

Second Annual FSTP Community of Practice Meeting 8 – 9 November 2023, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

EVENT REPORT



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Introduction

The Second Annual Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) Community of Practice (CoP) Meeting was organised on 8 – 9 November 2023 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. This second meeting was organised as a follow-up to the first meeting organised in December 2022 in Belgrade, Serbia at which the Community of Practice was initiated and later formed in February 2023. The event was attended by 45 live participants (37 women and 8 men) and 18 online participants (14 women and 4 men).

Several FSTP CoP meetings and capacity-building activities have been organised during 2023. Documents, presentations, and reports from these events can be found on the EU TACSO 3 [website](#) library and event pages by searching the term “FSTP”.

The FSTP Community of Practice gathers 276 members in the [LinkedIn group](#) including members and employees of interested CSOs acting as FSTP (current and future) implementers from the Western Balkans and Türkiye region. Its purpose is to enhance the exchange of knowledge, good practices and constraints of the civil society organisations in FSTP implementation throughout the region implementing regional and national level projects.

FSTP, or sub-granting, is an increasingly used tool to enhance outreach to a wider range of local beneficiaries, notably in the areas of good governance, gender equality, human rights, media and civil society support. With this, the European Commission has significantly increased the number of CSOs benefitting from EU support. FSTP allows for more tailor-made support of grassroots organisations and informal groups with smaller grants and more accessible application and selection procedures which are offered in local languages. It also provides the flexibility to define eligibility and reporting requirements adapted to the capacities of target beneficiaries within the difficult political contexts in which civil society actors often operate.

The purpose of the Second Annual FSTP CoP Meeting was to discuss the new developments in the FSTP regional practices and enable more group-based learning. This is achieved by the active involvement of the participants in the role of contributors and facilitators and was highly accepted resulting in a CoP agreement of strengthening such approach for future events by involving the CoP members from the level of the event and activity design to the end of its implementation.



The key topics of the event included an overview of the work done in the previous year with a specific focus on:

- Monitoring of FSTP grant contracts (follow-up to TACSO training);
- VAT practices and challenges (presentation of the TACSO manual and discussion on the current issues and practices; summarising key issues);
- Reaching smaller organisations with simplified application and reporting procedures; successes and lessons learned;
- Development of inclusive selection criteria to reach out to more CSOs who have limited experience and financial capacity;
- Presenting the gender mainstreaming checklist – what has been learned from experience.

Event documentation and presentations can be found [here](#).

Opening speeches and plenary

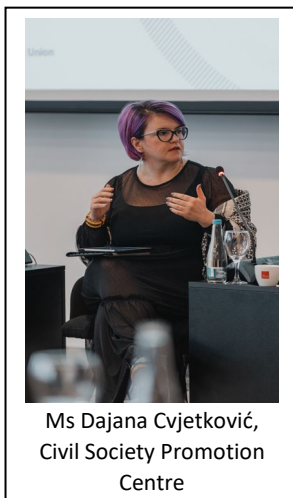
The event was opened by welcoming speeches of **Mr Gianluca Vannini, Head of Section for Social Development, Civil Society and Cross Border Cooperation, [EU Delegation to BiH](#)** and **Mr Richard Allen, [EU TACSO 3 Team Leader](#)**.

In his speech, Mr Vannini emphasized that an empowered civil society plays an important role in ensuring democracy. Civil society can help citizens to understand the need for reforms as part of the EU integration process. But the issue of shrinking space for civil society is noticed in BiH, so the European Union and the Delegation of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina are committed to supporting civil society in the WBT region because it is essential for a functioning democracy to have a vibrant civil society and a key component of the participatory democracy.

For a number of years, EU TACSO 3 and the EU have jointly aimed to increase and improve the capacity and actions of CSOs as well as to enhance their democratic role. Through EU TACSO 3's capacity-building activities, support and assistance, the EU aims to achieve a strengthened civil society and to stimulate a civil society-friendly environment and culture. Thus, this event is seen as an opportunity to foster the sharing of experiences, challenges, and lessons learned for CSOs who are interested in developing and implementing FSTP projects in the future.

Following Mr Vannini's opening speech, Mr Allen presented the objectives and key components of the EU TACSO 3 project and announced the Call for Proposals: EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Türkiye.

The opening plenary "Growing together – reflection on the first year of the FSTP Community of Practice" included inputs from the contributors presenting regional actors working on strengthening CSO and FSTP capacities.



Ms Dajana Cvjetković Project Manager from the [Civil Society Promotion Centre](#) praised the agenda of the event and said that allows all participants to contribute. She spoke about the environment for the work of CSOs in the region and mentioned a couple of examples. CSOs have capacities to develop their methodology, strategy or programme which fits best to our conditions. Very often donors are offering us methodologies developed for other countries that are not applicable for BiH due to the different conditions in the country. Local ownership as a value and process of distribution of grants is not unique for each country - not the same in Italy, Kosovo or BiH, as an example. **Unique methodology and standards are required for each country** since the factors that create the environment are complex due to the political situation in each IPA beneficiary.

Furthermore, we are witnessing the shrinking space for CSOs which is a two-way battle: Donors encourage CSOs to collaborate with the government and cooperate with them, but at the same time, governments see CSOs as an enemy – so how to collaborate? The public image of civil society is that they see CSOs as a mechanism for money laundering – so CSOs need to inform the public daily about what we do, what are our results, etc. **CSOs need to work on the development of visibility standards.** There are not enough independent media in the WBT region.

A key issue is the "project-oriented model", a model on how donors like to support CSOs and as a result, CSOs get "projectitis", an illness where they lose their mission, connection with the foundation, with beneficiaries, trust is threatened and people expect results from us. International criteria expect

high performance from CSOs, affecting small and middle-size CSOs. Middle-size CSOs are the most influential in bringing about change and should be so. CSOs must find a way to increase the number of CSOs in the “middle size” and strengthen their capacities.

Mr Fjordi Bisha Project Manager from the [Western Balkans Fund](#).

The WBF serves as a bridge between the EU and civil society in the region, recognized by the EU as a service for in-person intense mentoring of CSOs in the region, following them throughout the total process of implementation of the grants. They introduced an electronic system called **OGM (online grant management system)**. Through this user-friendly system, all grantees can report to WBF in real time all activities and expenses they have done. Also, next year (2024), WBF plans to focus on the grassroots CSOs and medium size CSOs. They are well established, in a growing process, reaching more project goals than was planned and the next step for WBF is to strengthen them through financing. Indeed, even with small-size grants, you can achieve your goals as well!



Ms Andreja Tonč the Key Expert for Capacity Building at the [EU TACSO 3](#) project emphasised the importance of having a community of professionals working on grant management and experience sharing since the usual role of grant experts is limited in opportunities for networking and transfer of knowledge among organisations and practitioners.

FSTP is a huge responsibility, but very important. The constant goal is to reach those contributing the best to the objectives of our grant programme. The point is that we all work on the development of the programme constantly, observing the process and finding ways to improve our work.

Considering the successful development of the Community of Practice initiated by the TACSO project, she suggested it is time to start working on ensuring the sustainability of this initiative by involving more CoP members in the design of future events and activities. The participants welcomed very much this idea.

The overall plan for the next year as concerns the CoP will include further work on the creation of case studies about the simplification of procedures, exchange of knowledge about VAT exemption practices and further strengthening of capacities in assessment and selection of proposals, monitoring of grants, reporting and visibility.

Key points from the group discussion:

- According to the experience from Türkiye, **regular organisation of meetings with CSO supported (grant beneficiaries) is very productive.** This results in creating informal networks and experience sharing and is perceived as a secure environment for requesting support and reporting challenges.
- **Risk management is an area to learn more about.** How to minimise risk and increase effectiveness? According to the experience from BiH, some organisations are dedicating 10% of their funds to the coverage of costs for possible unexpected situations. The input provided based on the practice in Albania is that the solution might be preliminary planning, which is the most important. Detect mitigations for any type of risk and regularly monitor grantees that we support – if we catch something in time it means that it turns into a lesson.



- The **creation of online grant-management platforms** seems crucial for strengthening the efficiency of the process by all actors involved. However, it requires time and funds for development and piloting, especially time for fixing the bugs and errors in the system. However, this can be done over time by monitoring which parts need improvements. The remaining question not answered yet is the initial cost needed for the creation of such a system.
- Participants suggested creating a list of contacts of FSTP implementors in the region. If possible, by EU TACSO 3 project.

The opening plenary session was *moderated by Ms Özge Konuralp, EU TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for Türkiye.*

Breakout session 1

How to build up a simplified reporting procedure in order to enable sub-grantees to easily share their financial and technical reports (live and online sessions)

Two contributors shared experiences of their organisations in simplifying FSTP procedures.

Ms Hülya Kurt, Project Manager from the [Truth Justice and Memory Centre](#) in her presentation provided an overview of the key challenges their organisation is facing in providing support to human rights-based organisations in Türkiye due to the political, social, and natural disaster situations affected that country. Thus, they work strongly on increasing the capacities of organisations, especially on strengthening their HR policies and ensuring diversified sources of funding.

One-to-one support is crucial in providing targeted support and learning more about the needs of the supported organisations. Furthermore, adjustment of the EU project terminology to the local language is crucial for ensuring local CSOs understand different types of requirements. Also, it is important to work on adjusting of the EU procedures with national/local legal frameworks and requirements. Especially in finance management.

The use of different IT tools is very much recommended to simplify the procedures. There are many free-of-charge tools we can use for submission of documentation, sharing information etc. It is not needed to start with development of the sophisticated management systems but to search for ready-to-use solutions at the beginning.

The organisation developed the **BELLEK online system** which helps them to monitor the programme and finance management of supported projects including submission of the proof documents. The system provides information on the expenditures that occurred, costs approved as eligible, pending costs etc.

The BELLEK system also is used as a capacity-building tool in **increasing IT literacy** and adopting the new, simplified system of project management for the supported CSOs. This tool helps not only the organisation acting in the role of the contracting authority but also the grant beneficiary to monitor their progress.

As concerning the **challenges**, the constant **turnover of the staff** in supported organisations is evident. Mainly due to government pressures and **constant audits of human rights organisations**. Understanding the **cash flow**, adjustments of the **donor requirements with the legal requirements of the country** also remain as well as the need for intensive support in **strengthening capacities for finance reporting** compared to the capacities for narrative reporting.



Mr Aleksandar Cekov, Project Manager from the [Centre for Research and Policy Making](#) presented the experience of simplified reporting procedures within the SMART Balkans project and its grant scheme.

[SMART Balkans](#) – Civil Society for Shared Society in the Western Balkans is a project targeting 6 Western Balkan countries and is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway. A total of EUR 17 million will be distributed over 4 years to 450 grants. The project aims to empower CSOs for a stronger and more active role in creating peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development in the Western Balkans. It is implemented by the [Centre for Civil Society Promotion](#) (Bosnia and Herzegovina), [Institute for Democracy and Mediation](#) (Albania) and [Centre for Research and Policy Making](#) (North Macedonia).

A variety of grant types are available for support including regional grants, core grants, national interventions, local initiatives, as well as grants for creative initiatives, media and ad hoc grants.



Mr Aleksandar Cekov,
Centre for Research and Policy Making

The simplified reporting procedure is based on milestone reporting including reporting once the key project deliverable is produced or service provided (i.e. video created). The project costs (budget) are also structured around particular milestones and deliverables. Therefore, the milestone plan is prepared and is enclosed in the grant agreement.

The project also designed its online grants management platform (GPM) available for use only for PCs. It includes all aspects of grant management and is available on the website of the project.

During the presentation, the structure of project indicators is presented including the type of information to be collected/reported by the grant beneficiaries to allow the regular and simplified monitoring of each project.

Key points from the group discussion:

- Quality assessment of the deliverables is crucial and thus we need to ensure proper procedure and timing to review deliverables and communicate with the grant beneficiaries the expected standards (i.e. for video material, policy brief, brochure etc.).
- The constant communication and site visits can help us understand the capacities and needs of the grant beneficiaries. It is very much needed and effective compared to i.e. online monitoring visits.
- Further investment into building capacities of grant beneficiaries in finance management and understanding visibility requirements is assessed as needed.
- Concerning the core grants, the experience has shown that the required budget costs and actual costs incurred should be calculated against the average market prices. This is the recommended way for monitoring the finance expenditures in the core grants since in this case we are focused on organisation instead of deliverables.

The Breakout session 1 was **moderated by Ms Aferdita Pustina, EU TACS 3 Country Coordinator for Kosovo.**

Breakout session 2

Development of inclusive selection criteria to reach out to more CSOs who have limited experience and financial capacity

Two contributors shared experiences of their organisations in the development of inclusive selection criteria to reach out to more CSOs who have limited experience and financial capacity.

Ms Marija Todorović, Project Manager from [Belgrade Open School](#) presented the work of the BOS in providing support to a variety of CSOs in Serbia in their role of the EU National Resource Centre. This role includes the implementation of the FSTP-related activities of capacity building, mentoring and grant awarding. The FSTP component of the BOS is also present in several other projects they are implementing as well.

In the BOS's FSTP implementing approach they assist civil society organisations having limited organisational capacities and less experience in project management. They are searching to support informal groups of citizens as well.

In addition to the financial support, they are also building capacities of targeted CSOs in areas of organisational development, policymaking and citizen mobilisation.

In this way, they are strengthening the capacities of CSOs having a strong base in communities but modest experience in project design and development.

To reach out to those they are having less developed capacities, the BOS has created two models: a) a two-phase approach, and 2) a one-phase approach.

A two-phase approach includes at the first instance submission only of the project idea presented in the simplified template. Based on that the evaluation committee is conducting an assessment. It is important to emphasise that the advantage here is really given to the project idea instead of the previous experience of the CSOs or how the template format is written.

If selected for the next phase of the selection process, the relevant mentoring support is available to selected CSOs since now they have to transfer the project idea into the project proposal format and need to develop a logical framework and budget as well. The support mentioned includes mentoring provided by project team members.

The one-step approach is a simplified procedure through which organisations can apply for 1) a grant of EUR 1,000 for the development of the organisation, and 2) a grant of EUR 5,000 for immediate support. Interested applicants submit a project proposal and budget forms. A logframe is not required in this process.

Inclusive selection criteria according to the BOS's model relate to:

- Relevance of the project proposal,
- Coherence of the project proposal,
- Quality of the suggested intervention,
- Necessary resources.



Ms Marija Todorović, Belgrade Open School

The criteria should be broadly set and enable evaluation of the aspects of the project proposal, and not only of previous experience of the CSOs or the quality of their project writing.

The continuous work with the evaluation committee is emphasised as important to ensure their understanding of the capacity-building aspect of the FSTP process including the provision of support to the CSOs with potential for further upgrade and those having a strong base in their communities.

Ms Sara Salihu, Capacity Building and Monitoring Officer from the [Kosovo Civil Society Foundation](#) provided insight into the capacity building and FSTP approach of the KCSF which also act as the National Resource Center for Kosovo.

The KCSF approach is based on supporting diverse CSOs. According to their experience, the challenges faced by smaller CSOs relate to a) limited resources, b) recognition and visibility, c) capacity building, and d) advocacy power.

Their FSTP approach is based on inclusivity and equity including adaptation to specific needs emphasising support beyond selection. The selection process is simplified to allow the application of organisations, individuals and non-formal groups. Collaboration and cooperation are the key to the process based on the identification of the needs of the target group.

Key points from the group discussion:

- Further learning on how to form evaluation committees, select appropriate evaluation committee members and how to work with evaluation committee members is needed. This especially includes their preparation for the assessment/evaluation of the project proposals process and understanding the needs of the particular FSTP programme and the capacities of the applicants.
- To improve the selection process, we can involve previous grant beneficiaries in the process, now in the role of the evaluation committee members. They can contribute to the process based on their experience and understanding of their capacities.
- Understanding the needs and capacities of the target group is crucial for selecting good quality proposals. Thus, we need to ensure that evaluation committee members understand the needs and constraints of the target group of the call.
- More work is needed to encourage FSTP providers to consider the special needs of CSOs and community groups from marginalised communities, and to develop approaches that would specifically encourage them to apply.

Breakout session 2 was **moderated by Mr Richard Allen, EU TACSO 3 Team Leader.**

Breakout session 3

Gender analysis to inform the design of the project/programme design and development of gender-sensitive indicators

Examples of how gender is mainstreamed in the FSTP related projects are presented at this session by **Ms Tuğçe Bahadır Cankara, Project Coordinator and Ms Zehra Tosun, Gender Equality Mainstreaming Expert from the [Birlikte Project STGM](#)**, and **Ms Ivana Jelača, Director of the [Media Diversity Institute](#)**. The session was moderated by **Ms Özge Konuralp, EU TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for Türkiye.**

Based on the presentation inputs provided and the summary of discussion points following key points are defined:

- Gender-sensitive perspective should be visible in all aspects of the project design, including

preparation, implementation and impact of the project. The same relates to design of the Call for Proposals under the FSTP related projects. For example, *“The call is... established to effectively influence media representation of ethnicity, religion and **gender** in the Western Balkans.”*

- This also includes the use of gender analysis in the process of selection of proposals. For example:
 - Application form question: *Will your project involve marginalised communities and **gender equality**, and how?*
 - Selection criteria: *Involvement of vulnerable groups and **gender-related issues*** – proposals to take into consideration the needs of vulnerable groups.
- **Gender-sensitive indicators** should be designed at the level of the project/call level and level of the individually supported projects. For example:
 - Representatives of 30 CSOs trained to recognise harmful narratives and create alternative narratives to address them (min. 60% women).
 - 12 advocacy events (minimum 2 focusing on addressing gender-related issues).
 - 60 articles produced through the mentoring process (minimum 2 including gender component).
 - 12 podcasts produced (minimum 50% of interlocutors are women).
- Gender-sensitive indicators can be developed at the level of the **FSTP support to core grants** as well including, for example:
 - Governance and decision-making:
 - Gender distribution in the board of directors
 - Existence of gender equality policy
 - Gender representation in meetings at which organisation participates
 - Strategic planning:
 - Have gender-sensitive external and internal analysis
 - Gender equality strategy for the organisation itself and its fieldwork in the strategic plan
 - Employees and volunteers:
 - Gender equality policy in employment and human resources and gender distribution of employees and volunteers
 - Gender distribution at the managerial staff level
 - Mechanism/procedure for prevention of violence and harassment
- The **key challenges in applying gender analysis** in the FSTP related projects are the following:
 - Organisations working in different fields which reflects on the different levels of the baseline capacity and knowledge.
 - Collection of data is often not structured, designed and properly planned which results in the provision of unclear and insufficient data.
 - Intersectionality - an all-inclusive perspective aware of the interplay between discrimination based on gender, sexuality, race, age, accessibility, poverty, cultural background etc.
 - Application of gender analysis and gender-sensitive approaches with organisations that are already working on gender equality and where intersectionality is the most relevant.



Breakout session 4

How to strengthen the visibility and communication aspects of the FSTP grant beneficiaries



The session on visibility and communication aspects of the FSTP grant beneficiaries was implemented in the form of a workshop and was moderated by Ms Andreja Tonč, EU TACSO 3 Capacity Building Expert.

The workshop was designed around three key questions to which the participants responded in small groups and discussed their findings at the level of the whole group.

The key questions asked were:

1. *What are the key issues concerning the communication and visibility of grant beneficiaries?*
2. *What can help in that particular issue?*
3. *What do we think now is needed to overcome and improve the situation?*

Key findings regarding the communication and visibility aspects of the FSTP grant beneficiaries:

- “We do much more activities than we promote our work!”
- The switch of the approach from just announcement to actual communication is needed. This is in line with the new EU Visibility Guidelines and thus the additional training of FSTP implementors and grant beneficiaries is needed.
- Simple instructions for ensuring communication and visibility by smaller organisations can be prepared (i.e. advise to take photos or to create short video clips during the actual implementation of activities/actions, sharing stories instead of information on activities and events implemented).
- Target groups are using different communication channels and we need to adapt to it depending on their needs and interests.

Breakout session 5

VAT practices and challenges - summarising key issues to be communicated with contracting authorities

The session was moderated by Mr Richard Allen, EU TACSO 3 Team Leader who presented the structure of the VAT Exemption Guide that was prepared by the EU TACSO 3 project and will be soon published. The guide compiles legislation that applies to VAT in each project country and will be released as online material to be easily updated continuously according to the changing rules and implementation.

In further discussion under this session, the VAT exemption rules that apply to EU-funded projects and which are different in each country have been considered. While there are different rules for applicants, co-applicants, sub-grantees, and regional activities, there are also different procedures changing according to the rules of countries regarding how to apply for exemption and how to reimburse the expenditures.

In some countries such as Türkiye, CSOs can have VAT exemption before the implementation of an EU-funded Project and have a straightforward process if CSOs are registered in the respective country such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, in some other countries such as Albania, CSOs have to ask for reimbursement after the finalisation of their project. The situation in Albania is changing, however, and CSOs will now be entitled to a VAT exemption.

It was underlined by the participants that it is a very long procedure for countries such as Albania due to the fact that, first the project needs to be approved and the VAT exemption process starts afterwards. It was also emphasized that VAT exemption and dealing with reimbursement is a quite time-consuming process and needs human resources. Besides, there is an assumption that all the expenditures made by CSOs will be considered eligible.

Closing plenary session – planning the next steps and evaluation



The final session of the event was dedicated to summarising key findings from the event focusing on the future activities of the FSTP Community of Practice. The session was moderated by Ms Andreja Tonč, EU TACSO 3 Capacity Building Expert while participants were divided into three small groups working on specific issues. The facilitators of the small groups (Ms Ivana Jelača, Ms Iskra Belcheva Ristovska, and Ms Hülya Kurt) also provided input for drafting this report by submitting notes from the small group discussions.

Topics we would like to explore more under FSTP Community of Practice

- How can we make subgrantees follow the instructions provided.
- How to make evaluation (assessment of proposals) process objective and define good evaluation criteria.
- How to overcome the time gap between payment of the last instalment and approval of the reports submitted by grant beneficiaries.
- VAT and tax authorities (i.e. training for tax authorities, auditors, VAT for co-financing, EU Delegation precautions for HROs, Challenges from government/how to mitigate tax).
- How do we simplify the whole process (from application to reporting).
- How to make comms & visibility more impactful.
- How can CoP advocates change (i.e. to advocate for higher indirect costs of the FSTP projects).

Possible activities during next year for the FSTP Community of Practice

Intermediate measures (and without financial implications):

- Improved communication channels (as the LinkedIn group is too closed) – to be extended to others and possibly on other social media platforms.
- Possibly to be compiled by TACSO and shared: list of organisations, CoP members contacts, and projects with FSTP component.

Crucial to be organised:

- Common events on FSTP together with EUDs, tax authorities/public revenue authorities so they can be informed about the challenges to implementing FSTP firsthand.
- Discussion with donors on the disproportion between the HR-allocated funds and the amount

for FSTP – there is a limitation to the amount which can be used for staff administering FSTP, which is too low to manage FSTP smoothly due to the workload. Suggested also to conduct an analysis on the workload required to prove disproportion with data.

Organisational:

- Sub-groups in the CoP per donor (and applicable rules), the country where the project is implemented, and specific procedures/steps (e.g. simplified procedures). Maybe these could be included as keywords and can be searchable on the improved platform for communication.

Workshops/peer exchange/best practices compendium on:

- VAT exemption
- Simplified procedures
- Audit
- Result-oriented monitoring (ROM)
- Financial reporting

Discussion/advocacy on:

- Possible unifying of the VAT exemption procedures in all countries.

How we can contribute to the FSTP Community of Practice

- To entitle **national FSTP coordinators** who can also act/contribute as:
- **LinkedIn admins** (for example, country-based admins that could be responsible for communication in their respective country)
- **Contact points for specific issues** (for example, Mr Dejan Ristovski, EPI can provide responses on the VAT exemption process in N. Macedonia, Ms Lindita Manga, ALCDF can provide the same type of responses for Albania)
- **The coordinators could be structured in teams** (e.g. communication, financial management...)
- National/regional (depending on relevance) online workshops
- Optimal twice per year on the following topics: VAT; Simplified procedures (CSOs can potentially unify the approach); OPSYS.
- The idea is that TACSO logistically organises workshops but can rely on CoP/ contact points for expertise and experience in FSTP practices.
- CoP can contribute to the exchange and capacity building of other FSTP implementors. Look for ways to translate that to the FSTP recipients.
- Some national workshops could maybe be organised in person.
- Ideally, this contribution to the exchange of knowledge and practices can be included in our timesheets.



Additional suggestions:

- Try to involve other donors in this and advocate for more unified procedures.
- Encourage two-way communication between EC and grant recipients.

Feedback provided by participants



Participants responded they agree the event met their expectations and its content was very relevant for the work of their organisations. The majority of participants confirmed they better understand the relevant issue than before while several participants do not notice the difference in this regard.

The satisfaction with the opportunity for active participation, exchange and networking is scored as strong. Also, participants are very satisfied with the organisational aspects of the event including provision of information before arrival and at the event.

In the further text are the most relevant written responses from participants on the particular questions from the evaluation questionnaire:

How will the information, knowledge and experience gained at this event serve you in your work?

It was a great event, with many new experiences and learning that will help me...

It was great to hear the experience and practices of other colleagues in the region, regarding the VAT issues. As we share the same problem, we will use the information and experience shared during this event to improve internal procedures and speed up the decisions regarding the VAT exemption in the region.

As an organisation that includes FSTP in many of our projects, the exchange of experience is very important for us. The ideas and experiences of other colleagues in the field will help us implement our activities. Some valuable inputs were received by colleagues, which will help us in designing the programme implementation in the future.

I expected to receive more information on managing small grants during the meeting. I did not get adequate information because the meeting predominantly covered general topics. Tips and tricks, as well as lessons learned from the previous period, were not shared. At least I didn't perceive them that way.

Mostly, it served as an inspiration for new tools, as well as useful information on the forthcoming implementation of the project.

There was a lot of exchange of information and shared positive experiences and good examples, that we will try to apply during our FSTP in the future.

It will serve in the direction to think more how to provide means for the platform which will serve as the helpful tool in alleviating the process of receiving applications and reports of subgrantees.

To improve sub granting within the project we implement by incorporating tips for simplification of the procedure.

The information and knowledge shared is very relevant and to the heart of the sector. The good practices from FSTP implementers are very helpful as each of us learnt from challenges and lessons learnt. The set up of the event provided a full opportunity for sharing and networking for future collaborations. Experiences of other countries on simplified procedures for reporting, criteria of selection and VAT issues were a good sharing, so we can use the examples of other countries when discussing the topic in our own country with other CSOs. It was interesting the discussion on

communication and visibility and how each of us is trying to improve in this direction. Goos practices from other organisations are very helpful to be used in our organisations. I appreciated the discussion on the way forward to improve the FSTP Community of Practice.

I will think about new target populations and the introduction of new practices in the first, administrative check.

I am at the beginning of my career related to the process of sub-granting, and many things that I heard at this event were new to me, so I tried to write down as many useful things as possible and to memorise them too. Everything that I've heard in Sarajevo will be part of my future career in this field, it helped me to better understand the whole process and adopt a mindset that I need for participating in the process of sub-granting as a part of my organisation.

It was very helpful to share experiences and get insights about the issues that other similar organisations are facing during the implementation of the EU-funded grants.

As an implementer of an EU project with FSTP coming in, it was valuable to understand and learn from the experiences of the CSO in the region. The information will allow me to better plan the upcoming activity and will serve as a reference!

Which aspects of the event were the most useful for your work?

Experience sharing, networking, learning about how to mobilise and engage new CSOs, information about online platform for monitoring, workshops group discussions, financial reporting, VAT section and visibility. Also, connecting with other colleagues on the local level, as well as on the regional level, was a unique opportunity for networking and socializing.

Work in groups such as how to improve visibility issues...

The entire event was useful, but I would like to emphasise the inclusive selection criteria for CSOs breakout session, and how to strengthen the visibility and communication aspect of FSTP (in both those sessions I did participate I bet the rest were interesting as well).

Most useful was the session related to the VAT exemption practices in the region, since it provides additional information and exchange of practices in the neighbouring countries, thus enabling better planning and collecting of information during the application processes, but also in the project implementation phases.

I want to point out the usefulness of the breakout sessions, especially "Development of inclusive selection criteria to reach out to more CSOs who have limited experience and financial capacity" and "Gender analysis to inform the design of the project/programme design and development of gender-sensitive indicators", which I followed. Both topics are really important and they gave me the most new information that I've heard. I would like to be able to follow the rest of the topics that were done on other breakout sessions.

Information, knowledge and experience gained from other countries, especially related to FSTP in general; reporting procedures, visibility and communication aspects, inclusive selection criteria for CSOs, etc.

Which aspects of the event were the least relevant to your work?

The most often response addressed the session on the VAT exemption procedures and practices as the least relevant for the work. However, most such responses also clarified that this was mainly due to

the reason other people in the organisation are dealing with VAT-related issues (i.e. finance managers etc.).

What could be improved in terms of content, trainers, and logistics?

Start of the event at 9:30, organised socialising activity like city sightseeing, otherwise all other organisational aspects and logistics were exceptional.

The trainers were productive and well-prepared. I particularly appreciate the punctuality during all two workdays from beginning to end. Their involvement ensured that the group was dynamic and that the work was interesting.



Please indicate whether, and how, you will transfer to others the experience gained at the event

During the staff meetings and through one-on-one meetings with my colleagues from other departments depending on the topic.

I transferred the experience to my colleagues at a staff meeting. Also, an additional gathering of national group is planned, as well as initiatives with other local CSOs

I already talked to my colleagues about the event and all the new information that I've gained. I wrote down many new things that I've heard, and I will transfer that to colleagues from the organisation, as well as to other colleagues from our partner organisations.

Please provide us with any other feedback you would like to share about this event

Great to know and meet so many interesting people from the region and Turkey. Thank You to the entire TACSO 3 Team.

I would appreciate it if the TACSO Team as such could bring in different donors (like Smart and WBF) to these events which could give first-hand information and share practices with participants on possible funding opportunities/implementation etc. In this case, it was great to have both potential donors present and hear from them relevant info.

Thank you for the chance to be a part of this event. Thank you for all the shared knowledge and the opportunity to make new connections!

It was very relevant and to the heart of the FSTP COP. This excellent work should just continue. This is a great platform for sharing, learning and networking.

Well organised and interactive in the breakout sessions that I have participated in.

It could be good to have a unique platform for all FSTP grantees which will be used for sub-grantees.

If it's feasible it will be very useful to have a kind of training for all stakeholders in the process of VAT exemption.

Everything was fine. It is very useful to have such events more frequently.

Meeting all colleagues, being part of the event, networking, informal discussions for possible cooperation... meant a lot.



Conclusions and recommendations

Grant management

- **Unique methodology and standards are required for each country** since the factors that create the environment are complex due to the political situation in each IPA beneficiary.
- The **creation of online grant-management platforms seems crucial for strengthening the efficiency of the process** by all actors involved. However, it requires time and funds for development and piloting, especially time for fixing the bugs and errors in the system. However, this can be done over time by monitoring which parts need improvements. The remaining question not answered yet is the initial cost needed for the creation of such a system. The costs for maintaining such a platform should also be planned.
- **Quality assessment of the deliverables is crucial** and thus we need to ensure proper procedure and timing to review deliverables and communicate with the grant beneficiaries the expected standards (i.e. for video material, policy brief, brochure etc.).
- The **constant communication and site visits can help us understand the capacities and needs of the grant beneficiaries**. It is very much needed and effective compared to i.e. online monitoring visits.
- **Gender-sensitive perspective should be visible in all aspects of the project design**, including preparation, implementation and impact of the project. The same relates to the design of the Call for Proposals under the FSTP related projects. See the section on the inputs provided from the Breakout session 3.
- Concerning the **core grants**, the experience has shown that the **required budget costs and actual costs incurred should be calculated against the average market prices**. This is the recommended way for monitoring the finance expenditures in the core grants since in this case we are focused on organisation instead of deliverables.
- **Further learning on how to form evaluation committees**, select appropriate evaluation committee members and how to work with evaluation committee members is needed. This especially includes their preparation for the assessment/evaluation of the project proposals process and understanding the needs of the particular FSTP programme and the capacities of the applicants.
- **To improve the selection process**, we can **involve previous grant beneficiaries** in the process, now in the role of the evaluation committee members. They can contribute to the process based on their experience and understanding of their capacities.

Support to grant beneficiaries

- The **regular organisation of the meetings with CSO supported (grant beneficiaries) is very productive**. This result in creating informal networks and experience sharing and is perceived as a secure environment for requesting support and reporting challenges.
- **Adjustment of the EU project terminology to the local language** is crucial for ensuring local

CSOs understand different types of requirements. Also, it is important to work on **adjusting the EU procedures with national/local legal frameworks and requirements**. Especially in finance management.

- Further investment into **building capacities of grant beneficiaries in finance management** and understanding **visibility requirements** is assessed as needed.
- **Simple instructions for ensuring fulfilment of communication and visibility requirements by grant beneficiaries** can be prepared (i.e. advise to take photos or to create short video clips during the actual implementation of activities/actions, sharing stories instead of information on activities and events implemented).

Strengthening and further development of the FSTP Community of Practice

- To involve interested CoP members into the development and implementation of further EU TACSO 3 activities (i.e. national FSTP coordinators and contributors).
- Organisation of online workshops and meetings on the following topics:
 - VAT
 - Simplification of procedures
 - Assessment of project proposals
 - Communication and visibility aspects of the FSTP projects and grants
- To create a list of contacts of FSTP implementors in the region. If possible, by EU TACSO 3 project.

Annexes

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