

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

Open Call for Proposals to Receive Funding for Ad-Hoc Support Grants

➤ **What is Ad-Hoc Support?**

Ad-hoc support is an instrument that was established to provide rapid funding for a CSO’s immediate need or for innovation to promote civic space when there is insufficient time to operate through the standard grant award procedure.

The instrument of ad-hoc support grants is established to respond rapidly to changing conditions and immediate needs, being flexible to address new challenges as they arise. Therefore, it follows a simplified and accelerated review procedure to ensure timely responses to address a concrete issue or a challenge.

➤ **Who Can Apply?**

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

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

This means that the following types of informal or registered organisations can participate:

- **Individual** informal or registered organizations, associations, foundations, and networks, operating in one of the 6 countries of the WB region;
- **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), **registered** in at least one of the 6 Western Balkan countries, that have member organizations in more than 2 countries in the region;
- **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) that have member organizations in more than 2 countries in the region.

Informal networks can apply with one organization leading the network or through a consortium of organizations.

Informal (non-registered) organizations can apply in two ways:

1. Alone (in which case no direct funding would be available, i.e. BCSDN will pay directly the costs for their activities or expert support), or
2. Through a partnership agreement with a registered organization in one of the 6 WB countries, where the registered organization would carry the costs/receive the funds (all types of support available).

➤ **Results/ Priorities to be Achieved with the Implementation of the Ad-Hoc Support Grants:**

BCSDN with this Project 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' role in promoting democracy and supporting the development of civil society in the Western Balkans in the long term. The Hub will support effective, transparent, and accountable CSOs that will contribute to protecting civic space, 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 to protect civic space.

In respect to the above-stated objectives, the funding available under this call may be provided for the ad hoc activities contributing to the following thematic areas (*the list presented is for orientation purposes and is not an exhaustive one*):

- 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 resource mobilization to promote civic space;
- To improve trust in CSOs by introducing accountability mechanisms and standards for CSOs' work in the WB region, including the [Dynamic Accountability](#) approach of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability.

Guidelines for Applicants

➤ **Streams of support:**

The ad-hoc support instrument will provide two different streams of support: for immediate needs or innovation.

1. Support for Immediate Needs

This mechanism should be used when there is an immediate need to quickly fund and support civil society actors who, prompted by an unpredicted event, must pursue urgent advocacy, legal support, communication or other forms of immediate reactions to tackle challenges (e.g. pressures on civic space and incidences of hate speech). In addition, this support could allow CSOs to seize very specific windows of opportunity for influencing public opinion and policy process through various forms of citizen participation and public action, including campaign and advocacy or others. Fast responses in these situations are very important as certain conditions need to be in place for civil society to be able to operate freely and to further develop.

The purpose of this assistance is NOT to support activities that could be planned/predicted in advance.

This assistance cannot be used for activities that can be anticipated, fundraised for and implemented within the regular annual program planning, but only for those that are unexpected, sudden and provoked by external circumstances/conditions. For these types of activities, funding may be provided ONLY in the case of an unexpected event and/or unique opportunity for influencing public opinion or the decision-making process, provided that satisfactory justification of the opportunity is positively assessed. It also cannot be used for activities that assume sponsorships, financial support to individuals, or used for co-funding. The project application should be developed for a specific project as a set of detailed and related activities, which will lead to concrete results in a precisely defined time frame.

The essence of this support is to stimulate active regional cooperation and the transfer of learning from one country to another by enabling regional exchanges that will investigate solutions to the urgent problems that CSOs are facing. Also, this instrument will be used when there is insufficient time to operate through the standard grant award procedure.

2. Support for Innovation

Innovative uptakes to the fight for reclaiming civic space will also be supported, including exploring the collective power of different groups (e.g. young people, women and vulnerable groups) to lead and transform their communities. Gatherings that would work towards finding solutions to restrictions of civic space will be the second streamline of the ad-hoc support instrument. The support provided should contribute to accomplishing the objectives by addressing the challenges through an innovative approach, whether it proposes a new idea/solution, or it introduces a different way of working in the organization itself which reinvents the established operations or practices. This approach is defined according to the Innovation for Change definitions:

- New solution in a new context
- New solution in an established context

- Established solution in a new context
- Established solution(s) recombined to serve an objective.

➤ **Ad-hoc Funding Mechanism:**

The assistance provided through this instrument, concerning both support for immediate needs and innovation, can be awarded for the following types of grants: expert missions, or regional actions.

1. **Expert missions:**

Regardless of the actual grant that may be awarded to the CSOs requesting support, there is a possibility to directly fund an expert or other societal actors such as media, research institutes, think tanks, universities, which will provide the needed expertise to support CSOs in times of crisis. The use of identified expert support (experts can be individuals or private entities) can be funded in cases where an organization from the region requests peer advice and exchange of experience on specific civic space topics: e.g. opinion of a new law, support in advocacy strategy, support in improving internal accountability mechanisms, support in the organization of a campaign, legal support in litigation cases or attacks 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 in another country.

The expert’s missions can be implemented in two ways:

- a) The organization requesting the expert’s support can apply for funding and can include in the project proposal and the respective budget and costs for an already identified expert who will perform the assignment. In this case, the application form shall be substantiated with a CV of the proposed expert and at least three recommendation letters regarding the successful completion of similar assignments. After assessing the CV, BCSDN may deny a project funding and may deny the use of a particular expert if the expert cannot prove the necessary expertise. In this case, BCSDN may propose to the applicant some of the experts available from the expert database and in agreement with the applicant may assign a particular expert to perform the respective assignment.
- b) The organization requesting the expert’s support can apply for funding elaborating the immediate need for particular expertise, and the expert(s) will be identified and appointed by BCSDN from the expert database in an agreement with the successful applicant.

The **expert database** is established to provide the necessary expertise for different types of assistance requested by organizations. This database consists 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 are selected based on predefined selection criteria and will be invited by BCSDN to provide their services when needed.

This database consists of experts coming not only from the Western Balkan region but also from other countries in Europe where BCSDN has its members¹.

2. Regional Actions (Events/Workshops/Community actions):

The organization of a regional action or gathering can be also supported with funding, both in line with the immediate needs stream or innovation stream of support.

The applications for immediate funding could comprise of regional actions or thematic gatherings that may be related to situations where there is a unique opportunity for the applicant to achieve great outreach in serving their causes, reach a consensus or raise awareness of a new situation impacting civil society or civic space in the region.

In terms of gatherings, the organization of single- or multi-country events with regional participation in line with the priorities of this call can be funded as well. Single events may be organized in one country from the WB region on a particular thematic area where regional experts may be invited to participate/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 applications for regional actions concerning innovation may refer to workshops, meetings, conferences for sharing best practices, hackathons or other actions for the promotion or development of new approaches and methods of working and/or engaging with constituencies and stakeholders.

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 regional actions.

Priorities of this component will include mainstreaming human rights, gender equality, the environment and a healthy planet as topics, as well as organizations that deal with reclaiming civic space and their role. The space for their action and support for their participation in policy- and decision-making would be the primary aim of this support. Innovative uptakes to the fight for reclaiming 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, hackathons that would work to find solutions to issues of restrictions of civic space and so on.

Please see ANNEX I for examples of types of assistance and cases in which you could apply for funding under this Call

¹ <http://www.balkancsd.net/about-us/members/>

➤ **What is the Limit for the Projects' Duration?**

The duration of the projects varies depending on the type of assistance requested:

- Grants requesting expert support - the time for the expert mission is estimated up to 15 days, which can be spread within 2 months;
- Grants requesting the organization of a regional action - the time for organizing an event is estimated up to 5 days and the total project duration for a regional action should be no more than 2 months.

➤ **What is the funding limit?**

The maximum funds available for this instrument - Ad-Hoc Support Grants is EUR 340.000,00.

It has been foreseen that these funds will be disbursed for at least 14 expert missions and at least 14 regional actions.

The maximum grant limit for an individual grant is EUR 10.000,00.

➤ **Eligible costs**

Eligible costs are those incurred by the grant's beneficiary. Expenditures are considered to have been incurred when the cost has been invoiced, paid and the subject matter delivered (in case of goods) or performed (in case of services).

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

- a) are necessary for the implementation of the project and the achievement of the indicated project results;
- b) are reasonable, justified, and comply with the requirements of sound financial management including fair and market-based calculations and cost-efficiency;
- c) are in accordance with the requirements of the applicable tax and social legislation;
- d) will be incurred between the start and end dates of the project, as stated in the project contract;
- e) are indicated in the proposed budget for the project;
- f) are identifiable and verifiable, which means that they must be recorded in the beneficiary's accounting records and determined in accordance with applicable accounting standards and generally accepted accounting principles - marked and accompanied by the original invoice, legal basis, proof of payment, and proof of supply of service/goods.

➤ **Ineligible costs**

Ineligible costs include:

- a) Costs related to the preparation of the project proposal;
- b) Costs covered from other sources;
- c) Currency exchange rate losses;

- d) Repayment of loans;
- e) Credits to third parties;
- f) Recoverable VAT;
- g) Travel costs for business or first class;
- h) Extra allowances, such as sitting allowances, or equivalent to finance allowances for participating staff/ invited speakers/ participant of workshops;
- i) Fines, penalties and legal costs, except in cases where they are an integral and necessary component for achieving the project objectives;
- j) Excessive and reckless spending of funds.

Value added tax (VAT) is an eligible cost only in case the applicant is not entitled to recoverable VAT. Applicants shall be aware of this rule when preparing their financial plan for the projects and shall consider only those VAT costs that are non-recoverable by the state. Applicants whose project proposals will be selected for the grant will be asked to provide a statement on non-recoverable VAT.

➤ **Deadline for submission of applications:**

This call is open from the date of publication onwards until all funds are fully disbursed.

Taking into account the implementation period of the Project and the grants' duration, **this Call for Proposals will be open until 20 December 2021.**

Applications can be submitted at any time by this date. Applications will be approved continuously.

The final date for eligibility of the costs incurred under the awarded ad-hoc grants shall be no later than 31 December 2021.

➤ **When is an answer received?**

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

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

➤ **Provisions for the implementation of contracts**

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

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

➤ **How to apply?**

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

➤ **Mandatory documents**

- a) Application for ad-hoc support grants (please read carefully the instructions given below regarding the application's parts);
- b) A copy of a valid document for the establishment of the organization/ the applicant;
- c) Basic act (statute) of the applicant;
- d) **ONLY** for applications for expert support with an expert already proposed: CV of the expert proposed and at least three recommendation letters for similar assignments.

NB

Applications should be written in English ONLY.

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

- The applicant's data;
- The application;
- The budget for the project (if an organization applies for particular expertise without suggesting an expert, this part should not be filled in);
- The justification for the proposed budget (if an organization applies for particular expertise without suggesting an expert, this part should not be filled in).

ANNEX I: Types of assistance and cases when you can apply for:

(the list presented is for orientation purposes and is not an exhaustive one)

	Immediate need	Innovation
Expert Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ For the preparation of expert papers and proposals during the process of passing a new draft law or policy. <i>For example: when you have concrete proposals, but you need additional expert support to prepare an evidence-based justification for them.</i> ➤ For the organization of a public campaign to gain public support. <i>For example: when a new draft law is published for consultations and you want to do an outreach campaign with the help of an expert to gain high public support to stop the law or some articles.</i> ➤ For the preparation of a response to hostile attacks on the work of your organization. <i>For example: when an important newspaper publishes an article full of insinuations about your work or NGOs in your field and you need legal and communicational support to fight the accusations and to prepare a suitable response.</i> ➤ For introducing internal accountability mechanisms and standards for an organization when CSOs' integrity has been threatened. <i>For example: a local politician wants to impose themselves on the governance structure of your organisation and you need an expert to support you to prepare internal policies regarding conflict of interest/codes of conduct).</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ For introducing new methods of work and communication so an organization can adequately respond to a new situation (including COVID-19 related challenges and working in a digital environment. <i>Examples: development and/or implementation of diverse methodologies, policies or approaches to target groups, IT solutions, programmes and mechanisms for (re)organizing the work in service of constituencies</i> ➤ For introducing innovative practices of dynamic accountability in the organization. <i>Examples: to set up new mechanisms for reaching your beneficiaries and constituencies, and increasing their feedback, participation in and ownership of CSOs' work, or to develop self-assessment tools to provide a structure for self-evaluation and foster internal learning.</i> ➤ For introducing innovative methods for campaigning and/or increased visibility in traditional and online media and for greater impact. <i>Examples: to encourage NGOs to implement result-oriented campaigns focusing on the changes they want to make in public opinion with the campaign or to engage in a positive story-telling campaign to influence public perceptions.</i> ➤ For introducing new mechanisms and means of cooperation for enlarging civic space. <i>For example: including "unusual suspects" in your campaign- going beyond the already established cooperation with certain entities and introducing new actors that you usually don't cooperate with, such as an association of small and medium enterprises, or some professional organizations, etc.).</i>

	Immediate need	Innovation
Regional Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regional advocacy or other types of actions when there is a unique opportunity to influence the policy process and/or raise awareness about a particular matter. <i>For example: a joint campaign in relation to the EU integration process as a response to new developments or regulations/decisions adopted.</i> ➤ Regional gatherings (meeting, workshops, conferences) crucial for building a consensus with key stakeholders about issues of common interest for more countries in the region, when a new situation presents a window of opportunity to be used. <i>For example: gatherings to reach an agreement on the preservation of the natural habitats and opposing the construction of small hydropower plants.</i> ➤ For the organization of a regional action (workshop, community action, advocacy event) in your country to immediately react to incidences of hate speech or other types of attacks at CSOs. <i>For example: regional experts invited to participate and share their experience on how to tackle the challenge;</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regional action (conference, workshop) that provide an opportunity for direct constituency involvement and engagement in an innovative way. <i>For example: multi-country community actions/events that involve direct beneficiaries or other constituencies in a way it has not been practised before.</i> ➤ Regional actions (meeting, workshop, conference) which brings on board multi-sectoral cooperation for enlarging civic space. <i>For example: bringing together different actors that you usually don't cooperate with or cooperate with each other to expand the civic space, such as an association of small and medium enterprises, or some professional organizations, etc.</i> ➤ Regional exchange of experiences on best practices or introducing innovative (new or improved) methods for applied advocacy. <i>For example: Inviting regional experts to introduce a method that was not used before, or upgrading existing methods, based on analyses, data and evidence, leading to the professionalization of advocacy.</i>