

Strengthening CSOs' skills by exploring the EU Programmes funding opportunities

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EVENT REPORT



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Introduction

Many individual professionals from CSOs in the Western Balkans and Türkiye (WBT), as well as organisations, participate in EU funding programmes through scholarships, mobility programmes, training, and research activities. In that sense, they often cooperate with other organisations from the region and EU member states, public institutions, and other partners like academia, educational and research institutes.

This online capacity-building event was implemented as a webinar due to the high interest of the CSO community from the Western Balkans and the Türkiye region. The event was organised as a follow-up to the previous EU TACSO 3 P2P event 2023 EU Year of Skills: “Skills for Non-Profit Organisations in the Western Balkans and Türkiye”, which was designed to foster cooperation and collaboration among diverse actors, countries, and regions. The primary objectives were to identify opportunities and advocate for initiatives aimed at integrating and expanding the provision of skills development opportunities for the non-profit sector, as well as working towards greater recognition of non-profit skills within the National Qualifications Frameworks and national skills strategies in WBT.

Among the recommendations from the 2023 P2P event, participants recognised the importance of further strengthening the capacities of CSOs to access the funding opportunities of the Union programmes as a mechanism for investing in non-profit skills development.

Therefore, the webinar was conceived to promote the importance of continuous skills development by designing long-term skills development programmes for CSOS in cooperation with educational institutions, similar bodies and organisations.

The newly launched Erasmus+ 2025 programme was an opportunity to present ideas and funding opportunities and encourage partnerships between academic institutions and CSOs to find ways to address the skills challenges in the non-profit sector. The event also covered the funding and partnership opportunities of the Horizon Europe programme.

The key speakers included representatives of CSOs with experience implementing similar projects and professionals from the EU and national levels working on managing the mentioned EU programmes.

Resource materials from the event are available in the online [library](#).

The event was attended by 132 participants (105 female, 26 male and 1 other).

Opening notes

The event was opened by the facilitator, **Ms. Andreja Tonč, EU TACSO 3 Key Expert for Capacity Building**, who presented the meeting's objectives, agenda, and methodological approach in a webinar.

In the introduction notes, **Mr Richard Allen, Team Leader of the EU TACSO 3 project**, presented the background of the event, emphasising the importance of developing long-term skills development programmes for CSOs and the funding opportunity for such programmes provided by EU programmes like Erasmus+.

Strengthening of the CSO skills and EU Programme Funding Opportunities

A detailed overview of EU Programmes funding opportunities for CSOs, technical requirements and resources for further information was presented by **Ms. Marija Armenski, EU TACSO 3 Country**

Coordinator for North Macedonia, while Ms. Maria Fabregas I Gonzalez from the DG EAC C3 International Cooperation Unit presented an overview of experience from WB using Erasmus+.

In her presentation, Ms. Armenski emphasised that regardless of the perceived threats to the sector now, the sector will grow and become a key element of our economies. Therefore, in our learning, we must invest in knowledge, research and knowledge transfers between academia and practitioners. The EU has provided us with the means to develop our resources for building skills in the non-profit sector. Meaning, it is up to CSOs and universities to take advantage of these opportunities and to take the steps to invest in skills development for the sector.

The presentation of the EU funding opportunities included key information on the following programmes:

- Erasmus+ (Capacity Building in Youth and Civil Society)
- CERV (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values)
- Horizon Europe (Cluster 2: Culture, Creativity, and Inclusive Society)
- Digital Europe Programme
- Creative Europe

For each programme, key features were presented with links to the websites and other sources of information (i.e. contact points in the region).

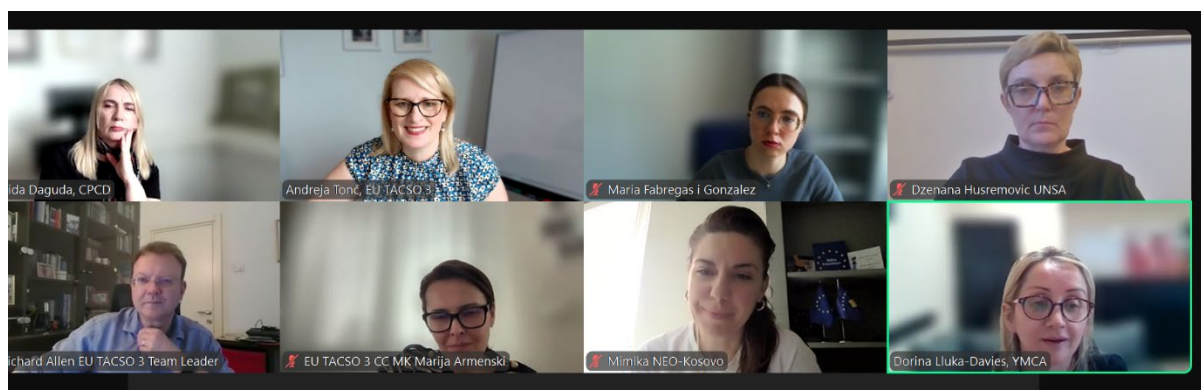
After several questions about the eligibility of organisations from the region, Ms. Maria Fabregas I Gonzalez continued with a detailed presentation on Erasmus+ from the European Commission's point of view.

Her presentation included detailed information on the available funding opportunities for specific sectors of higher education, vocational education and training, youth and sports, with a particular emphasis on capacity building.

She provided an overview of some funded projects and instructions on how to prepare for participation in Erasmus+, including links to the programme's key documents.

Experience sharing: Stories from the WBT-related practice

In the session on experience sharing, representatives of different institutions and organisations shared their experiences in developing and implementing capacity-building programmes while cooperating with partners from different sectors under the financial framework of the EU programmes.



Mr. Marko Gjorgievski, Director at the National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility, Republic of North Macedonia, talked about the experience in the national agency role and supporting CSO skills-related projects.

"CSOs need to be supported not just with funding but with knowledge and connections. The Erasmus+ programme opens doors for long-term partnerships and innovation."

Furthermore, he provided information on how to access support from similar agencies in the region, and present representatives from the national agencies or focal points contributed to his presentation by sharing their experiences and contacts.

Ms. Dženana Husremović, Vice rector for Teaching and Student Affairs from the University of Sarajevo, presented opportunities for cooperation between academia and CSOs in three key areas: research and development, co-design of new study programmes and involvement in teaching and internships. She emphasised that stronger collaboration between CSOs, universities, and public institutions is essential for long-term progress and sustainability. Also, she provided some recommendations for CSOs on cooperation with academic institutions, including:

- Be proactive – you have to be on the radar for academia
- Be ready to cooperate with the system
- Align your interests and objectives with the research interests of academic institutions
- Offer your expertise in communication of the research results, policy writing, fundraising and advocacy

Ms. Jelena Manić Radoičić from the Belgrade Open School, Serbia, provided an overview of experience in skills strengthening with the support of EU programmes.

At the first instance, she clarified why EU programmes matter for CSOs, pointing the following:

- They provide funding opportunities for capacity-building and cross-sectoral collaboration.
- Bridging the gap between CSOs, academia, and businesses.
- Promote innovation and best practices in education and training.

"Training, capacity building, and developing non-formal educational programmes for diverse groups are core skills in the CSO sector—and they're highly transferable. These are part of nearly every Erasmus+ project I've worked on."

Few BOS's projects funded by Erasmus+ have been presented, including support to youth from rural areas and vulnerable groups in the post-COVID-19 period, addressing skills gaps through virtual internships; supporting NEET (not in education, employment or training) youth through social entrepreneurship, and integrating career guidance with HR training in enterprises.

In her presentation, she also provided a detailed list of skills for CSOs that can be strengthened under the EU programmes or can support the implementation of the measures and actions under the EU programmes.

Ms. Aida Daguda from the Centre for Civil Society Promotion, Bosnia and Herzegovina, shared their experiences cooperating with public and private academic institutions, including developing and implementing the capacity-building programmes.

She offered three key pieces of advice for CSOs:

- Participate in EU consultations to influence policy,
- Be selective and strategic when attending events, and
- Take the initiative—don't wait for cooperation, initiate it.

Final Remarks

The event participants expressed ***interest in continuous learning about the EU programme's funding opportunities***. Even at the application process stage, only 14 out of 199 registered participants responded that they could contribute to the event by sharing their experience, while others emphasised their modest knowledge of how the programmes operate and support CSO actions.

Even though the EU TACSO 3 project and other technical assistance projects have already conducted some capacity-building initiatives regarding the promotion of EU programmes, due to their specific and different approaches to operations, only the highly capacitated CSOs are in the loop with the features of their funding opportunities and participate actively.

As noted by representatives of national agencies, ***support can't be provided to grassroots organisations with modest capacities and experiences, but only to well-capacitated organisations*** that can meet the administrative and technical requirements of the funding opportunities and can act as reliable partners to academic institutions, businesses, local authorities, etc.

Several contributors emphasised the ***importance of CSOs' proactive approach to other partners*** and offering cooperation in areas of their experience and expertise, especially in relation to project management, research, advocacy, monitoring, and work with vulnerable groups.

In strengthening the ***partnership potential***, CSOs are also advised to invest in building their organisations' strong governance base by ***involving more private sector members in the governing boards***. Such an approach can also foster the financial sustainability and fundraising efforts of the organisations and supported projects.

Evaluation of Event

In the follow-up to the event, participants were provided with the documents shared at the event and asked to provide feedback information on the event. Ten participants responded to the online evaluation questionnaire.

For most participants, the event met their expectations. Now, they better understand the topics covered, including the experiences and lessons learnt from the presented practices in the region. They are also satisfied with the timeliness and completeness of information related to the organisation and logistics before and during the event.

"Thank you for the very useful and well-organised presentation on EU funds. Andreja Tonč did an excellent job facilitating the event, and all the presenters were outstanding."

Tanja Pavlov, Director of the Centre for Migration, NGO Group 484

For future events, participants recommend expanding the presentation on the details of each programme or particular call and how the project ideas were transferred into practice.

Summary of key responses on how finally the information, knowledge and experience gained at this event will serve participants in their further work includes the following answers:

- *I learned about new dates for Call openings, got a wind in our back about reporting to CERV about our non-eligibility.*
- *I feel better equipped with new names and contacts as well as direct insights related to EU programmes, which will help me in fundraising and grant writing.*
- *The knowledge gained during this event will significantly improve my ability to search for and apply for EU funding opportunities more effectively.*
- *The knowledge and insights gained from this event will significantly enhance my ability to contribute to and strengthen the impact of my work within the civil society sector. Through detailed presentations on EU funding programs—particularly Erasmus+, CERV, Horizon Europe, and Digital Europe—I gained a clearer understanding of how to strategically access and apply these funding opportunities to support skills development, capacity building, and cross-sector collaboration. Furthermore, networking and knowledge-sharing with other CSOs and academic institutions at the event highlighted best practices and innovations that I can adapt locally, helping to bridge gaps between education and the labour market, and to promote employability and social inclusion. Overall, the event not only deepened my understanding of EU programs but also provided inspiration and practical strategies for leveraging these tools to drive sustainable, positive change in my community and professional practice.*
- *The info session came at the right moment for my organisation, as we are actively exploring EU funding opportunities but have not yet received EU funding. As a growing NGO, understanding the available programs, eligibility criteria, and application processes is crucial for us to take the next steps in securing support for our work. The session provided us with valuable insights into the structure of EU funds, key requirements, and best practices for successful applications. This knowledge will help us navigate future calls for proposals with greater confidence and ensure that we align our projects with EU priorities.*
- *The insights gained from this webinar provided me with a comprehensive overview of all the EU programs available to the civil society sector. It highlighted opportunities to apply for funding, gain valuable experience, and contribute to key areas of interest or broader societal goals. The presentations were clear, concise, and will be instrumental in shaping our project proposal outline. We will continue to explore further details about the calls and specific guidelines for each program, even though we already have experience with EU funding programmes and their implementation.*

Annexes

Relevant documents to which the report is referring, including the agenda of the event and presentations, are available at the [EU TACSO 3 library](#).