

CSO Governance in the Western Balkans and Türkiye

Regional Workshop for CSO Body Members

6 -7 March 2024, Skopje, North Macedonia

EVENT REPORT



Prepared by:

Andreja Tonč, Key Expert for Capacity Building, EU TACSO 3 and

Ozge Konuralp, EU TACSO 3 Country Coordinator for Türkiye

Contents

Introduction	3
Opening remarks.....	3
Strategic oversight	3
Importance of strong governing bodies	5
Strengthening Governance across the region	7
Conclusions and recommendations.....	8
Feedback provided by participants.....	9

Introduction

The Regional Workshop for CSO Governing Body Members was held on 6 – 7 March 2024 in Skopje, North Macedonia, as part of the CSO Governance Programme under Result Area 1 of the EU TACSO 3 project.

This event presents the continuation of the EU TACSO 3 efforts from the previous year on promoting and building capacities of the CSOs in the area of CSO governance.

The quality of CSO governance was identified as a challenge in the Baseline Assessment against the DG NEAR Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society for 2021. Quality of governance is essential for public trust in the civil society sector across the region, and trust is a key factor for the sustainability of the sector.

In 2023, the EU TACSO 3 project initiated the CSO Governance Community of Practice. The CoP succeeded in gathering twice in the form of an online meeting and the form of a regional capacity-building event. The learning brief and resource materials produced to date are available in the [TACSO library](#).

The workshop succeeded in gathering 27 representatives (9 male and 18 female) of CSO governing body members from the Western Balkans and Türkiye region to discuss the current findings on CSO governance in the region, network, and propose inputs for designing the ad-hoc research on CSO governance practices in the WBT.

Opening remarks

Ms. Irena Ivanova, Task Manager from the European Union's delegation to North Macedonia, and Mr. Richard Allen, Team Leader of the EU TACSO 3 projects, opened the event.

In her speech, Ms. Ivanova emphasised *“It is important that CSOs are also examples of good practices of governing organisations. Meaning that we have to assess and observe how we are developing, what we have planned, and where we are now.”*

Mr. Allen presented the background of the event, previous activities in the area of CSO Governance already conducted by the EU TACSO 3 project and ideas for future actions. His presentation is available in the event documentation.

After the opening remarks, the participants briefly introduced themselves. This session concluded with Ms. Andreja Tonč, EU TACSO 3 Key Expert for Capacity Building, presenting the detailed agenda and methodology of work.

Strategic oversight

This session was dedicated to the presentation of the governance practices from Türkiye, including the discussion on how strategic oversight is defined, how organisations set goals, work with the executive/management team, and cooperate with their constituencies.



In her **presentation on the example of a diversified and horizontal CSO governance structure, Ms. Tuğçe Canpolat from Purple Roof Women’s Shelter Foundation** introduced the organisation, which was established in 1990 and presents the first legal entity formed by the feminist movement in the country. In Türkiye, the feminist movement and feminist organisations have always seen non-hierarchical, horizontal organization as a prerequisite for feminist organizing. Often, horizontal organisations are perceived as easier to operate in non-legal entities without official responsibilities. However, this example of the largest and oldest women’s organisation in the country serves as a good example of how horizontal organisational models can also be applied in legal entities.

The work against male violence at Purple Roof Women’s Shelter Foundation is based on feminist methods. Male violence is understood to be rooted in existing inequalities between men and women in society, which must be dismantled by fostering women’s solidarity. As women are being offered support, no decisions are made on their behalf, nor are they pressured into making decisions. They are supported without judgement no matter what they may decide.

- Decisions in the organisation are reached through a collective process.
- There are no hierarchical mechanisms – which involve an effort to prevent differences from producing hierarchies.
- Roles and responsibilities are rotated to prevent knowledge from concentrating in the hands of certain individuals.
- The work rests on a voluntary basis, where volunteers are expected to carry out their responsibilities within their own self-determined boundaries.
- The process is just as important as the end goal itself in making and implementing decisions.

She emphasised: *“We do not take a vote, but rather seek to reach a consensus through debate and discussion.”* Instead of relying solely on appointed leaders or experts, all members are encouraged to take on leadership roles and contribute their unique skills and experiences to the collective. This not only empowers individual members but also builds a strong sense of ownership and solidarity within the organisation. Overall, horizontal organisations offer a more democratic, inclusive, and empowering alternative to traditional hierarchical structures. By prioritising collaboration, consensus-building, transparency, and participatory leadership, a more equitable and sustainable framework for collective action is created.



The responsibility for the political and administrative functioning of the organisation belongs to the collective, which gathers every Tuesday. The collective is open to the participation of women who actively volunteer and identify as feminists, and who wish to be involved in organisational politics.

Currently, there are about 20-25 women in the collective.

While horizontal organisation empowers members and fosters inclusivity, it also requires significant time and effort to maintain. Consensus-building processes can be time-consuming and complex, requiring patience and compromise from all members involved. This can sometimes slow down decision-making. However, our main goal is not to make quick decisions but to create a space for more women to be involved.

Mr. Celal Can Bilgiç from Go-For Youth Organisations Forum in Türkiye talked about an **example of a CSO network having a diversified CSO governance structure and various policy documents.** He

presented organisational experience in fostering youth participation and overall development of the organisation.

Within the youth community, there are different challenges of youth representation. In addition to being the young person, the GoFor consider the minority group they represent and their specific needs in order to ensure their adequate representation and participation.

Overall, Türkiye's rate of youth representation in the governing position is only 5%. The barriers mainly relate to their lack of experience.

As regards GoFor as an organisation, it started as an initiative and, after a few years, became an umbrella organisation of 57 members. De facto, it is recognised as a national youth council, even though it is not recognised by the government but by other stakeholders in the country.

The organisation comprises the General Assembly, Board, Membership Evaluation Committee, Supervisory Board, Commissions, and Secretariats.

The role of the Board is to produce reports on all meetings which the General Assembly must approve.

The membership Evaluation Committee set up the requirements for membership (youth representation, women representation, etc.). They are making the selection and propose a decision on membership, but the General Assembly should again approve it.

The Supervisory Board has a role in holding a Board accountable. The Supervisory Board prepares its report in relation to the Board's report, and then the General Assembly compares those reports.

Commissions' role is to ensure the effective participation of the member organisations, established per field of work which members choose.

The secretariat is composed of professionals from different fields. Its task is to facilitate the executive role and has zero influence on the governing decisions.

The structure of the organisation presented is not required by law. The organisation has bylaws and internal regulations; members can also be non-legal entities. They have by-laws and internal organisations in relation to a) Transparency and Accountability, b) Gender Equality and Violence Prevention, c) Non-Discrimination/Equality, and d) Environmental Policy.

He also pointed out the key challenges they are facing including:

- High rotation
- Adult-centric hegemony
- Political risks
- Insufficient capacity
- Unsustainable – low participation within GoFor

Importance of strong governing bodies

During the session, three respective experts shared their knowledge and experience of working with boards, acting as board members and raising capacities in good governance.

Ms. Makedonka Dimitrova from ECOS shared her experience and views on the oversight of the executive/management levels by the governing boards. **Mr. Toni Vidan from the European Environmental Bureau** talked about the importance of having strong governing bodies, while **Mr. Vladimir Lazovski from Metamorphosis** presented the key features of a good governing body and its members, including the challenges of selecting and engaging governing body members.



Along with the legislative obligations of CSOs' governing bodies, the participant CSOs highlighted that governing structures also have diverse and complicated functions, such as strategic guidance, policy development, monitoring and evaluation, risk management, stakeholder engagement, and ethical oversight.

There are four outstanding issues underlined by the guest speakers:

1. One of the challenges concerning good governance is **ensuring the board is actively involved**. To ensure the board's active involvement in CSOs' governance, the induction of board members, familiarisation with the work of the organisation, and the provision of ongoing development support were emphasised as key issues that need to be addressed.
2. The **selection of board members** is another challenging issue to make the governance mechanisms more effective and functional. The key aspects of the selection of members of the board was mentioned as increasing the social capital of the CSOs and making possible of the participation of people from different genders, ethnicity, backgrounds, sectors, institutions and academia into the governance structures. Taking volunteers and youth representatives in the board is another key aspect of good governance.
3. One of the most significant functions of the governing bodies is the role that they play in terms of **strategic oversight** as well as watchdog for vision and values of the CSOs in an environment that challenge the values. This is also one of the main areas where boards are insufficiently engaged and unable to exercise adequate oversight.
4. Boards can have a potential role as a **mediator** when there is a conflict in a CSO and can represent the CSO whenever necessary. Thus, it is important for the board members to internalise the principles and have a deeper understanding of the values of the CSOs. It was also underlined that in some cases it is **challenging to be a board member of a CSO, where there is shrinking space for civil society** and board members face with the risk of being imprisoned. In terms of the recommendations to foster the discussions on good governance it was recommended **to promote different cases from CSOs related to diverse governance structures and showcase the good practices of CSOs** in terms of good governance.



Strengthening Governance across the region

During the session, participants worked in small groups and discussed on following guiding questions:

- How can we strengthen Governance across the region?
- How to make governing structures more effective?
- How to attract the right people to Governing bodies?
- What can donors and other support organisations do in this area?

Here, we present the key inputs from each group:

1st Group:

- Board members should be diverse and have different backgrounds.
- It is important to make the role and the function of the board clear to everybody by using different documents, such as the development of bylaws or codes of conduct.
- It is important to include the board members in the work of CSOs and ensure their ownership by enabling them to open an event, for instance.
- Identifying the areas that CSOs are lacking and finding ways for board members to contribute to those areas are some of the key issues to be handled regarding good governance.
- When it comes to good governance, it is important to distinguish project-based and sustainable organisations.
- If there are certain risks in terms of the governance of the CSOs, it should be communicated.
- In terms of the role of donors and other support organisations in this area, local resource centres can play a role in knowledge exchange and facilitation of information so that CSOs can adapt this information into their organisations.
- Strengthening the capacities of local authorities and including other stakeholders in the process is another important aspect of promoting and strengthening good governance.

2nd Group:

- To ensure the effectiveness of governance bodies, it is important to ensure communication within a CSO, both vertically and horizontally.
- Experience sharing, skill development, and knowledge exchange are fundamental to having more board members.
- It is important to ensure the visibility of the board members.
- There is no one structure that applies to all CSOs based on the fact that there might be different needs of CSOs, so there might be diverse structures to meet these needs.
- There should be a mutual benefit to being a board member, and board members should see it as an opportunity.
- The EU TACSO 3 project might advocate for more core funding for CSOs (up to 50%) from the EU, promote networking, and provide training at the national level.

3rd Group:

- It is important to provide enough support for effective governance and improve the internal capacities of CSOs. In this respect, TACSO might provide internal capacity development support to CSOs.
- Support centres, such as Istanbul Bilgi University Incubation Centre in Türkiye, can provide more support to CSOs in terms of improving their internal capacities.
- It is important to improve the reputation of CSOs in order to attract more people to become board members.
- An open call for board members might be a solution to invite more people to become board members.
- Governance is an important issue to invest.
- The development of training programmes to support good governance needs a basis; thus, research can be conducted to find case studies. Besides, good governance practices may inform the content of the training. The training content might also involve failures and lessons learned.



Conclusions and recommendations

The event succeeded in gathering governing body representatives from all over the region who openly discussed the key issues in CSO governance, including different forms of governing structures, challenges in selecting appropriate governing body members, strengthening capacities, and exploring the possibilities of advantages of having strong government structures.

In addition to the already presented experiences and recommendations, the participants suggested conducting research on good practices in the region, which would be published as case studies instead of actual ad hoc research.

The CSO in the WBT region needs more examples that will support learning about different types of governing structures, their challenges, development processes, and sustainability aspects.

Feedback provided by participants

The feedback from participants is collected using the standard project evaluation form available online. Below are summaries of key points provided by participants.

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

- Attending the CSO Governance workshop will equip you with valuable information, knowledge, and experiences you can apply. You will gain insights into effective governance practices for civil society organisations (CSOs), which can enhance your ability to lead and manage your organisation. Additionally, you will learn about regional perspectives and best practices, which can broaden your understanding of governance issues in the CSO sector. These learnings can help you make informed decisions, improve your organisation's performance, and contribute to the overall development of the CSO sector.



- Attending this event has provided me with valuable insights, best practices, and networking opportunities that I can leverage to enhance decision-making processes, improve governance structures, and drive impactful initiatives within my organisation.

We had important discussions and realised that this subject needs much more work. Strengthening CSOs needs to make at least a brief SWOT analysis of the sector, and differences among countries should be understood. CSO governing problems are much more complicated than applying to calls and finding the right donor. Cultural effects and sociological impacts should be understood. Discussions must continue until more clear questions become visible.

- The information, knowledge, and experience acquired at the EU TACSO 3 project event will profoundly benefit my work by providing a comprehensive understanding of CSO governance dynamics, thus empowering me to make informed decisions and contribute effectively to my organisation's leadership. Networking opportunities have expanded my professional connections, potentially leading to fruitful collaborations and shared resources. Furthermore, workshops and sessions likely offered skill development opportunities, enhancing my ability to manage and lead within my CSO. These insights will inform our strategic planning processes, ensuring alignment with best practices and bolstering our organisation's effectiveness in achieving its mission.

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

- Networking can indeed be incredibly valuable, as it allows you to connect with other professionals in your field, exchange ideas, and build relationships that can benefit your work in the future. By networking at the workshop, you may have gained new insights, learned about innovative practices, and established contacts that could help you address challenges and seize opportunities in your work.
- Practical exchange between organisations and finding more information on how I can turn some current challenges into success.
- The most useful aspect of the event was the opportunity to learn from presenters from different countries on CSO governance bodies and exchange ideas with fellow CSO members. The practical examples and interactive sessions also provided valuable ideas that I can implement in my work effectively.
- Meeting with CSO governors from different countries in the enlargement area. Openly discussing the problems of keeping a CSO functional in the long run, touching on problems of administration and internal auditing on all aspects (strategy/policies/activities) of the CSO, legislative representation, legal barriers, etc.

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

- Some topics were already familiar to me, but it was great to gain different insights and perspectives that could be useful for in-depth strategy thinking for organisational development.
- As a CSO governor with a long history of various CSO organisations, almost all discussions were relevant to my questions. We even agreed with some other attendees to continue discussing some subjects with mutual work and research. Exchanging information was great at this event.

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

- To have templates for CSO to improve the internal policy and fill the gaps.
- To have a board regulation and other documents for the boards.
- Would be good to have extra time to work in country groups as well since the laws are different in the countries.