

## EU TACSO 3 Meeting Notes\_Draft 1.0.

People-to-People Programme Event/Regional Event Number 158

“What is the change?” on August 3, 2023, Via Zoom, 13:00 – 15:00

### Introduction

#### Purpose

The objective of both meetings is to explore the impact of digital transition on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and identify strategies for civil society in the region to adapt to the changing world. The meeting aims to identify priorities related to the digital agenda and digital transition for CSOs in the region: address various aspects of digital transformation and its implications on the modus operandi of CSOs and their beneficiaries. Based on these consultation sessions, a live event will be carefully planned and organised for later during the Reporting Period 10 (July – December 2023).

#### Background

*The widespread, rapid, and extensive development of digital service platforms, as well as debates on public data spaces and new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), affect all areas of our society. Many new ways to communicate, shop and access information online have been integrated into our daily lives and are constantly evolving. The European digital agenda for the decade 2020-2030 addresses these issues by focusing on creating secure digital spaces and services, creating a level playing field in digital markets with large platforms, and strengthening Europe’s digital sovereignty while contributing to the European goal of climate neutrality by 2050<sup>1</sup>.*

All the extensive digital development has effects on civil society organisations. It influences the ways in which they operate, adapt to the changing world, offer their services, advertise their activities to a wider public, record their results, publish, and present them to donors. The new era also makes everyone more vulnerable regarding data management and protection, as well as the need to prevent and combat digital violence.

The digital transformation can be observed as a train that has left the main station. During its never-ending travel, this train gives opportunity, as well as imposes the need for everyone to get on the train as soon as possible, boarding wagons with different features and services offered to make the traveling experience a platform of learning, adapting, adjusting to constant improvements, dysfunctionalities, improvements need and keeping up with changes that are not necessarily timely communicated or explained.

#### Relations to the EU TACSO 3 Project’s Result Areas

The “Digital Agenda Consultative Meetings are in relation to the Project’s Result Area 6: “The People to People (P2P) programme and other events are effectively designed and implemented in a participatory manner.”

---

<sup>1</sup> [Digital Agenda for Europe | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

## Agenda for the 1<sup>st</sup> Consultative Meeting - “What is the change?”

3 <sup>rd</sup> of August, 2023, Thursday	
12:45 – 13:00	<b>Registration of participants via Zoom Link</b>
13:00 – 13:10	<b>Welcome and introduction to the topic, with a brief overview of the agenda</b> Moderator: Mr. Dino Mujanović, People-to-People Programme Manager
13:10– 13:50	<b>Session I: Understanding the Effects of Digital Transition on CSOs and Changes in the Operating Environment</b>  a. Presentation on the analysis of digital transition's impact on CSOs, and specific changes in the operating environment  b. Discussion on the changes in communication, collaboration, and engagement within CSOs due to digitalization,  c. Identification and discussion of challenges and opportunities faced by CSOs in adapting to digital transition;  d. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its Effects on CSOs’ operations, decision-making processes, efficiency, effectiveness, ethical considerations, challenges, and risks associated with the use of AI in CSOs, including issues of transparency, bias, and accountability;
13:50 – 14:40	<b>Session II: Management Strategies in the Digital Landscape</b>  a. Presentation on strategies employed by CSOs to effectively manage their operations, resources, and stakeholders in the digital era,  b. Discussion on successful practices and case studies of CSOs that have adapted effectively to the changing digital landscape,  c. Examination of challenges faced by CSO managers and practical recommendations for navigating the digital environment;
14:40– 14:50	<b>Refreshment Break</b>
14:50 – 15:15	<b>Wrap-up and Conclusion</b>  a. Recap of key points discussed in each session,  b. Q&A session to address any remaining questions or concerns,  c. Closing remarks and next steps;

## Meeting Notes

Opening remarks were provided by Mr. Daniele Aloisi, Task Manager with DG NEAR, while the introduction to the agenda was provided by Dino Mujanović, People-to-People PM from EU TACSO 3

## Session I: Understanding the Effects of Digital Transition on CSOs and Changes in the Operating Environment

Ms. Mila Josifovska Danilovska, Metamorphosis Macedonia<sup>2</sup>,

Digital transformation has big effects on CSOs, as it comes with the need for skills, knowledge, and resources to bond with that, as well as internal policies. On a positive note, CSOs are out of their comfort zones and they start to invest more in capacity building of their staff – additional activities online, using online tools to create campaigns, using e-learning tools, collaborative platforms, and decreasing printing to save the environment.

It pushed CSOs to be flexible and learn new ways to share the message. It also demystifies certain concepts and learns of AI, personal data protection, etc. Creating short video audio content for the inclusion of different target groups, and usage of collaborative platforms. It provides tools for open government partnership plans, as well as helped to improve mechanisms of collaboration between CSOs and governments.

- The struggle is that the online space was crowded already prior Covid19. For viewers and information seekers, it is difficult to know what to follow first, and what to look for online. Those CSOs with lower digital skills and smaller coverage of activities are staying behind those with stronger skills and wider coverage. For the promotion of activities and increased digital print, online promotion services need to be attractive, and more importantly - paid, while funding for such activity was not planned and often is not allowed. Algorithms are changing frequently, it is not transparent how they work, or how to navigate the information to the public. CSOs also are invaded with new technologies, there is AI usage, or not, some of them are using it, and some are not, there is a question raised what data are correct, what are the sources of the information that feed AI tools, etc. There is also Zoom fatigue that might exhaust everyone, no matter if it is a good platform, especially if there are a lot of meetings a person needs to attend in a short period of time, it can represent quite a challenge.
- Cyber security – strengthening of CSOs operations is really a daily challenge, requiring attention, commitment, support, and cooperation. Capacity building is needed to assure that CSOs and staff are aware of often daily cyber-attacks and remain aware of how to protect their data.

When speaking of AI – not much used among CSOs right now, however, it will make a big legal rights breach if not regulated and implemented well.

When Metamorphosis recently applied for some projects, it turned out that some donors/calls develop platforms that have algorithms that are based on the membership to the platform (a problem for foundations as entities), which can be considered biased, favouring CSOs who established membership. It automatically gives fewer scores and discriminates in comparison to other applicants, lowering their chance for the support of their idea/project.

**The main point is the commitment to the investment in the capacities helps to be better positioned to serve the community.**

Mr. Miloš Janković, Catalyst Balkans<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> [Home - Metamorphosis](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Catalyst Balkans Home - Catalyst Balkans](#)

Catalyst is using different tools in their process of learning, research, and development and they now work on a strategy to teach others on usage of those tools. Now they work around two pillars:

1. Philanthropy and Engagement and
2. Technology and Transformation.

- Catalyst's observation through their work was that in many social media groups, there were a lot of discussions on which best Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to be used. Catalyst Balkans decided to offer those services in their area of work. It was at that time considered as naïve, as a strategy was missing. At the moment they are providing different tools for CSOs such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and teaching CSOs how to use them.
- Digital Transformation is a better name than Digital Transition, as it has different effects and can make changes. CSOs can see changes in generations of leadership generations. There is a new openness for new management technologies. Those tools are practical only if we know how on a larger scale to use them strategically, and in particular when using AI. Catalyst is using AI already for categorising data collected on philanthropy and also plans to introduce new ways of usage of AI.
- At conferences and meetings held, CSOs report they are understaffed, lack resources, and are not attractive to new talents jobs-wise. AI can be a part of the solution, as it can be used for assistance in work, for utilising the best of HR, for speeding up admin procedures, etc.

**The main point is that the technology needs to be thought of on a more strategic level, explore what are the models for CSOs development, and how digital technology should be used for the improvement of CSOs missions and not only for CSOs efficiency.**

Ms. Teuta Sahatqija, Women in Tech in Kosovo<sup>4</sup>

Digital Transformation is the transformation of our mindset. Younger generations are native to it. We need to spread it to all. CSOs, state institutions, and others are not prepared for AI, or for Blockchain smart contracts and others. Our duty is to help institutions to start to think of that. UN Human Rights Council on 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2023 adopted a resolution on Crucial Safeguards for CSO in AI-Driven Digital Age. The EU is also working on AI Act that would help increase collaboration between WB Countries and Türkiye to be prepared and have regulations and talk with the same frequency.

There are three paths of artificial intelligence:

1. Deep AI – mathematics – backtracking mechanisms – concern of programmers, universities;
2. Impact on CSOs – Using AI tools – we need these tools to include as much as possible, as it increases efficiency and data analysis, improves platforms-based communication, and brings empowerment and participation to a higher level. It helps participation in decision-making processes and in resource mobilisation.
3. Challenges:
  - privacy and digital security and the Digital Divide – biases, ethical aspects,
  - Responsible usage of AI – needs to be on the agenda, as well as the budget for improvement of capacities and tools,
  - Social aspects – the ability to cope and adapt to the new digital era, are we able to distinguish disinformation in this society? Do we have solutions for biases?

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/company/women-in-tech-kosovo>



As an engineer, AI stands on tops of two pillars – big data and machine learning, in big data, data that can be scrapped all over the Internet are data that are 85-90% data of men, 80 kilos of weight, and up white men. Therefore, machine learning will learn from that big data, and algorithms will replicate biases. And with the computational power that now software has, it can also augment it. If, for instance, the hiring software backed by AI, the big data provides that 9 out of 10 are CEOs, the hiring software will replicate that, so we need to have in our agenda talking about improvement, combat biases, and how to set data that will improve algorithms. It is needed to have AI more inclusive, to have better programmes that improve processes, to have more women there, and more diversity. In the process of making software, it needs to be aware of these biases existing, whenever it is used for data collection, and analysis. Women in Tech got a project from the Dutch government to work with two categories of women – younger to enable them how to learn about threats, how to protect their data, and how to pursue their careers. With women over 30, Women in Tech will work on improvement of their skills, increasing their employability, etc.

**The main point is to emphasise the need for a comprehensive understanding of digital transformation, the challenges posed by biases in AI, and the importance of promoting inclusivity and diversity in the digital era. It also highlights relevant global and regional initiatives aimed at addressing these issues.**

Uroš Mišljenović, Partners Serbia<sup>5</sup>

- The digital agenda is also strategic also we should be on the side of human rights. It is the battle of narrative; it requires specific communication that CSOs are in favour of digital transformation, while at the same time, privacy is protected as any other human right is, as the digitalization process is unfolding. The great enthusiasm among governments is set too high, as it is not adapted to categories of the population who sometimes have no digital skills. The priority of CSOs should be to assist those who do not have skills and knowledge and access to participate in the digitalization process. Census data In Serbia there are more people older than 65 than younger than 19. There is a significant area for CSOs that can intervene to help capacity building.
- Serbia and other countries are already using negative algorithms. We need to get the understanding technical background of these processes. Most people working in CSOs have a background in social sciences and are not pre-set to quickly learn the backgrounds of AI, and rely on those who know more about new technologies. It leads to the conclusion that there might be a need to develop a new partnership with the private business, schools, and academia and create enabling alliances for tackling the threats to human rights that are affected by some government digitalization processes in legislation. It is needed to have different evidence-based advocacy based on a different skill set.

**The main point is the importance of ensuring human rights are upheld in the face of digital transformation, addressing the digital skills gap in the population, and creating collaborative partnerships to navigate complex technological challenges.**

Margareta Ekland, Freya Forum from Sweden – will use the information obtained at the meeting to initiate a conversation in their network. Will get back with questions and thoughts.

---

<sup>5</sup> [About us | PARTNERS-SERBIA](#)

Ms. İtir Akdoğan, the Economic and Social Studies Foundation in Türkiye<sup>6</sup> (TESEV)

Prioritizing democratic transformation is essential, as well as the development of digital policy tools to help decision-makers and civic society to decide with data and participate better. Agreed with previous speakers on the importance of learning digital tools, but also prioritizing democratic transformation along with the tools. The one digital tool produced together with other CSOs transformed the way how municipalities collect, share, and use data. They changed their data management so much that in return the Foundation needed to redevelop the digital tool. It showed that it is important in theory to learn how digital tools work and how they might transform the democratically operating environment, how they affect decision-makers, how they change their way of doing, and then how, in return, this digital collaboration influences the digital tool itself. As a result, this interaction goes on for a real democratic transition. Processes of digital transformation need to be cross-sectoral to be able to be successful.

**The main points are the interconnectedness between digital tools, democratic processes, and the potential for a genuine democratic transition, and the need for cross-sectoral collaboration to achieve effective results in the process of digital transformation.**

## Session II: Management Strategies in the Digital Landscape

- AI usage is one of the helpers to the CSO to deal better with data, be more efficient, have faster results, etc. Using the tools is important, but it is not enough. It is important to network between CSOs and other stakeholders and inform which tools they use, share experiences on usage, and let each other know which are working better and which maybe are not that good. CSOs need to talk about improvements, regulations, and the effects of AI. Digital transformation has effects on ourselves, our work, our health, and society itself.
- CSOs from Kosovo, as they are coming from the territory that has partial diplomatic recognition, face problems with access to some digital platforms and some being denied to them. For some applications, an access fee is not possible to pay from Kosovo, but it is needed to do it from abroad. This affects the administrative cost of running programs and imposes additional costs for serving beneficiaries.
- The WBT region has also problems with PayPal. The legal framework in the region is a bit complicated. In Serbia, the government is much more focused on digitalisation of many processes, but yet there are no facilitated digital processes for civil society.

Mr. Nadir Redzepi, Initiative for Social Change<sup>7</sup>, North Macedonia reported that small and medium size organisations are left behind in following the new technologies. They cannot cope with all the developments and advantages of them, as they are often understaffed and only able to be present in the field, far away from the bigger CSOs with higher budgets, and a sufficient number of skilled staff. This is an important thing for TACSO to keep in mind and pay attention to, as these CSOs are present on the ground, but with no ability to present themselves properly in the new era. The programme EU TACSO 3 should do some mapping in order to help those organisations with capacity-building training to be able to keep up with the digital transformation.

The mindset gap differences between older and younger people in CSO management represent an issue. – Transformative processes need to come from the leadership. Leadership needs to be open to change and understand and support the digital transition. It is individual – there are people in the CSO

---

<sup>6</sup> [Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation | TESEV](#)

<sup>7</sup> [\(1\) Initiative for Social Change - InSoC: Overview | LinkedIn](#)



sector for many years, with great accomplishments, but not willing to embrace the change. If the leadership is willing to change it becomes possible to adapt. In Serbia, there is a gap between the leadership and young people working in the sector. Also, there are also young people without skills and knowledge that need capacity building. People need to be open to attempt and also willing to be able to fail in the process and that would enable learning, as in any other process. This perspective needs to be also brought also to the donors, who may need to understand that some initiatives are pilot ones and that not necessarily will bring expected outcomes.

Questions constantly needs to be raised, as the entire World is in the transition process in all its aspects.

**The main point is about the challenges faced by smaller CSOs in adopting new technologies, the need for support and capacity-building, the mindset shift required for effective digital transition, and the importance of adaptability and learning in this process.**

Mr. Dukagjin Kelmendi, HandiKos<sup>8</sup>

- There are 18 thousand PWD registered with HandiKos. Digital transformation affects all activities. It is very difficult for CSOs, and consequently, it would be very difficult how to train beneficiaries. The question raised was if there are some capacity-building experiences regarding training people today. The comparison is made with pieces of training delivered in 1999 and early 2000s. There were organised pieces of training then on how to use nowadays computer basics.
- The tools are different now, but there are new tools to be used, and can be beneficial. What is needed are tailored pieces of training responding to the needs of people to be able to benefit from those tools. They do not need to be focused on backtracking mechanisms, tangents, etc., as it is not necessary for the users. The pieces of training need to be personalised to meet the need of specific groups and people in general, for example, to use ChatGPT, Bard, and Mid-journey maybe.
- It is important to note that there are a lot of people in the region who are not necessarily computer literate. We are in specific situations where if there is no investment in training those who are slower in embracing changes, and or simply have a mandate in delivering basics to beneficiaries (food and non-food items for instance), they would be forgotten in the changing world, by the potential donors. Their services might be considered as expensive, as they need an office, storage, etc.
- There are still great opportunities for AI to provide learning. The Catalyst is looking for funding to help to create AI-based courses. Including IT Sector is extremely important in all the processes of working with CSOs and creating bridges among them. There is a need to understand that gaining new skills, either learning a new language or digital skills is essential and that constant learning is needed.
- Text-to-speech – a speech-to-text platform for blind PWD is something that HandiKos will be working on. It is identified that training is needed for staff prior to reaching and helping beneficiaries to use this platform.
- It is needed to work carefully with the digital transformation, to avoid making a new gap where the advanced will become more advanced, while those less advanced will not be able to keep up with the change.

---

<sup>8</sup> [Ballina -En - HANDIKOS \(handi-kos.org\)](https://handi-kos.org)

**The main point is that there is a need to approach digital transformation carefully, ensuring that advancements do not create a new gap between those who are technologically advanced and those who are not. Maintaining a balanced approach is crucial to avoid leaving certain groups of people behind in the rapidly changing digital world.**

Mr. Aldo Merkoci, MFJAT!<sup>9</sup>

- Albania for instance moved a lot towards digitalization and most of the “hardcopy” work is moved to the digital area, and certain activities are now possible to do only online. With moving on with following the Digitalisation Service Act (DSA) and EU aspirations, there is an investment in stakeholders dealing with digitalization and training youth in this area. The use and application of digital technologies are high in the capital of the country, but in-country it becomes quite difficult. Regarding the use of state digital platforms in-country, in the best-case scenarios, people are assisted by their more computer-literate cousins and friends who deal with their digital work on platforms of any kind, or they use Internet cafes to their login into digital platforms to request or add certain data.
- Youth in the capital city has access to the training (between 7 and 14 years) and are aware of the importance of embracing digitalization, but often by the age of the end of high school, they leave the country. One of the concerns is that those who come from in-country to the capital for a myriad of reasons (education or work) are behind with the knowledge and skills of those who grew up in the capital.

**The main points are Albania's digitalization efforts, the challenges faced in achieving equal digital access across regions, and the impact of these disparities on youth education and opportunities.**

It is noticed that donors are getting project proposals with a better quality in writing, where AI was used in the preparation. The question raised is whether would it be necessary to develop a new tool for donors to evaluate proposals and examine the real quality behind them. Also, on another hand will it be possible to question AI in order to help children decide their future occupation, assist people with their disorders, etc.?

## Recommendations and Potential Next Steps

The key recommendations involve fostering collaboration, addressing digital divides, embracing technology strategically, upholding human rights, supporting leadership shifts, and ensuring inclusivity and adaptability in the face of digital transformation challenges.

- **Facilitate Collaboration and Knowledge-Sharing:** CSOs should prioritize networking and sharing experiences regarding the usage of digital tools. Collaboration and information exchange among CSOs and other stakeholders can lead to better utilization of tools, improved strategies, and increased digital impact.
- **Address Digital Access Inequalities:** Recognize and address disparities in digital access, particularly for smaller CSOs, marginalized groups, and regions with limited technological resources. Explore solutions such as tailored training programs to ensure everyone can benefit from digital transformation.
- **Embrace Strategic Technology Adoption:** CSOs should strategically adopt digital technologies, including AI, to enhance their operations, data analysis, and engagement. Focus on

---

<sup>9</sup> [Levizja Mjaft](#)





understanding and utilizing AI tools efficiently and ethically, while addressing concerns such as data biases and privacy.

- **Prioritise Human Rights and Democratic Transformation:** Keep human rights at the forefront of digital transformation efforts. Prioritize democratic transformation alongside digital tools to ensure that technology enhances, rather than hinders, the pursuit of democratic ideals.
- **Support Leadership and Mindset Shifts:** Encourage a mindset shift among CSO leaders to embrace digital transformation and understand its potential benefits. Promote leadership openness to change and a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.
- **Combat Cybersecurity Challenges:** Invest in cybersecurity awareness and capacity building to protect CSO operations from cyber threats. Ensure that CSOs and staff are well-informed about cyber risks and know how to safeguard their data.
- **Design and Implement Inclusive Digital Training:** Develop tailored training programs that cater to the diverse needs of various groups, including those who are less computer literate. Offer training on relevant digital tools, focusing on practical usage rather than complex technical details.
- **Bond the Urban-Rural Gap:** Tackle the urban-rural divide by providing equitable access to digital training and opportunities. Consider initiatives to support youth education and skill development, ensuring that rural populations are not left behind.
- **Advocate for Inclusive AI Usage:** Promote inclusive AI usage that addresses biases, increases diversity, and ensures fairness. Encourage the development of AI tools that contribute to positive social change and mitigate potential negative impacts.
- **Leverage AI for Efficient Processes:** Explore how AI can streamline CSO operations, enhance human resources, and improve administrative procedures. Investigate opportunities to use AI for tasks such as data categorization and analysis.
- **Involve with Digital Policy and Regulation:** Collaborate with governments, private businesses, academia, and civil society to shape digital policies and regulations. Advocate for responsible AI usage and seek partnerships to address digitalization challenges.
- **Remain Curious and Adaptive:** Embrace a continuous learning approach and stay curious about new technological advancements. Be open to experimentation, learn from failures, and adapt strategies as the digital landscape evolves.

## Sources for further information

Metamorphosis' latest regional research on human rights and cyber security, Digital Agenda, and disinformation, hoping that it would be useful for you and your initiatives:

- Digital Agenda Observatory 2022 – Final research on the state of e-government development & digital literacy in the targeted Western Balkan countries (<https://tinyurl.com/4dhamsxr>)
- Cyber-security and Human Rights in North Macedonia and the Western Balkans: Mapping governance and actors (<https://tinyurl.com/2rewijkj>)
- Disinformation Trends Western Balkans - Metamorphosis (<https://tinyurl.com/5n8v55hj>):

Geopolitical Perspective of Disinformation Flows in The Western Balkans - Metamorphosis (<https://tinyurl.com/2p82ymh8>)

- Public education and informative campaign about the benefits and challenges related to the Digital Agenda (<https://tinyurl.com/ycyumz5z>)