civil society stakeholders.

In introductory sessions, we had representatives of EU TACSO 3 - Team Leader **Tanja Hafner Ademi** who moderated the session, **Liselotte Isaksson** - Head of Sector - Civil Society, Social Inclusion and Human Capital, Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programmes, DG NEAR, **Ekmel Cizmecioglu** of the Delegation of the European Union in Serbia and **Biljana Dakić Đorđević**, Executive Director of Trag Foundation. We also had two CSO representatives from the EU, **Marina Škrabalo and Ivan Blažević** from SOLIDARNA Foundation, Croatia who emphasized the importance of connection to constituency as a means of being resilient in turbulent times. Panelists highlighted how the EU financially supports small CSOs through the process of re-granting, also known as Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP).

The key message from the introductory session was: to gain trust of citizens, CSOs should be authentic, connect with others through solidarity and learn from each other.

The next Forum session was devoted to the question: What makes a resilient community? where



participants learned and exchanged about the resiliency concept based, on the Partners Global Resilience Framework. Resilience is the capacity and ability to anticipate and plan for, respond to, adapt to shocks/impacts and recover from threats of the changing civil space. Not only to survive, but also to thrive in an uncertain environment. This was followed by group work related to 7 elements of resiliency: adaptive capacity, resiliency ethos, situation awareness, business acumen; connectedness, narrative competency, legitimacy. Main panellist of this session was **Bojana Selaković**, Programme Director from Civic Initiatives, Serbia and it was moderated by **Dubravka Velat**, Senior Non Key Expert, TACSO 3.

Parallel sessions on three specific topics organised in cooperation with contributing CSOs that were selected through a public call followed:

Parallel Session 1: Strengthening and mobilizing – how to support communities to recover when everything falls apart

Contributors:

- ✓ *Mario Bajkuša, Development and Programs Director, Forum for Freedom in Education, Croatia*
- ✓ *Uroš Bulatović, President of Union of Young Entrepreneurs of Montenegro*
- ✓ *Armela Gariپی, Psychologist, Udhetim i Lirë - Liberi di Viaggiare, Albania*
- ✓ *Ivana Smolović, Project Coordinator, Red Cross Montenegro*

Moderator: Natasha Mazari, TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for Albania.

These four contributors presented an overview of topics, challenges, ways of responding to challenges, lessons learned and recommendations from the participants. The main topic of the session was how crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic, earthquakes and fires affected people in various local contexts. Issues of mental health were addressed, especially of youth and students, schools adapting to the new situation, multi-level crises that affects communities and CSOs. Main challenges were mapped within the educational system that is under much more pressure. There was a compelling story from Croatia, where a CSO developed materials to support students and teachers.

Main messages that came out of this session were: *when there is so much bad news around - to be on the optimistic side, with call for action and positive examples and stories, to be a spark to recovery. The recovered individual contributes to recovered community, and when we support individuals, they can support others too. Still, as one participant stated, "we have to be prepared because crisis will come again".*

Parallel Session 2: Vulnerability in times of crisis-presentation of cases of CSO support to vulnerable groups

Contributors:

- ✓ *Ereandra Robo, MEAL Officer & IF Fundraiser and Viola Bogdani, Programme Manager General, Dorcas Aid International Albania*
- ✓ *Sanja Šišović, Member of the Drug Policy Network South-East Europe (DPNSEE) Board and Program Director, CAZAS*
- ✓ *Tatjana Stoimenovska, DPNSEE member and Project Manager, HOPS, North Macedonia*



- ✓ *Nebojša Đurasović, President of DPNSEE and Association Prevent, Serbia*
- ✓ *Miloš Perić, DPNSEE Member Association DUGA Šabac, Serbia*
- ✓ *Bekim Asani, President of LGBT United Tetovo, North Macedonia*

Moderator: Aferdita Pustina, TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for Kosovo.

Immensely rich material was provided. Topics that were covered were the characteristics of various vulnerable groups and communities (youth, children, women Roma, elderly, poor families, farmers, drug and alcohol users, patients, people with mental health difficulties, etc.), community mobilization and how to mobilize local resources, sustainability of service and advocacy. Challenges are mapped on both sides – there are those that vulnerable groups face themselves, and other that CSOs face. Vulnerable groups face deep existential challenges, are in the risk of becoming homeless, under stigma and violence, in constant fear. CSOs challenge is related to sustainability of their services, that are being donor funded, lack of volunteers, shrinking space for CSOs and a specific mindset of their target groups. Paralegals were identified as one of the good practices to empower the vulnerable groups.

The main messages that came out of this session:

Be united in diversity and solidarity.

Put efforts in humanizing the vulnerable population!

Never say never to change.

Community mobilization takes time and asks for a lot of flexibility.

Together we can make a difference - joint action is needed to address the emerging challenges and needs.

Keep working and do not be judgmental.

Parallel Session 3: *Observing the needs of communities - knowing your constituency* with three

Contributors:

- ✓ *Milka Domanović, Head of Business and Partnerships, Balkan Investigative Regional Network (BIRN), Serbia/network*
- ✓ *Dajana Bakić, Programme Coordinators, Sarajevo Open Centre, Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- ✓ *Aleksandar Kržalovski, Director, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), North Macedonia*

Moderator: Kanita Kulić, TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for BiH.

Contributors provided diverse perspectives about monitoring and gathering data and how to improve this process, how to connect better with the constituency. They have described a specific method - beneficiary assessment, then engaged citizen observers, collecting data and producing news. We had a chance to learn about a more strategic approach, with constituency building alliances, and reporting on human rights violations. Among identified challenges there was an importance of having a strategic plan and monitoring process. What is equally important is to build alliances and network with other relevant actors, fact check and collect data, participants stated.



The main messages that came out of this session:

The members of the organisation are also the constituencies.

Combining capacity building activities with funding is very important.

During a wrap up of the day, moderators of the parallel session shared what was discussed in groups. Participants discussed about the apparent lack of government data and especially, data on vulnerable groups.

Second day of the Forum was dedicated to the promotion of Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) mechanism and a publication¹ prepared by the DG NEAR „Enhanced Outreach to Civil Society Organizations“ as European Commission’s main aid modalities to support local and grassroots organizations. The publication documents the variety of existing approaches, experiences and lessons learnt from the field, with the aim to put together a collection of good practices of FSTP implementation and draws on the lessons learned from CSO-implementers. On this we heard from **Gaby Hagmueller** a former representative of DG NEAR, who prepared the publication. The audience had a chance to hear from three CSOs - implementers of FSTP, who shared their experience with the role of CSOs managing FSTP all from different IPA Beneficiaries, giving a unique perspective and context. Representatives who shared their insights were **Milorad Bjeletić**, Executive Director of Belgrade Open School (BOS), Serbia, **Dren Puka**, Department Director for Research, Advocacy and Resource Center from Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF), Kosovo* and **Dr. Tezcan Eralp Abay**, General Coordinator from Civil Society Development Centre (STGM), Turkey. First panel was moderated by **Tanja Hafner Ademi**, TACSO 3 Team Leader.

In addition, there was an opportunity to learn from the perspective of community based grant beneficiaries/sub-grantees about their experience and value of EU financial support to local communities. Value of EU financial support to local communities and experience was shared by **Dragan Nedeljković** from Protok 21, Serbia and **Ozan Devrim Yay**, from Life, Memory and Freedom Association, Turkey.

In conclusion, this is a mechanism that should be used more, and is of considerable value to local communities and small CSOs. It is important not to overburden them with administrative procedures and requests, so they can have time to work directly on the field with constituencies. FSTP is just a tool, a mechanism and it is important that its use is adjusted to the particular goal – thematic or that of the local community in question.

Three parallel sessions of CSO contributors were held on different topics.

Session Resilient models of activism - New approaches in digital era (digital activism and communication, how can we include those without digital skills)

Contributors:

- ✓ *Milena Šćepanović, Program Assistant, ADP-Zid; Montenegro*
- ✓ *Nikola Arsenić, Campaigner, Kreni promeni, Serbia*

¹ <https://tacso.eu/enhanced-outreach-to-civil-society-organizations/>



- ✓ *Iskra Belčeva Ristovska, Programme Coordinator, Center for Change Management, North Macedonia*
- ✓ *Ivana Volf, Online Learning Content Manager/Trainer/Consultant, South- East European Youth Network (SEEYN), Serbia/network*
- ✓ *Miloš Janković, Partnerships and Engagement Director, Catalyst Balkans, Serbia/network*

Moderator: Beti M. Spasenoska, TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for North Macedonia.

This session discussed innovative approaches in a digital era, a major crisis that affected us all, including civil society. Participants have shared experiences of this digital transformation process, COVID 19 crisis, especially in formal education, but also facilitating public participation. They discussed how to make it possible to take part in decision making, especially with regards to inclusion of those without digital skills and services. Research of a CSO was presented. Results showed that most software is free, while not many CSOs have invested in digital security and data privacy. Levels of digitalization were discussed, from IT transformation, through Operational to Digital transformation. Digital and online platforms and tools, software for different purposes were introduced. What is important when talking about use of digital in CSOs is that not just that tools matter, but more important are the concepts behind tools and what they are being used for, which require senior staff to start implementing it. CSOs have now seen what is it like to be in a crisis, what are the digital challenges, and are more resilient, prepared for possible future crisis. As for recommendations there is a need for more improvement in data protection, and cyber security. Also, more cooperation between CSOs and businesses is needed.

The main messages that came out of this session:

Digital transformation is not about the tools, it is about the concepts behind those tools.

Digital transformation shouldn't leave anybody behind.

Session *The strength of community support - Community philanthropy and funding for resilience*

Contributors from the SIGN network including:

- ✓ *Biljana Dakić Đorđević, Director, Trag Foundation, Serbia*
- ✓ *Nathan Koeshall, Director, Catalyst Balkans, Serbia*
- ✓ *Dajana Berisha, Forum for Civic Initiatives (FIQ), Kosovo (virtually)*

Moderator: Aleksandra Gligorovic, TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for Montenegro.

This session emphasized that each citizen is important, has rights and responsibilities, and everybody has a role in community development. Looking at the last two years, philanthropy has increased, almost exploded, solidarity was the main value, there was a desire to give that prevailed in all communities in the Balkans. What is learned as a lesson and shared between participants is that we have to see within our community, first, what are internal resources, for there are many. Challenges are seen in centralized funds, situations when local communities collected contributions, but funds went to central Government, and people were unsure about what happened with funds. Another concern are results, what is achieved with collected funds? Assessing this can increase trust of citizens in the work of Government, and other stakeholders.



There is a need for cooperation between CSOs, businesses and public institutions, finding a common interest between them. If we find this common interest, businesses will be interested to join policy decision making, and jointly participate in development of communities. Also, there are Diaspora sources that can be used as a fundraising tool, bring money from outside to the community.

Shared good practices showed that more has to be done in terms of transparency. As a conclusion, community philanthropy is evolving, and for this to happen on a larger scale, a legal framework ought to be developed in some countries.

The main messages that came out of this session:

Transparency is where the trust comes from!

Community philanthropy is evolving.

There is a need for cooperation between CSOs, businesses and public institutions.

Community mobilization brings development and is one the best models for sustainability.

Session Importance of adopting Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) in building resilient communities - How to persist in activism in turbulent circumstances

Contributors:

- ✓ *Dr. Aurela Bozo, Lawyer/Executive Director, Center for Legal Civic Initiatives (CLCI) and Technical Coordinator of the Monitoring Network Against Gender Based Violence in Albania*
- ✓ *Aslı Ece Koçak, Communications Officer, Truth Justice Memory Center (Hafiza Merkezi), Turkey*
- ✓ *Deniz Savaş, Project Coordinator, Association of Journalists; Turkey*

Moderator: Ozge Konuralp, TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for Turkey.

This session discussed mainly persistence in COVID pandemic. Very important session that focused on fight against domestic violence, violence against children and women, during the pandemic. Some services cannot be digitalized - safe houses, shelters, premises where victims can be protected. Challenges were mapped in the area of CSO-institutions relation, referral mechanism related to gender based violence, and problems of journalists during pandemic. Some CSOs provided free legal aid for cases of domestic violence, brought amendments to laws related to this issue, changed social protection system, and put them in a practical use in the field. What was pointed out as the most important challenge CSOs face is direct contact or how to reach out to beneficiaries in the field. This is still something that CSOs need to overcome, that should be worked on. Pandemic stopped giving help directly due to fear of contact. Close collaboration between CSOs and institutions is critically important because CSOs don't possess a legal authority on the field, institutions are the ones that provide first aid to victims. Finally, it is important to implement international standards in work, have a deep understanding of power of solidarity, advocacy with human rights being a priority.

The main messages that came out of this session:

Each crisis should be managed with dignity, respect, and empathy!

Advocacy for human rights should be strengthened in crisis because human rights should be a



priority.

The Forum was wrapped up with key messages created to inspire and generate hope to activists in the region. Messages were collected from participants during their sessions by **Jelena Pajović**, TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for Serbia, shared for voting on padlet, and those that were voted best, were highlighted. One of them is, as stated below:

*“To function in disturbing environment, ask yourself what is going on, detach yourself and see all around, **always go back to solidarity**. Trust, think together, analyze, how to present ourselves to public, send messages, prove our authenticity, solidarity. **Authenticity is related to our capacity to mobilize.**”*

Messages source: <https://padlet.com/jelenavanreenen/1sh5uqq41dpcit6d>

EU TACSO 3, COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FORUM
KEY MESSAGES

- The notion of "communities" changed** - they are not just marked by geography, physical space, but are more emerging from values, online, it's our new reality. (21 Rate)
- Bringing solidarity, philanthropy and advocacy** together! (18 Rate)
- In order to function in disturbing environment, ask yourself what is going on, detach and see all around, and always go back to solidarity.** Trust, think together, analyze, how to present ourselves to public, send messages, prove our authenticity, solidarity. Authenticity is related to our capacity to mobilize. (17 Rate)
- Organizations must maintain an **entrepreneurial mindset that enables access to diversified funding, strategic alliances, innovative service delivery, and quick recovery** from civic space shocks. (15 Rate)
- It's important to **measure real impact** of CSOs! (16 Rate)
- Practicing resiliency every day. We have to be resilient,** it's the only perspective in which we can help others! (16 Rate)
- Our last resort** (17 Rate)
- Changes** (infrastructure, knowledge, skills, mindset shifts) to address resiliency vulnerabilities. (14 Rate)
- Community mobilization** brings development and is one the **best models for sustainability.** (16 Rate)
- Put efforts in **humanizing the vulnerable** population! (17 Rate)
- Each crisis should be managed with dignity, respect and empathy!** (19 Rate)

Closing the event, **Tanja Hafner Ademi**, TACSO 3 Team Leader promised participants to gather and collect all that was shared among them in these two days, and distribute it to all participants. She thanked to all participants and contributors for their inputs and active involvement in organising and implementing the event and expressed hope that a similar event could be organised bi-annually, as a follow up.