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Sida Decentralised Evaluation

FCG Sweden

Evaluation of Sida's support to the Balkan Civil Society Development Network 2019-2022

Final Report

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**Final Report
April 2022**

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The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AGNA	Affinity Group of National Associations
AJM	Association of Journalists of Macedonia
ALDA	European Association for Local Democracy
ARYSEN	At-risk Youth Social Empowerment network
BCSDN	Balkan Civil Society Development Network
BELhospice	Centre for Palliative care and Palliative Medicine (BELhospice)
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BNLD	Balkan Network for Local Democracy
BTD	Balkan Trust for Democracy
ConWeb	Network of national consumers' organisations of South East Europe
CPCD	Centre for Promotion of Civil Society
CPDE	CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness
CRNVO	Centre for the Development of Non-Governmental Organisations
CSF	Civil Society Facility
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSOSI	Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index
CZZS	Center for Environment
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
ECNL	European Center for Not-for-Profit Law
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EO	Executive Office
EPI	European Policy Institute
ERA	LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey
EU	European Union
EUROLATIN	Department for Eastern Europe and Latin America
FCG	Finnish Consulting Group (Sweden)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GONGO	Government NGOs
I4C	Innovation for Change
ICNL	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
KCSF	Kosovar Civil Society Foundation
MCIC	Macedonia Centre for International Cooperation
MKD	North Macedonia
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

NOPS	National Consumers Association of Serbia
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RBF	Rockefeller Brothers Fund
SEENET	South East Europe network on Natural resources, Energy and Transport
SEK	Swedish kronor
SIGN	South Eastern European Indigenous Grant-makers Network
TACSO	Technical Assistance to CSOs
TEN	Think for Europe Network
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YIHR	Youth Initiative for Human Rights

Preface

This evaluation was commissioned by Sida/EUROLATIN through the Sida Framework Agreement for Evaluation Services, and conducted by FCG Sweden.

The evaluation team consisted of Jonas Lövkrona (Team Leader) and Ardita Metaj. The Draft Evaluation Report was quality assured by Susan Tamondong, whose work was independent of the evaluation team. Annefried Muller provided project management support.

Executive Summary

The project *Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub* aims at establishing a platform, or Hub, to enhance cooperation and resilience of CSOs in the Western Balkans countries. Implemented by the Balkan Civil Society Development network (BCSDN), the project focuses on piloting a regranting mechanism (the Fund), offering regional grants to CSO networks and ad-hoc grants for immediate needs and innovation. In addition, the project has supported BCSDN's monitoring of the enabling environment for civil society development in the region. The project started in September 2019 and has been extended to June 2023. Sida's contribution amounts to a total of SEK 22 million.

In line with the ToR, the evaluation assessed project effectiveness and efficiency, but also considered the other four OECD/DAC evaluation criteria for development evaluation. A theory-based approach with elements of Contribution Analysis was used to explore changes at the outcome level and the relative influence of grantees and BCSDN's on work on such changes. Data collection was carried out through a mix of methods and tools, including a desk review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and on-line surveys. The main findings and conclusions of the evaluation are summarised below.

Relevance

The evaluation has shown that the project has been relevant to the regional context for civil society development and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans. Project objectives and priorities are evidence-based and the regional approach well-justified in view of the countries' common characteristics and challenges, the proven benefits of peer-to-peer collaboration, and the potential leverage that networks can gain in the policy dialogue. Moreover, the project has reached out to a broad target group and covered a wide spectrum of issues of relevance to the enabling environment, answering to the needs and priorities of grantees. Adjustments have been made in response to new and emerging issues and a flexible approach has been adopted to accommodate the requests of grantees.

Coherence

The project has emerged through global and regional partnerships and cooperation, building on the work of other key actors influencing the civic space and CSO accountability agenda. As some grantees have used the BCSDN grants as co-funding of much larger projects, the Fund has to some extent complemented other regional funding mechanisms, although not in a premeditated manner.

Sida's decision to support BCSDN is aligned with consecutive Swedish regional strategies, which share the concerns related to shrinking civic space and lack of accountability. Potential linkages between the support to BCSDN and Sida's civil society portfolio at the country level may need to be further explored, to maximise the contributions towards higher-level outcomes. In many ways, the project offers a perfect fit with the Guiding Principles for Sida's engagement with and support to civil society, and the DAC Recommendation on civil society.

Efficiency

The establishment and operationalisation of the Fund proved to be more resource-intensive than expected, which created initial delays. However, project implementation has since picked up considerably. Even though additional costs incurred through budget revisions and amendments appear well-justified, it could arguably have been more cost-efficient to delegate the Fund to one of BCSDN's members that already had the capacity and systems in place for regranting. On the other hand, this might have affected the regional relevance of the project. At any rate, the resources invested in the selection and management of ad-hoc grants do not seem to be proportional to the size of the grants.

As confirmed by grantees, BCSDN's Executive Office (EO) today has adequate capacity and systems in place to continue hosting the Fund. Grantees appreciate the simple application and reporting procedures and the cooperation with BCSDN overall. At the same time, a common opinion is that the regional grants were too small and that activity and reporting periods too short.

Effectiveness

There is evidence showing that change has occurred in relation to three of four immediate outcomes – i.e. evidence-based advocacy for civic space, increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment, and increased regional cooperation for civic space. The regional grants to Safejournalists, SEENET and BELhospice stand out as particularly successful to this end, but contributions are also identified among the ad-hoc grants. Capitalising on the national Monitoring Matrix reports, BCSDN members have significantly contributed to evidence-based advocacy.

With regard to the intermediate outcomes, the evaluation indicates that policy and legal change has been achieved to a varying extent across the region. Examples of direct and indirect contributions *towards* such change can be found in all six countries. No evidence has been found that the project has contributed to more effective, transparent and accountable CSOs in any significant way. Contrary to what is reflected in the ToC, global accountability standards and practices have primarily been shared through other BCSDN projects.

The project MEL system is generally not comprehensive enough – or sufficiently operationalised – to deliver robust and useful information that can be used to assess the

achievement of outcomes. While prior evaluations have informed decision-making on project adjustments, learning has not been promoted to the extent envisaged in the initial project proposal.

Impact and sustainability

Given the nature of the project and relatively short implementation period it is not reasonable to expect significant change at the impact level. Nevertheless, the project is deemed to have contributed to CSO policy influence and regional cooperation to some extent.

The prospects for sustainability are best in the cases where legal changes have occurred. Although the regional grants have given a boost to regional cooperation, they have not contributed to more resilient networks. The latter would have required a stronger focus on capacity development, including institutional strengthening. BCSDN's monitoring of the enabling environment will continue beyond the end of the project but the regranting remains unduly dependent on Sida funding.

Sida's perspectives and cross-cutting issues

The gender and environment perspectives were to some extent considered in project design while the poverty perspective was entirely neglected. In general, the need for, and ways of, integrating Sida perspectives do not seem to be well understood among grantees, let alone by BCSDN and its members. On a more positive note, the project has been implemented in a transparent fashion and accountability mechanisms have been properly established.

Recommendations to BCSDN (see chapter 6 for more details)

BCSDN should review its strategic plan to further develop the network's ToC and clarify the role and contribution of the Fund. Specific attention should be given to BCSDN's strategic niche in terms of regranting, linkages between national-level and regional regranting, and how to decrease dependence on Sida support.

BCSDN should develop indicators for its strategic plan and ensure that the objectives and priority themes of any future regional regranting is linked with those indicators. Grantees should be requested to report to BCSDN on a set of joint indicators.

BCSDN should carefully reflect on what type of grants should be provided in the future. The continued relevance of ad-hoc grants should be particularly deliberated since many of these grants have lacked a regional dimension. The management of these grants could be delegated to BCSDN members and more stringent evaluation procedures introduced.

BCSDN should increase the size of regional grants and extend the activity period to ensure better conditions for grantees to contribute to higher-level outcomes. In this connection, BCSDN should also consider whether regional grants should be awarded

based on open calls or through direct selection. Regional grants could also be used for innovation.

BCSDN should complement the regional grants with capacity development, especially to strengthen CSO accountability and transparency. This may entail general awareness raising, tailored training and mentoring, and learning events to share experiences and good practices. Capacity development may also be warranted to ensure that different perspectives (e.g. gender, environment/climate, poverty) are well understood and applied.

BCSDN should encourage its members to develop communication/advocacy plans for the national Monitoring Matrix reports and prepare a similar plan for the regional Monitoring Matrix report (with a focus on advocacy at the EU level).

BCSDN should, as part of the overall review of the Monitoring Matrix methodology, consider introducing perspective-sensitive indicators. The same should be considered for the new methodology for monitoring CSO capacities as well as BCSDN's strategic plan.

Recommendations to Sida (see chapter 6 for more details)

1. Sida should consider **continued support** to BCSDN to further strengthen regional advocacy and cooperation for civic space and CSO accountability. This would be in line with the intentions of the current regional strategy for reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey.
2. If further support is agreed on, Sida should shift from project support to **long-term core funding** linked to BCSDN's strategic plan. BCSDN has the capacity to handle core funding given that all recommendations from the 2020 internal control assessment are verified as implemented.
3. Sida should, together with BCSDN, consult with other donors on how to best **pool resources** to avoid overlaps and promote synergies. Consideration should also be given to ways of rationalise Sida's own support given that BCSDN has received Sida funding from three different projects.
4. Sida should consider or organising a training for BCSDN EO and members on the "**Sida perspectives**" and ensure that the perspectives are carefully analysed by BCSDN as part of the development of a new project and/or a revised strategic plan.
5. Sida should inform Swedish embassies in the region of any future contribution to BCSDN and encourage contacts with national BCSDN members to **explore complementarities**. Sida may also set up an informal working group to promote the sharing of ideas and good practices for promoting civic space and civil society development in the region.

1 Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The project *Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub* (hereinafter referred to as the Regional Hub project) aims at establishing a platform, or Hub, to enhance the cooperation and resilience of CSOs in the Western Balkans countries “by connecting and empowering them in innovative uptakes of the enabling environment and their practices of accountability”.¹ Implemented by the Balkan Civil Society Development network (BCSDN), the project started in September 2019 and has been extended to June 2023. Sida’s contribution amounts to a total of SEK 22 million.

This evaluation is mandated by the grant agreement between Sida and BCSDN and, according to the Terms of Reference (ToR), serves three main purposes:

- To inform Sida’s decision-making on future support to the BCSDN beyond the current agreement extension;
- To advise BCSDN on the need for further improvements to the Hub and the regional re-granting mechanism (the Fund), and;
- To provide inputs to an internal Sida dialogue about future support to civil society and the promotion of civic space in the Western Balkan region.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are Sida and BCSDN. While the project has been implemented with support from BCSDN members in six countries, project ownership rests with the Executive Office (EO) in North Macedonia, which is Sida’s agreement partner.

1.2 EVALUATION OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The objective of the evaluation was to make an independent assessment of the project’s performance with a focus on the results achieved by the project as a whole, and the functioning of the Fund. Its substantive scope has been delimited by the evaluation questions defined in the ToR, as interpreted and further elaborated on in FCG Sweden’s

¹ Outline Project Proposal – Protecting Civic Space: Regional Civil Society Development Hub. BCSDN 7 May 2019.

inception report.² Time-wise, the evaluation has covered the project implementation period from September 2019 to the end of December 2022.

1.3 EVALUATION CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

Sida's ToR defines evaluation questions for all six OECD/DAC evaluation criteria for development evaluation but indicates that the focus should be on effectiveness and efficiency. This was confirmed at the start-up meeting with Sida.

During the inception phase, some of the evaluation questions from the ToR were re-categorised, and refined questions – as well sub-questions – formulated. This process was guided by a reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC). While the key evaluation questions are presented below (Table 1), the refined questions and sub-questions can be found in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 2).

Table 1. Evaluation criteria and key evaluation questions

Relevance	• How has the project addressed the relevant needs in the region regarding civil society? Have new, more relevant needs emerged and how has the intervention addressed them? • How relevant is the project to the target groups?
Coherence	• In what way has the intervention's design and implementation considered the work of other actors working in the same area? To what extent has BCSDN coordinated effectively and created synergies in their work?
Efficiency	• To what extent has the intervention delivered, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way? • Is the BCSDN management team adequately resourced to enable the achievement of desired outcomes?
Effectiveness	• To what extent has the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups? • Has the M&E system delivered robust and useful information that could be used to assess progress towards outcomes and contribute to learning?
Impact	• To what extent has the project or programme generated, or is expected to generate, significant positive or negative, intended, or unintended, high-level effects?

² Evaluation of Sida's support to the Balkan Civil Society Development Network 2019-2022. Final Inception Report. FCG Sweden. January 2023.

Sustainability	• To what extent will the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue over time after the end of the agreement period?
Other aspects	• Has the project contributed to poverty reduction? If so, what dimensions of poverty were addressed by the project? • Has the project considered environment and climate aspects? If so, in what way and with what scope and results? • Has the project been implemented in a transparent fashion? Are there accountability mechanisms? Have non-discrimination aspects been considered?

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Following the executive summary and this introduction (chapter 1), the report describes the evaluation object (chapter 2) and the evaluation methodology (chapter 3). Chapter 4 is the main part of the report. This chapter presents data, analysis and findings related to each evaluation criteria and (refined) evaluation question.³ Findings are highlighted in bold font, normally in the beginning of a paragraph. The report ends with a concluding chapter (chapter 5) and a set of recommendations to BCSDN and Sida (chapter 6). Evaluation tools and sources can be found in the annexes.

³ The questions are not necessarily addressed in the same order as they appear in the ToR and Evaluation Matrix.

2 Evaluation Object

2.1 REGIONAL CONTEXT

The following observations are made based on a review of BCSDN's regional Monitoring Matrix reports, the EU assessments of the enabling environment and CSO capacities in the Enlargement Region (hereinafter referred to as the EU assessment), the USAID-funded Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index (CSOSI), as well as perspectives obtained from interviews.

The enabling environment for civil society development

While freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech continue to be guaranteed by national legal frameworks, the implementation of related standards has remained a challenge, not the least following state measures to combat COVID-19. As conveyed by the desk review and interviews conducted during the evaluation, there is a common understanding that, in general, the situation with regard to the enabling environment in the region has worsened during the evaluation period.

With regard to **freedom of association**, individual and legal entities are allowed to establish CSOs, and CSOs can operate without prior registration. Since 2019 there have been few significant changes in the main laws on civil society in the region although. In Albania, legal provisions for the establishment of an electronic CSO register have been established and, in Kosovo, the already enabling legal environment became slightly more predictable as government compliance with the requirements regarding public funding of CSOs increased.⁴ At the same time, legislation on anti-money laundering and for combating terrorist financing has made registration of CSOs more complicated in some countries.

The **freedom of assembly** has been particularly hit by COVID-19 restrictions. Governments throughout the region passed numerous regulations and decrees introducing bans on gatherings, curfews, and restrictions of movement. Throughout the period there are also reports of restraining police interventions. Similarly, journalists across the region continue to face interference in their work, affecting the **freedom of expression**. Disinformation and hate speech increased during the pandemic, with some countries being criticized for monopolizing the information space or restricting access to media. Smear campaigns towards human rights and watchdog organisations were

⁴ Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Regional reports for 2020 and 2021. BCSDN.

reported in Serbia, BiH and Montenegro. In Albania, media freedoms deteriorated in connection with the 2021 elections.⁵

Unfavourable **fiscal and tax regimes** constitute another obstacle for civil society development. Partly as a result of the lack of tax incentives, individual and corporate giving is underdeveloped. In some countries there was a significant increase in the level of private donations during the COVID-19 pandemic and, in Albania, VAT reimbursement procedures for grants to NGOs were introduced.⁶ On the other hand, state funding of CSO activities remain insufficient and tended to decrease during and after the pandemic as funds were re-allocated elsewhere. In several countries, public funds are allocated in a non-transparent manner that is rarely scrutinized.⁷ Overall, the CSOs sector in the region remains highly dependent on foreign funds.

Labour laws do not consider the specific nature of civil society, and falls short of regulating, facilitating and stimulating both **employment and volunteering in CSOs**. There is also an overall lack of data on the number of employees and other people engaged with CSOs across the region, which makes it difficult to assess and diagnose the problems. During the evaluation period, progress was made in North Macedonia with the adoption of amendments to the Law on Volunteering, which clarifies the existing provisions for the organisation of volunteer work and the rights of volunteers.⁸

All the governments in the region have issued **policies or strategies for state-CSO cooperation**, and have national level mechanisms serving the same purpose. However, due to lack of political commitment and financial resources, the policies and strategies tend to be only partially implemented. In addition, the national level mechanisms are often not effective or functioning. New strategies for state-CSO cooperation have been adopted in Serbia, North Macedonia and Kosovo.⁹ In BiH, a government advisory council for cooperation with NGOs was established in 2020.¹⁰

Across sectors, dialogue between CSOs and public authorities has been limited, particularly with regard to **CSO involvement in decision-making processes**. In practice, access to draft laws and policies is not always provided and CSO representation in cross-sector bodies is not properly regulated. This means that governments are not obliged to invite CSOs (except in Kosovo), and CSO engagement

5 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Regional report for 2020. BCSDN.

6 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Albania Country Report 2021. BCSDN.

7 Supra note 6.

8 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Regional report for 2021. BCSDN.

9 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Regional reports for 2020 and 2021. BCSDN.

10 Assessment of the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society against the 2014-2020 Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement region for the year 2020. Final report. EU TACSO. September 2021.

therefore happens only sporadically or in a formalistic manner.¹¹ There are also reports of faking public participation and debates with GONGOs (Serbia).¹² Pro-active involvement of CSOs in law and policy development processes (with a positive outcome) can be seen in North Macedonia and Kosovo.¹³

Finally, legal frameworks continue to be unsupportive of **CSOs as service providers**, despite their important role in this regard throughout the region. The number of public service contracts awarded to CSOs are very few. Challenges remain in terms of equal treatment of CSOs, insufficient and unpredictable funding, and non-transparent selection procedures. Improvements are noted in Albania, where a new Law on Public Procurement allows for greater and more meaningful CSO participation in public tender procedures.¹⁴

CSO effectiveness, accountability and transparency

Overall, **CSO capacities** in the region has not significantly changed during the evaluation period. According to the EU assessment, CSOs have been preoccupied with raising funds and overcome obstacles related to COVID-19 measures.¹⁵ The CSOSI reports for 2020 and 2021 similarly notes that CSO capacities remained largely the same, and that many CSOs have struggled to retain staff in the face of uncertain and constantly changing circumstances. Capacities are especially weak among the majority of grassroots and small organisations operating in rural areas.¹⁶

Nevertheless, despite the restrictions on in-person events, improvements in volunteerism, the use of digital tools/social media, and constituency building can be seen in several countries. Echoing the EU assessment and the CSOSI reports, BCSDN's publication "Constituency Led Accountability in the Western Balkans" remarks that CSOs across the region have, as a result of the pandemic, developed new ways for providing services to vulnerable communities. At the same time, the report notes that CSOs tend to lack feedback and general accountability mechanisms, and where such exist, the focus is usually on upward accountability (to donors).

11 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Regional report for 2020. BCSDN.

12 Ibid.

13 Supra note 10.

14 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Albania Country Report 2020. BCSDN.

15 Ibid.

16 2020 and 2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index. Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. USAID and FHI360.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF BCSDN AND THE REGIONAL HUB PROJECT

Overview of BCSDN

Originally established as a pilot programme for capacity development in 2001, BCSDN is a regional network of 14 civil society organisations in the Balkans. Following many years of informal cooperation, the network was registered as a non-profit civil society organisation under Macedonian law in 2009. The Executive Office (EO) in Skopje has five full-time employees.

BCSDN's mission is “to empower the civil society and influence European and national policies towards more enabling environment for civil society development in order to ensure sustainable and functioning democracies in the Balkans”. Activities are guided by a strategy for 2021-2024 with four objectives:

- To facilitate a common understanding of the enabling environment for civil society development and a recognition of its role in the sustainable development of the regional and its accession into the EU;
- To strengthen CSO capacities to become legitimate and accountable actors in functioning democracies;
- To increase the collaboration and the recognition of the network with and among the core stakeholders, and;
- To improve the functioning, communication and collaboration of the network.¹⁷

Network members have equal rights and duties. They come together in BCSDN's Council, the highest decision-making body of the network, which, in turn, elects the Board. Most of the members are resource centers for civil society in their countries and many serve as grant intermediaries.

Since 2012, a core activity of the network is the monitoring of the enabling environment for civil society development in the region. This is done with the help of a standardised Monitoring Matrix – a tool for measuring the health of the legal, regulatory, and financial environment in which CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey operate. The data collected is presented in annual Monitoring Matrix reports for each of the countries in the region, which are synthesized by the EO in a regional report. The reports are intended to be used for advocacy at both the national and regional level (primarily vis-à-vis the EU).

BCSDN has become increasingly engaged in efforts to strengthen CSO accountability and transparency, both to ensure responsiveness towards constituencies and as a way of making CSOs more capable of addressing shrinking civic space. Since 2016,

¹⁷ BCSDN Strategic Outlook 2021-2024. March 2021.

BCSDN is a partner of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability Initiative, a world-wide civil society network promoting the concept of “Dynamic Accountability”, an approach to accountability where the feedback and voice of people that CSOs work for and with, drives organisational decision-making. BCSDN is also a member of the CIVICUS/AGNA network and serves as the regional (Europe) secretariat for the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), which works to promote CSO development effectiveness/the Istanbul Principles.

In 2021, BCSDN’s revenue amounted to EUR 1,4 million, of which about EUR 1.1 million constituted carry-over funds from 2020. Sida contributed a total of EUR 173,000 in that year, equivalent to 55 percent of new revenue. The other main donors were the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) and the Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD).¹⁸

Project details

As defined in the agreement with Sida, the overall objective of the project is “through the establishment of a Regional Civil Society Development Hub to enhance the cooperation and resilience of civil society organisations, by connecting and empowering them in innovative uptakes of the enabling environment and their practices of accountability”. This overall objective is translated into three specific objectives:

1. To contribute to a conducive environment for civil society development that enables CSOs to be influential actors in society.
2. To support effective, transparent and accountable CSOs contributing to protecting civic space.
3. To strengthen regional cooperation for promoting civic space through the Civil Society Development Fund (the Fund).

A lion’s share of the project budget (75 percent) has been allocated to the Fund, which targets CSOs and CSO networks in the six Western Balkans countries. The other main component of the project has been devoted to the monitoring of the enabling environment, captured by the annual Monitoring Matrix reports. As part of the Fund, two types of grants have been provided:

- Regional/multi-country grants
- Ad-hoc grants for immediate needs and “innovative uptakes”

A first, fully competitive, open call for regional/multi-country projects was announced in 2020, resulting in 10 grants being awarded to CSO networks working in different thematic fields. A second (restricted) call was announced in 2022 whereby the same

grantees had the opportunity to apply for project extensions. The first call had a maximum grant size of EUR 70,000 and the second call of EUR 18,000. The ad-hoc grants, which have been awarded through three open calls to a total of 46 initiatives, make it possible for CSOs to obtain technical advice on specific civic space topics, or organise single or multi-country activities (e.g. conferences, workshops, community actions, etc). The maximum grant size was EUR 10,000.

BCSDN's EO is Sida's agreement partner and manages the relationships with all project entities, including a Steering Committee and a Task Force Group (see section 4.3.2), as well as the grantees. Partnership agreements have been signed with five of the BCSDN members participating in the project, defining the tasks and deliverables. In the case of Kosovo, a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed but no funds provided since the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF) is also receiving core funding from Sida.

Project implementing partners (BCSDN members):

- Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), North Macedonia
- Civic Initiatives, Serbia
- Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF), Kosovo
- Center for Development of NGOs (CRNVO), Montenegro
- Center for Civil Society Promotion (CPCD), Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Partners Albania for Change and Development, Albania

3 Methodology

3.1 OVERALL EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation approach and methods were guided by the ToR and are elaborated on in the Inception Report, which was approved by Sida on 23 January 2023.¹⁹

In line with the ToR, the evaluation was planned and conducted through a utilisation-focused approach that encouraged the participation of intended users. During the inception phase, start-up meetings were held with both Sida and BCSDN to explore overall expectations on the evaluation and ways of making it as useful as possible. A Theory of Change (ToC) workshop was conducted to promote reflection and reach common agreement on the intended results of the project, and, hence, the focus of the evaluation. At the end of the data collection phase, Sida and BCSDN were invited to a debriefing, which served to validate and discuss emerging findings. This Draft Evaluation Report will also be shared for review and comments.

The ToC workshop resulted in the re-construction of the project's ToC. Outcomes at three different levels were identified along with assumptions, risks and external actors/initiatives and factors. The ToC was tested against the data collected by the evaluation team with the help of a simplified version of the Contribution Analysis approach. Relevant contribution claims were identified and in each case the evaluation team sought to clarify the significance of the claim, the project's influence, and the role of other actors/initiatives and factors.²⁰

A gender perspective was incorporated in the evaluation methodology and the Evaluation Matrix, as well as in different tools for data collection. Using the guidance, standards and approaches described in Sida's gender toolbox,²¹ an assessment was made of the extent to which BCSDN and the grantees had applied a gender perspective. The evaluation team has encouraged a gender-balanced composition of key informants.

19 Evaluation of Sida's support to the Balkan Civil Society Development Network 2019-2022. Final Inception Report. FCG Sweden. January 2023.

20 Contribution analysis is a methodology used to identify the contribution a development intervention has made to a change or set of changes. The aim is to produce a credible, evidence-based narrative of contribution that a reasonable person would be likely to agree with, rather than to produce conclusive proof. See <https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Contribution-analysis.pdf> for further details.

21 See, for instance, The Gender Practitioners Collaborative (2017): Minimum Standards for Mainstreaming Gender Equality.

The entire grant portfolio of 19 regional grants and 46 ad-hoc grants (no sampling was done) was evaluated using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Similar assessment scales were used in the on-line surveys and desk review, enabling direct comparison and aggregation of findings to the portfolio level (see 3.2 for details).

3.2 METHODS AND TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

The use of different data collection tools was considered and discussed during the inception phase and an agreement was reached on the following mix:

- Desk review of documents collected from Sida, BCSDN, other actors, and open sources;
- Interviews with representatives of BCSDN and its members, different project entities, grantees, and a wide range of external stakeholders;
- Focus group discussions (FGDs) with grantees;
- On-line surveys, targeted to grantees.

Desk review

The desk review included documents and data pertaining to: the overall project context (e.g. BCSDN Monitoring Matrix reports and similar analysis published by other actors); the management and implementation of the project (e.g. project proposal, budgets, reports, procedural documents, monitoring guidelines, etc.); the grant portfolio (e.g. grantee applications and reports), and; other key project deliverables (e.g. BCSDN methodologies and research). Grantee documents were reviewed with the help of a desk review form whereby each grant was systematically scored in terms of the realisation of objectives and key results, the contribution to intended outcomes, and the integration of different perspectives. This enabled the evaluation team to make a comparison across grants and aggregate data to the project portfolio level. A full list of documents can be found in Annex 7.

Key informant interviews

Key informants for interviews were identified in consultation with BCSDN and Sida, as well as through the evaluation team's own inquiry. The key informants included:

- BCSDN EO staff and Board chairperson
- Members of the Hub Steering Group and the Task Force Group
- Grant recipients (representatives of 10 regional networks)
- Sida and Swedish embassy staff
- Representatives of other donors and organisations as well as government representatives and individual experts/consultants

In total, 63 individuals (49 women and 14 men) were interviewed, either in-person (in North Macedonia and Serbia) or through on-line meetings. Both individual interviews

and group interviews were conducted. All the interviews were semi-structured and based on interview guides tailored to different categories of key informants. The notes from the interviews were entered in the same format to allow for easy aggregation and comparison with data obtained through other sources. A full list of the key informants is attached as Annex 8.

Focus group discussions

Three FGDs were held and attended by a total of 12 representatives (nine women and three men) of organisations that had received ad-hoc grants. Two of the FGDs were organised according to themes of implemented activities, and the third was devoted to grantees applying for funds for “innovation”. Similar to the key informant interviews, the FGDs were semi-structured (see guide in Annex 6), and provided grantees an opportunity to expand on responses to the on-line survey (see below).

On-line surveys

Two on-line surveys – one targeted to regional grantees and the other to the ad-hoc grantees – were conducted. The surveys (Annex 6) included a combination of multiple choice (ranked) and open-ended questions, and were administered through Qualtrics, an advanced online survey and analysis tool. The survey among the regional grantees was completed by 22 respondents (18 women and four men), giving a response rate of 63 percent, while the survey among ad-hoc grantees was completed by 25 respondents (15 women and 10 men), giving a response rate of 60 percent.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The data collected through the desk review, interviews, FGDs and on-line surveys were analysed in a systematic manner, in overall conformity with the Contribution Analysis approach. A first set of emerging findings were presented for questioning and validation at a debriefing meeting with BCSDN and Sida. Following the debriefing meeting, BCSDN provided complementary information and perspectives, which were validated through additional data collection and analysis.

If not otherwise mentioned in the report, the findings were corroborated against at least two data sources and aggregated whenever possible. Similarly, the conclusions were drawn based on multiple findings and convey the vital points of the evaluation with a focus on the key evaluation questions. The conclusions also seek to communicate the result of the Contribution Analysis.

3.4 ETHICS AND PARTICIPATION

The evaluation was conducted in line with the OECD/DAC Guidelines on Quality Standards for Development Evaluation. Accordingly, the evaluation team has adhered to the principles of impartiality, independence and credibility. The rights of confidentiality and anonymity have been explained in the beginning of interviews and

FGDs. Similarly, as explained in an introductory note, the on-line surveys were anonymous. Only the evaluation team has had access to the full survey data, which will be stored in compliance with European data legislation.

As elaborated on above, the evaluation was utilisation-focused and conducted in a participatory manner, especially through close engagement with BCSDN EO. Comments and suggestions on the Draft Evaluation Report will be handled in a systematic manner, including through the use of a Comments and Response Matrix. The latter will capture both general and specific comments, the evaluation team's response to these comments, and the changes, if any, made to the report. Disagreement over findings, if any, will be accounted for in the Final Evaluation Report.

3.5 LIMITATIONS

The project has been composed of a relatively large number of grants. While all the grants have been scrutinized by the evaluation team, the focus has been on the regional grants. Even though FGDs with recipient of ad-hoc grants were also conducted, these FGDs mainly served to corroborate the responses to the on-line survey, especially the questions relating to project relevance and efficiency. This means that the portfolio analysis of the *effectiveness* of the ad-hoc grants was mainly based on the desk review.

Relatedly, given that grants have been scattered over a wide range of themes and issues, it has not been possible to apply Contribution Analysis at the overall project portfolio level. As explained in section 3.3, a simplified version of this methodology has been used when selecting the most successful grants.

Finally, although the evaluation team has encouraged key informants to provide honest and well-substantiated answers, there is always a risk of response bias, especially when using on-line surveys. As further elaborated on in the main findings section, in some cases, the grantees' answers to some of the on-line survey questions are much more positive than the evaluation team's own assessment based on the desk review and key informant interviews. These instances are highlighted in the report and any claims of response bias are discussed and substantiated to the extent possible.

4 Findings

4.1 RELEVANCE

In line with the ToR, this section explores that what extent the project has addressed the relevant needs in the region in relation to civil society development and how responsive it has been to any emerging developments. It also examines the relevance with regard to target groups and their priorities. As with other sections, the analysis is guided by the refined questions and sub-questions in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 2).

4.1.1 Relevance to regional context

The project focus and scope are evidence-based and firmly rooted in the regional context for civil society development. A core activity of the BCSDN and its members is to monitor the enabling environment for civil society development in the region. This is done through the Monitoring Matrix, a methodology and tool containing principles, standards and indicators considered crucial to an enabling legal environment for CSO operations. The standards and indicators were developed with CSO inputs and also reflect basic human freedoms and rights as well as best regulatory practices in EU countries. The Monitoring Matrix is organised around three main areas – basic legal guarantees and freedoms; framework for CSOs’ financial viability and sustainability, and; government- CSO relationship. Each of these areas are divided into sub-areas. The indicators were defined to track both the quality and the implementation of the legal framework.

The regional Monitoring Matrix report for 2019, the year when the project was launched, conveys that the EU integration agenda moved slowly and that the political environment in most of the countries remained unfavourable, especially toward civil society development. Even though basic freedoms were legally guaranteed across the region, the report finds that, in practice, civic space had been shrinking. The report calls on governments to address this situation and provides a number of specific recommendations relating to the main areas of assessment.²² The analysis in the 2019 regional Monitoring Matrix report largely conforms with similar research conducted/funded by other actors, including the annual EU assessment of the enabling environment and civil society capacities in the Enlargement region (the EU assessment

²² Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Regional report 2019. BCSDN.

report) and the USAID-funded Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI).²³

The Regional Hub project's focus and scope resonate well with the findings and recommendations of the above-mentioned research. The two main areas of analysis in the EU assessment and CSOSI – the enabling environment for civil society development and CSO accountability – constitute the overall pillars of the project, and the main objectives of the call for proposals. The call for proposals also identifies key priority themes and actions, such as promoting civic dialogue and cooperation with public institutions, improving the legal framework and practices regarding the financial viability of civil society, trust-building with CSO constituencies, capacity building for CSOs' resilience against attacks, etc. These themes are similarly well aligned with the needs identified in the Monitoring Matrix, EU assessment and CSOSI.

The regional approach of the project was well-justified in view of the similar challenges faced by the countries in the region, the benefits of peer-to-peer learning, and the potential leverage that networks can gain in the policy dialogue. The project also helped to bridge a funding gap for regional CSO initiatives. All of the three reports mentioned above include a regional analysis that point out some of the common challenges that countries face, e.g. in terms of the overall implementation of the legal framework, fiscal regulations and public funding mechanisms, legal provisions for CSO employment and volunteering, CSO participation in policy-making processes, CSO service provision, etc. In the 2017 mid-term evaluation of the EU Civil Society Facility (EU CSF) for the Western Balkans and Turkey (also referenced in BCSDN project proposal to Sida) it is found that the particular focus on CSO partnerships, coalition and networking has reinforced the dialogue and strengthened ties between CSOs in the region, and helped addressing “historical issues” between the countries. The report particularly highlights the added-value of peer-to-peer learning, and how this has contributed to enhanced capacities and evidence-based approaches. At the same time, the report provides mixed signals about the effectiveness of policy advocacy conducted by regional networks and to what extent the EU support has contributed to the sustainability of the networks.²⁴

Interviews indicate that there is general agreement about the added-value of a regional approach to promoting an enabling environment for civil society development. In line with the findings of the EU evaluation mentioned above, BCSDN grantees underline that the regional support helps them to connect and share experiences to address common challenges, and that networks are able to pool resources and therefore have

23 Assessment of the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society against the Guidelines for EU support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region, 2014-2020, for the period 2018-2019. EU TACSO, and; 2019 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index. Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. 23rd Edition – October 2020. USAID, ICNL, and FHI360.

24 Mid-term Evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey. European Commission. 1 December 2017.

more leverage in the policy dialogue than single organisation would have. By being part of a network and regional initiatives smaller organisations can also gain important recognition from donors, government and other stakeholders.

Funding for regional initiatives and networks in the Western Balkans has been relatively limited. For some of the CSO networks supported by the Regional Hub project, the other main source of funding has been the financial instruments established under the CSF. Other funding for regional networks and initiatives mainly comes from private foundations²⁵ and tend to be relatively small, at least in comparison with the EU CSF.

4.1.2 Relevance to the needs and priorities of the target group

The thematic scope of the call for proposals accommodated the needs and priorities of grantees although the ad-hoc grants support was not always used for the purposes defined in the call. When asked about what convinced them to apply for a regional grant from the project, 42 percent of the on-line survey respondents answered that the call for proposal offered a “perfect fit” with the needs/priorities of their organisations/networks. The wish to enhance cooperation with regional partners was an important reason for 28 percent of the respondents. The same questions were included in the on-line survey targeted to the recipients of the ad-hoc grants. Among the respondents to this survey 41 percent answered that “perfect fit” was an important reason, while 16 percent answered that the wish to enhance cooperation with regional partners was something that convinced them to apply.

The survey responses were largely corroborated by interviews with regional grantees. For several organisations the grant was important for the realisation of network strategies and plans for collaboration, and the priority themes of the open calls were aligned with these strategies and plans. In several cases the Regional Hub grants also offered an opportunity to continue and consolidate past activities and, in two cases, to secure co-funding (10 percent) for EU CSF-supported projects was mentioned as an important reason for applying. While the overall objectives were the same as for the regional grants, the ad hoc grants were specifically targeted to “immediate needs” and “innovative approaches”. The sheer number of applications²⁶ and the focus group discussions with successful grantees indicate that the ad-hoc grants were highly appreciated and, in most cases, appear to have been used to address real needs. At the same time, as indicated by FGDs and the desk review, the innovation concept was not generally well-understood and many of the needs were not necessarily of an “immediate” nature. The FGDs indicate that the grants sometimes supported the

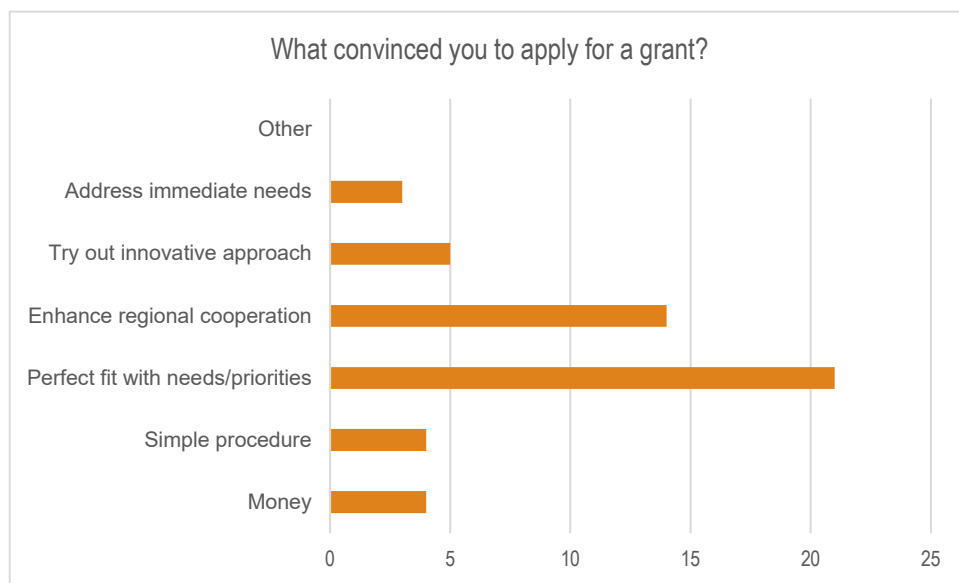
25 E.g. Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Balkan Trust for Democracy, National Endowment for Democracy, European Endowment for Democracy, Oak Foundation, Open Societies Foundation, etc.

26 BCSDN received a total of 50 applications for the regional grants (first call) and 207 applications for the ad-hoc grants.

continuation of already on-going activities, or were used as bridge funding awaiting renewal of previous support. Similarly, the ad-hoc grants were expected to promote regional cooperation and transfer of learning but, in practice, as shown by the desk review, less than half of the ad-hoc grants can be said to have been of a regional nature.

The project reached out to relevant and networks and actors, both formal and informal, and addressed the enabling environment within a considerable span of themes and issues. In terms of outreach, the regional grants were aimed at “regional networks and initiatives with missions and demonstrated experience in the thematic area of this call, with special focus on the enabling environment and accountability”.²⁷

Figure 1. Regional networks' reasons for applying



Source: On-line survey (regional grantees)

While the open calls for the regional grants and the supporting communication plan of the project did not target any particular type of organisations, both formal and informal networks were encouraged to apply (although the lead applicant had to be registered in one of the Western Balkan countries). The networks were also required to have member organisations in more than two countries from the region.²⁸ The requirements on the organisations applying for ad-hoc grants were initially similar to the ones for the regional grants, but was later revised to allow also informal actors (non-registered) to apply, responding to emerging needs in Serbia in particular. Eventually, only two of

27 Call for Project Proposals. No. 09-108/1-2020. “Strengthening regional cooperation to promote civic space in the Western Balkan countries. Guidelines for Applications. BCSDN (undated).

28 The second call for proposals under the regional grant mechanism was restricted to 10 networks that had received funding from the first call, with a view to support the consolidation of activities and the networks themselves.

the 46 ad-hoc grants were awarded to informal actors (who both applied through registered organisations).

As indicated by the applications, all the grants awarded through the first call targeted the first objective (enabling environment), whereas five out of nine grants awarded through the second call also targeted the second objective (CSO accountability). The scope of the grants is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic focus of regional grants

Network	Project theme/issues
At-risk Youth Social Empowerment network (ARYSEN)	CSO service provision with a focus on children and youth at risk
Balkan Network for Local Democracy (BNLD)	Active citizenship at local level (local democracy)
ConWeb (Network of national consumers' organisations of South East Europe)	Consumer-friendly certification services
South East Europe network on natural resources, energy and transport (SEENET)	Protection of environmental CSOs and defenders
South Eastern European Indigenous Grant-makers Network (SIGN)	Philanthropy and CSO fundraising from local sources
Western Balkans Regional Platform for advocating media freedom and journalists' safety (Safejournalists)	CSO-parliament dialogue on media freedoms
Centre for Palliative care and Palliative Medicine (BELhospice)	CSO service provision for palliative care
Think for Europe Network (TEN)	CSO participation in public administration reform
Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR)	CSO-government dialogue and cooperation
LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey (ERA)	Capacity building of the LGBTI movement

4.1.3 Responsiveness to emerging developments

Project design and implementation has generally been responsive to new developments and needs. The project was implemented during a turbulent and problematic period both globally and regionally, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, political turbulence and polarization, and the Ukraine war. While there are some positive developments in terms of changes in policies and the legal framework across the region, the common message of the analysis conducted by BCSDN and other actors is that the situation with regard to the enabling environment has worsened, or largely remained the same, during the project implementation period.

Since the project objectives and the themes of the calls for proposals were already broad, allowing for a wide range of interventions, no significant changes have been made to the overall project design and scope. It should also be recognized that the very purpose of the ad-hoc calls was to remain responsive to new developments, such as the need for public consultations on a new draft law or responding to threats and hostile

attacks. Interviews and FGDs commonly suggest that BCDN has been flexible towards the grantees by allowing extensions and reallocation of funds based on changes in the project environment. In addition, adjustments to regranting requirements and procedures have been made based on experience and the recommendations provided in previous evaluations (see section 4.4.4). With regard to the Monitoring Matrix, interviews indicate that the questionnaires for the national reports have been expanded at times to include current issues, such as the ongoing economic and energy crisis and its impact on civil society development. In 2023, a more comprehensive review of the methodology is planned, e.g. to ensure that issues such as digitalization are properly covered.

4.2 COHERENCE

This section examines the extent to which BCSDN has considered the work of other actors and initiatives during project development and implementation, and what has been done to promote coordination and identify synergies. It also briefly addresses how the project aligns with Swedish strategies, Sida's policies and international standards on engagement with and support to civil society.

4.2.1 Consistency of approaches

BCSDN's programme has emerged through partnerships and cooperation with influential global and regional actors. The regranting mechanism is informed by the work of BCSDN's own members. Over the past decade, BCSDN has stepped up collaboration with global and regional actors working to promote civil society development and CSO capacity strengthening. For instance, since 2016, BCSDN is one of 20 regional research partners of the CIVICUS Monitor, which provides global comparisons and trends in real-time in relation to freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. With support of its members, BCSDN prepares bi-monthly research updates for the Western Balkan countries and Turkey as well as alerts and early warning notifications when worrisome developments take place.

In relation to CSO accountability, as earlier noted, BCSDN is one of nine civil society networks partnering in the Global Standard for CSO Accountability, which is also supported by Sida through Accountable Now. BCDN joined the partnership during the co-creation and development of the standard (in 2015/2016) and have since supported CSOs and networks in the Western Balkan region to test related tools. The Regional Hub project builds on this work and has offered an opportunity to scale up such support through the regional regranting mechanism.

The idea of creating a Hub originally came from the Innovation for Change (I4C), a global network of individuals and organisations working to find new solutions to civic space restrictions. The I4C is organised into seven regional hubs covering a large part of the world but notably not Europe. The bearing idea is to “catalyse social change

trough collaborative innovation”²⁹, which prompted BCSDN to make “innovation” a central theme of the ad-hoc grants.³⁰ The main input to the Fund was the experience of BCSDN’s members, many of which are resource centers for civil society in their countries and serve as grant intermediaries.

4.2.2 Coordination and synergies

The regranting under the Regional Hub project overlaps with other, similar calls for proposals. While some complementarities can be detected, the added-value of BCSDN’s grants is not always clear. The main funding mechanism for regional CSO initiatives and networks are the open calls under the EU Civil Society Facility (CSF) and Media Programme. The grants provided under the CSF range between EUR 700,000 to EUR 1,300,000 and are partly geared towards supporting regional CSO networks.³¹ The CSF grants come with a requirement of 10 percent co-financing by the grantee, and, in at least two cases, BCSDN’s regional grants have been used for this purpose. This has brought visibility to BCSDN but arguably also diminished the added-value of the regional grants.

There is a new regional programme funded by Norway – SMART Balkans – that seeks to empower CSOs and CSO networks “for stronger and active role in creating peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development”³². The programme is implemented by one of BCSDN’s member organisations (CPCD in BiH) together with two organisations from Albania and North Macedonia. The topics of the programme overlap with some of the themes in BCDN’s call for proposals (e.g. development of regional CSO partnerships, increasing CSO influence on decision making, awareness raising for active citizen participation, etc.), and the SMART Balkans also provides both regional grants and ad-hoc grants. In general, coordination of regranting mechanisms appears to have been limited, especially in terms of ensuring that the regranting complements other funding and is targeted to organisations and networks who may have difficulties in accessing such funding. This situation mirrors the general lack of coordination of CSO support in the region, as also highlighted by several interviewees.

The Regional Hub project is aligned with BCSDN’s mission and strategy and complements regranting by BCSDN members at the national level. BCSDN’s work is guided by a strategic plan for the period 2021-2024. The strategic plan defines four strategic objectives of which the first two are very similar to the objectives of the Regional Hub project, i.e. 1) to promote a common understanding of the enabling

29 <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/innovate/innovation-for-change>

30 BCSDN’s definition of “innovation” is taken from I4C.

31 <https://tacso.eu/call-for-proposals-grants-under-the-eu-civil-society-facility-and-media-programme-for-the-western-balkans-and-turkey-for-2021-2023/>

32 <https://smartbalkansproject.org>

environment for civil society development and, 2) to strengthen CSO capacities to become legitimate and accountable actors. A core activity under the first objective is the monitoring of the enabling environment. This work is mainly funded by the Regional Hub project. The second objective of BCSDN's strategic plan is also covered by the Regional Hub project but appears to be mainly pursued with funds from other projects and initiatives.

BCSDN members have their own national re-granting schemes funded by different donors. Sida provides (direct) core funding to the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF), which provides institutional and project grants, along with capacity building support. Sida also supports CPCD in BiH and its regranting to environmental CSOs. In some cases, BCSDN members also provide ad-hoc grants.

4.2.3 Alignment with Swedish strategies, Sida policy and international standards

The project is well-aligned with successive Swedish regional strategies. While some BCSDN members also receive direct Sida support, the potential linkages between regional and country-level contributions may not have been sufficiently explored. Swedish reform cooperation with the Western Balkans are governed by regional results strategies. The strategy for the years 2014-2020 identifies three thematic results areas: economic integration; democracy and human rights, and; environment and climate change resilience. Within the area of democracy and human rights, the strategy envisages that support should be provided to initiatives that increase the capacity and sustainability of civil society working for democratic values and human rights.³³ Sida's own strategy plan notes the civic space is shrinking in several countries in the region, and that regional initiatives may therefore be supported to complement bilateral support at the country level.³⁴ The subsequent regional strategy for the years 2021-2027 also singles out human rights and democracy as a priority area for reform cooperation, noting that democratic space is shrinking and the opportunities for media and civil society to operate freely are being curtailed.³⁵

Interviews with Swedish embassy staff in the region suggest that Sida increasingly supports civil society to achieve the thematic goals of the regional strategy. In several countries Swedish organisations are used as intermediaries but direct support to national CSOs, including those acting as intermediaries, appears to be on the rise. The issue of an enabling environment for civil society development is directly addressed through the direct support to KCSF (see above). There are also examples of how Sida-supported CSOs in other countries have engaged in consultations, promoted popular

33 Results strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden.

34 Strategiplan för regional reformsamarbete Östeuropa, Västra Balkan, Turkiet 2019–2021. Sida. December 2018.

35 Strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2027. Government Offices of Sweden. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

participation, and demanded transparency – processes that also contribute to promoting and protecting civic space. As indicated by interviews, there is a need for dialogue about how to create synergies between regional and country-level Sida contributions in general. Embassies wish to be updated on a regular basis on what organisations are supported through regional projects, and also contribute to the discussion on how to promote civic space and CSO capacity building within the region.

In many ways, the project offers a perfect fit with Sida’s Guiding Principles and the DAC Recommendation on civil society. What is not compliant is the reliance on short-term project funding. Sida’s overall approach to engagement with and support to civil society is framed in a set of five Guiding Principles, reflecting the commitment to creating an enabling environment for civil society, fostering a vibrant and pluralistic civil society, and supporting civil society as an integrated part of support toward other development objectives:

- Sida should explore the various roles of civil society within their context
- Sida should strive to support civil society in its own right
- Sida should provide aid and development effective support to civil society partners
- Sida should support civil society partners’ efforts to strengthen their own development effectiveness, including their transparency and accountability
- Sida should engage in continuous dialogue with civil society

A recent desk review shows that Sida’s Guiding Principles are largely aligned with the OECD/DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance (the DAC Recommendation), which was adopted in 2021.³⁶ With its focus on how to address civic space and engage with CSOs as independent development actors in their own right as part of the 2030 Agenda, the DAC Recommendation is the first international standard of its kind. The DAC Recommendation has three building blocks or pillars: 1) Respecting, protecting and promoting civic space; 2) supporting and engaging with civil society, and; 3) incentivising CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

In line with Sida’s Guiding Principles and the DAC Recommendation, the Regional Hub project can be said to recognise the roles of a diverse range of CSOs within different contexts and in their own right, and also promote CSO accountability and transparency. The DAC Recommendation explicitly calls upon donors to support existing cooperation platforms for civil society in partner countries and to contribute to building CSOs’ internal system for increased accountability and effectiveness, which fits well with the Regional Hub objectives. However, while the DAC Recommendation places a strong emphasis on trust-based, flexible and long-term funding, preferably in

³⁶ Desk study on Sida’s alignment with the OECD/DAC Recommendation on Civil Society. FCG Sweden. August 2022.

the form of core funding, Sida has so far only provided short-term project funding to BCSDN, and BCSDN in turns provides even shorter-term funding to its grantees.

4.3 EFFICIENCY

The efficiency criterion focus on how well resources are being used. This section seeks to assess to what extent the project has delivered outputs in an economic and timely manner, and the capacity, structures, and systems in place to this end. The final part focuses on the regranting mechanisms.

4.3.1 Programme delivery and distribution of costs

The project was initially faced by significant delays, mainly due to overambitious planning and the time required to establish the regranting mechanism, but delivery has picked-up over time. Additional costs incurred through budget revisions and amendments appear well-justified. The project had an initial budget of EUR 1,5 million with three major cost categories: funds for re-granting; BCSDN EO implementation and management costs, and; BCSDN member costs. As reflected in the project financial report³⁷, significant delays in project implementation and budget delivery were experienced during the first year. Nothing was spent from the cost category of regranting due to the delay in the announcement of open calls. This also affected the spending on monitoring and evaluation. However, project implementation has since picked up, and by the end of 2022 close to 90 percent of available budget had been spent (see Table 3). The largest variances are related to the spending on ad-hoc grants (45 percent) and costs for monitoring and evaluation (70 percent).³⁸

There is common agreement among key informants that the initial time line of the project was too short and that planning was over-ambitious. In particular, BCSDN under-estimated the time it would take to set-up the grant mechanism, and the human resources required for its implementation. When the budget was revised in 2021, this budget line for BCSDN EO staff costs was increased by almost 60 percent, and a relatively large increase again followed in connection with the cost extension in 2022. This cost extension also allowed for a second (restrictive) call for regional grants and a new set of regional hub activities – such as website development, a capacity building workshop for grantees, outreach and promotion, and a regional learning event. Judging by interviews, these activities, some of which remain to be completed, seem justified.

37 Independent Auditor's Report and Financial Report. BCSDN. Project "Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub". For the period 1 September 2019-31 August 2020. Grant Thornton.

38 Independent Auditor's Report and Financial Report. BCSDN. Project "Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub". For the period 1 September 2020-28 February 2022. Grant Thornton.

Table 3. Distribution of programme costs 2019-2022 (EUR)

Type of costs	1 st year	2 nd year	Mar-Dec 2022	Total	Share
Civil Society Development Fund	50,700	864,400	374,000	1,289,100	75%
- <i>Regional grants</i>	0	617,800	N/A	N/A	N/A
- <i>Ad-hoc grants</i>	0	151,300	N/A	N/A	N/A
- <i>Task Force Group</i>	50,700	84,400	0	135,100	8%
- <i>Steering Group</i>	0	10,900	0	10,900	>1%
EO implementation & management	56,800	128,600	103,000	288,400	17%
BCSDN member subcontracts	69,300	64,700	0	134,000	8%
Total annual costs	176,800	1,057,700	477,000	1,711,500	100%

Source: Financial reports to Sida, BCSDN project accounts

Better results could possibly have been achieved with larger grants and more resources allocated towards capacity building, learning and BCSDN's own advocacy. Delegating grantmaking to members would have been less costly but might have affected the regional relevance. Considering the results achieved (see section 4.4), there is reason to suggest that more (and earlier) funding should have been allocated towards capacity building and joint learning among grantees, activities that were only added towards the end of the project. In addition, as further elaborated on below, the grants were generally not sufficient in size and length to allow for contributions beyond the immediate outcome level. With regard to the BCSDN's own work, there was no budget allocation for regional advocacy. Having such a budget may have prompted BCSDN EO to do more in this area, which is also something called for by many key informants. The same is true for the work on CSO accountability and transparency.

While the project as a whole appears under-funded considering the intended outcomes, one way of delivering outputs (i.e. grants) with fewer resources would have been to delegate the regranting mechanism to one of BCSDN's members that already had the capacity and systems in place for regranting. This option was discussed at length during the project conceptualisation phase. BCSDN ultimately decided that BCSDN EO should have this role given the regional nature of the project, and that members would share their expertise and experience through the Task Force Group.

4.3.2 Project management structures and capacity

The project management structure has been carefully considered, formalised and operationalised, but proven rather resource-intensive. The roles of the Steering Group and Task Force Group have diminished over time. While the ultimate responsibility for the project rests with BCSDN EO and the BCSDN Board, a project-specific structure was set up for the regranting mechanism, consisting of the Steering Group, Task Force Group, BCSDN EO, and a group of independent evaluators. The composition and main tasks of these entities are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Project entities and responsibilities

Project entity	Main tasks
Steering Group	• Oversee Hub Strategy • Determine thematic priorities for the open calls • Approve the selection of grants
Task Force Group	• Provide inputs to the development of grant procedures • Support EO in monitoring the grants
BCSDN EO	• Prepare and implement the Hub Strategy • Finalise and revise grant procedures • Prepare the open calls and manage the evaluation process • Assess ad-hoc grant applications • Monitor grant contracts, approve narrative and financial reports from grantees, and execute payments
Independent evaluators ³⁹	• Assess regional grant applications against established criteria

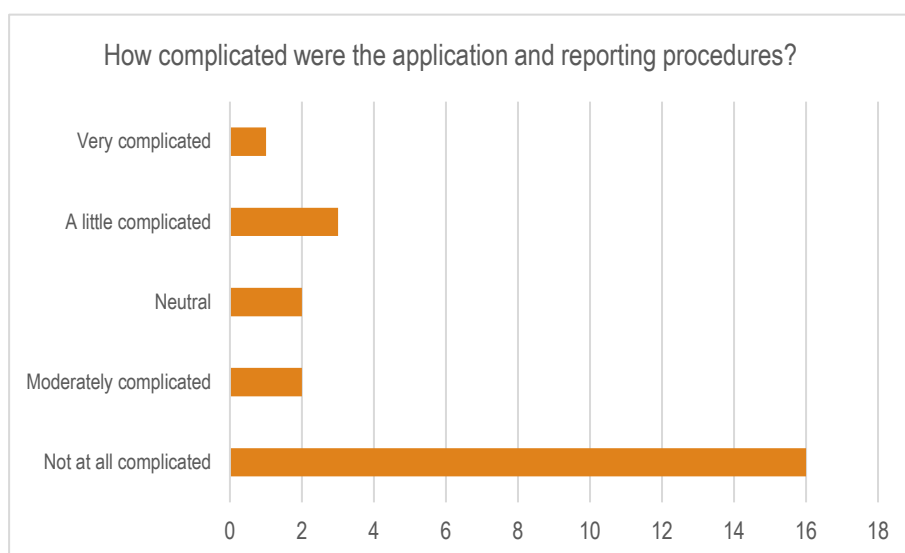
Interviews with BCSDN and its members suggest that the structure has been working well in practice. No significant overlaps or other concerns are noted, and none of the interviewees see any need for changing the structure should the project continue. At the same time, while the Steering Group and Task Force Group were very active in the beginning of the project as part of developing the regranting mechanism and open calls, during project implementation their role has been mainly limited to assessing grant applications (Steering Group) and reports (the local monitors). No regular meetings of the Task Force Group are being convened, which is a missed opportunity to share experiences and good practices from the monitoring process. This issue is also raised in the 2022 mid-term project evaluation, which calls for capacity building of local monitors and more experience-sharing between them.

³⁹ BCDN contracted six independent evaluators through an open call (65 applications were received). The selected evaluators were from North Macedonia (two), Romania, Albania, Serbia and BiH. The selection was based on criteria established in a ToR.

4.3.3 Quality of grant management

Comprehensive guidelines and procedures are in place for regranting. Grantees provide positive feedback on grant management but the limited grant size and activity period is a common concern – as well as the short time given for reporting. The procedures for the Fund were developed with the inputs from BCSDN members and are documented in an Internal Manual of Procedures, which includes an overview of the project management and control set-up as well as step-by-step instructions for project selection, contracting, reporting, monitoring and verification, payments, audits, evaluation, management of irregularities, and record-keeping. Complementary guidelines for grant monitoring have also been developed, focusing on the role of local monitors. The calls for project proposals have been accompanied by guidelines with information on objectives and thematic priorities, size of grants, eligibility criteria, eligible and ineligible costs, application procedures and deadlines, evaluation and selection procedures, the scope for appeal, etc.

Figure 2. Experiences from application and reporting



Source: On-line survey (ad-hoc grantees)

In the on-line surveys the grantees were asked about their experiences from the grant process. Most of the regional grantees answered that the application and reporting procedures were “not at all complicated” or “moderately complicated”, and were happy with the support provided by BCSDN. In the survey among ad-hoc support grantees, the share of respondents answering that the application and reporting procedures were “not at all complicated” was even higher. The ad-hoc grantees are also satisfied with BCSDN’s support, which was confirmed in interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

What stands out in the survey among regional grantees are the mixed opinions on grant size and activity period, which most grantees felt was “moderately” reasonable. This sentiment was confirmed in interviews, with several grantees suggesting that both the grant size and activity period should be increased in future calls. Another common

concern emerging from the interviews is that the time for reporting is not enough and does not consider the challenges involved with gathering information and supporting documents from network members in several countries. FGDs indicate the activity period for the ad-hoc grants was also too short (maximum of two months but often shorter). Interviews with BCDN and its members suggest that the process involved with the selection and management of ad-hoc grants was particularly challenging, and overly resource-intensive considering the limited grant size (EUR 10,000).

4.4 EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness criterion is essentially about the achievement of project objectives and intended outcomes. The assessment is guided by the re-constructed Theory of Change (ToC), which was developed with inputs from BCSDN EO during the inception phase of the evaluation.

4.4.1 Contribution to immediate outcomes

The ToC identifies four immediate outcomes to which the Regional Hub project was expected to contribute:

- Evidence-based advocacy for civic space
- Increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment
- Increased regional cooperation for civic space
- Sharing of global accountability standards and good practices

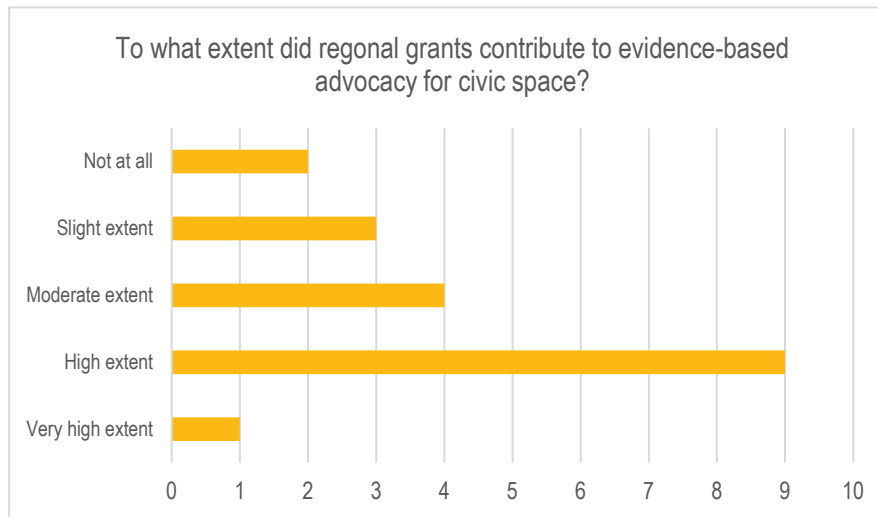
In the following the project's contribution to these outcomes is assessed at the overall portfolio level. Examples of significant contributions of single grants are referenced and details provided in Annex 5. In line with the Contribution Analysis approach, these examples have been selected with due consideration to the influence of other actors/initiatives and external factors.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The two regional grants used for co-financing of EU CSF projects are not included since their relative importance could not be adequately assessed.

Evidence-based advocacy for civic space

On average, the regional grants significantly contributed to evidence-based advocacy for civic space. According to the on-line survey, policy and legal advocacy was, together with capacity development, the second most common activity pursued with support of the regional grants⁴¹. Out of 22 respondents, 15 answered that they thought that their project had contributed to increased evidence-based advocacy for promoting civic space to a “high” or “very high” extent. Judging by the answers to the other on-line survey, the ad-hoc grants involved various advocacy-related activities, including expert inputs to draft policies or laws, public campaigns/consultations, and regional advocacy.

Figure 3. Contribution of regional grants to evidence-based advocacy



Source: Grant applications and final reports

The analysis conducted as part of the evaluation team’s desk review shows that 10 out of 19 regional grants contributed to evidence-based advocacy to a “high” or “very high extent”. This analysis was corroborated in interviews with the regional grantees. In contrast to the survey responses, very few of the ad-hoc grants (three grants) were assessed to have made a significant contribution to this outcome. Prominent examples contributing to this outcome are the regional grants to Safejournalists, SEENET, and BELhospice, and the ad-hoc grant to ELSA in BiH (see Annex 5 for details).

BCSDN’s Monitoring Matrix reports have been used as a stepping stone for evidence-based advocacy by members, but not in a systematic manner. Interviews with BCSDN members indicate that the findings and recommendations of the Monitoring Matrix reports produced with the support of the Regional Hub project have informed CSO dialogue and advocacy for policy and legal change. Additional details

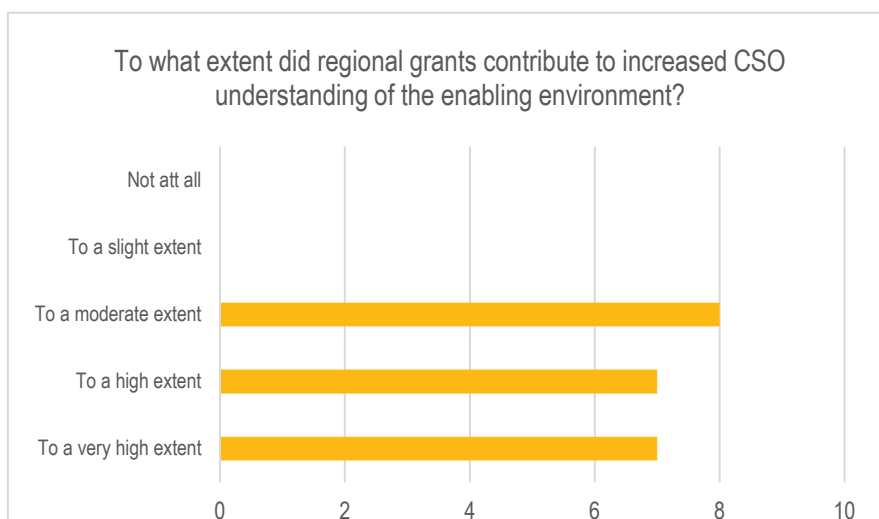
⁴¹ research/analysis was the most common activity.

on such efforts have been provided in writing at the request of the evaluation team, which has selected four examples of prominent BCDN member contributions – in Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia (see Annex 5 for details). It is noted that while the national Monitoring Matrix reports are disseminated in various ways the evaluation team has not come across any dedicated advocacy strategies and related budgets linked to the reports. The regional Monitoring Matrix report has regularly been presented to the EU and informed the dialogue with DG NEAR.

Increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment

The contribution of grants to increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment appears to be more mixed. About two-thirds (14 of 22 respondents) of the regional grantees who completed the on-line survey perceive that their projects contributed to increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment to a “high” or “very high extent”. Eight respondents answered that their projects contributed to a “moderate extent”. The evaluation team’s own assessment based on the desk review generally shows a lower level of contribution, indicating that seven projects contributed to a “high” or “very high” extent and that 11 projects contributed to a “moderate extent”. While the on-line survey of ad-hoc grants did not include questions about the contribution towards immediate outcomes, the analysis based on the desk review indicates that only four of the 45 ad-hoc grants reviewed contributed to a “high” extent to this outcome. Prominent examples contributing to this outcome are the regional grants to Safejournalists, SEENET, and BELhospice, and the ad-hoc grant to Media Center Montenegro.

Figure 4. Regional grants’ contribution to CSO understanding of enabling environment



Source: Online survey (regional grantees)

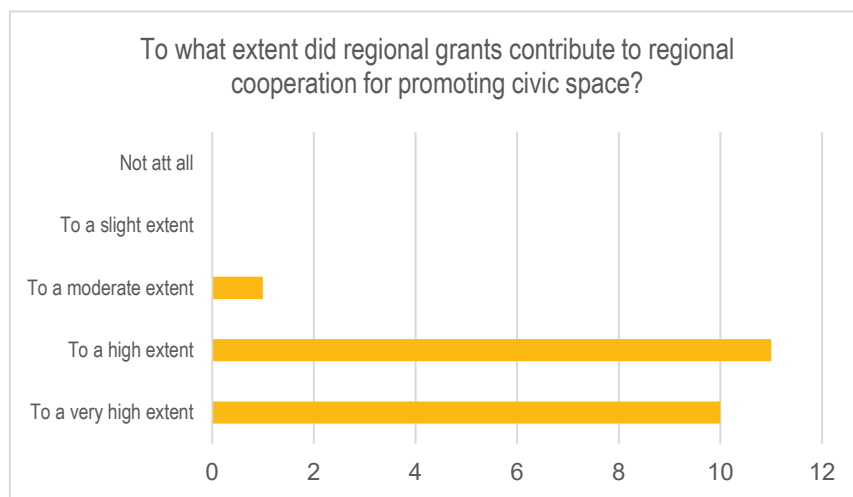
BSCDN’s Monitoring Matrix reports are seen as useful reference documents by many grantees but may not be sufficiently capitalised on by civil society at large.

With regard to the contribution of BCSDN's own work to this outcome, interviews suggest that BCSDN members disseminate the national Monitoring Matrix reports at public events and use them as input to their dialogue with other CSOs. Judging by the interviews, there is some variation in the knowledge about the Monitoring Matrix reports among regional grantees. While some of the interviewees were not aware of the reports, others know about their existence but had not read them. Nevertheless, a majority of the lead agencies in the CSO networks claim that they use the Monitoring Matrix reports as a reference when preparing strategies, new projects, meetings, etc. One suggestion emerging from the interviews is that BCSDN should organise a briefing with new grantees to explain the scope and intended use of the Monitoring Matrix.

Increased regional cooperation for civic space

The regional grants significantly contributed to regional cooperation for civic space whilst the ad-hoc grants were mostly directed to single-country initiatives. Almost all respondents to the on-line survey among regional grantees believe that their projects contributed to increased regional cooperation for promoting civic space to a “high” or “very high” extent. The desk review similarly suggest that the regional grants contributed toward this objective to a “high” extent on average. The on-line survey among the recipients of ad-hoc grants show that “regional networking” was the third most common reason for applying. Yet, as indicated by the desk review, only four ad-hoc grants contributed to a “high” extent to regional cooperation. In fact, as many as 21 of the 45 ad-hoc grants reviewed did “not at all” contribute to regional cooperation, according to the desk review. These are essentially grants implemented in one country

Figure 5. Regional grants' contribution to regional



Source 1: On-line survey (regional grantees)

only without the involvement of CSOs from other countries in the region.⁴² The grants that are assessed as having contributed the most to regional cooperation are the regional grants to Safejournalists and SEENET and the ad-hoc grants to Censor (BiH) and Finance Think (North Macedonia).

Sharing of global accountability standards and good practices

While the understanding of CSO accountability may vary, the evaluation team's assessment is that the grants contributed to the sharing of global accountability stands and good practices to a very limited extent. A majority of the respondents (17 of 22) to the on-line survey among regional grantees answered that their projects contributed to more effective, transparent and accountable CSOs to a “high” or “very high” extent. The responses to the on-line survey among the recipients of ad-hoc grants are more mixed although 14 of 23 respondents answered that their projects contributed to the same objective to a “high” or “very high” extent. These survey results stand in stark contrast to the desk review analysis, which concluded that only two regional grants and one ad-hoc grant were found to have contributed to said outcome to a “high” or “very high” extent.

The discrepancy between the survey results and the desk review analysis may indicate that the objective of CSO accountability and transparency is not well understood by grantees. It may also be a case of response bias, as indicated by the fact the second objective of CSO accountability and transparency was only “ticked” in five of 19 regional grant applications. An interesting comparison can be made with the 2020 EU assessment, which indicates that CSOs have an overly positive view on the level of accountability and transparency within their own organisations.⁴³ The regional grant that is assessed as having contributed the most to CSO accountability and transparency is the second regional grant to BNLD, which led to the adoption of accountability principles.

BCDN's own work on CSO accountability is conducted across different projects. The contribution and added value of the Regional Hub project in this regard is not clear. BCSDN's own work on CSO accountability and transparency has resulted in a draft methodology for monitoring CSO capacities, followed by data collection and the preparation of a regional report entitled “Constituency Led Accountability in the Western Balkans”. The latter study is produced with the support of the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), within the project “Promoting the Universal Application of EDC for the SDGs”, also funded by Sida. According to the progress

42 In many cases expert advice was obtained by experts from other countries but this is not deemed as contributing to regional cooperation.

43 Assessment of the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society against the 2014-2020 Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement region for the year 2020. Final report. EU TACSO. September 2021.

reports of the Regional Hub project, the findings of the study are being used for further planning the support provided to CSOs under the Hub. The sharing of global accountability standards and practices is part of BCSDN work with the Global Standard for CSO accountability and CPDE.

4.4.2 Contribution to intermediate outcomes

The intermediate outcomes defined in the re-constructed ToC are:

- Policy and legal change promoting/protecting civic space
- More effective, transparency and accountable CSOs

Policy and legal change promoting/protecting civic space

The evaluation team’s assessment is that the grants, on average and in a strict sense, contributed to policy and legal change only to a limited extent. As indicated by the above analysis and assessment, a majority of the regional grants have involved evidence-based advocacy. According to the on-line survey there is a relatively high level of confidence among respondents that this advocacy contributes to policy and legal change for promoting civic space. Out of 22 respondents, 14 answered that their projects had contributed to this outcome to a “high” or “very high” extent. Based on the desk review, the evaluation team’s own assessment is that only three of the regional grants and four of the ad-hoc grants contributed at this level, which was partly corroborated by the interviews with regional grantees. The discrepancy between the survey results and desk review could be another example of response bias or differences in the understanding of the meaning of policy and legal change for promoting/protecting civic space.

The grants that are assessed as having contributed the most to policy and legal change for the promotion/protection of civic space are the second regional grant to Safejournalists and the ad-hoc grants to ELSA (BiH), Media Center Montenegro, and Zero Waste (Montenegro).

BCSDN members, capitalising on the Monitoring Matrix reports but with funding from elsewhere, have contributed to significant policy and legal changes for civic space in some of the countries in the region. As noted above, the Monitoring Matrix reports have informed BCDN members’ programming and advocacy, and this advocacy (not part of the Regional Hub project) has contributed to some key policy and legal changes, including:

- The 2020 amendment to the Law on Public Procurement in Albania;
- Changes made in 2021 to the NPO Registration Law in Albania;
- The new Law on Lobbying in North Macedonia, adopted in 2021;
- The withdrawal of proposed amendments to the Criminal Code of Serbia;
- The draft Law on Public Gatherings in Kosovo in 2022;

- The adoption of the government Strategy for the creation of an enabling environment for the development of civil society in Serbia for the period 2022-2030.⁴⁴

More effective, transparent and accountable CSOs

There is no evidence that the project has contributed to more effective, transparent and accountable CSOs in any significant way. Very few of the grants were geared towards strengthening CSO capacities, let alone internal accountability mechanisms, and BCSDN's own role in terms of sharing global accountability standards and good practices with grantees appears to have been limited, at least in the context of the Regional Hub project. It is recognised that, with funding from elsewhere, BCSDN members have actively contributed to the process of developing national codes of standard for CSO accountability in Albania and North Macedonia. In addition, BCSDN EO initiated a Regional Community of Practice within the Hub, inspired by the global Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice led by Global Standard partners.

4.4.3 Factors influencing project effectiveness

This section provides a summary of factors influencing the project's contribution to the outcomes defined in the re-constructed ToC.

External factors

Project effectiveness have been affected by political factors and the consequences of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As noted in chapter 2, the project was implemented during a turbulent and problematic period both globally and regionally. Political instability and polarization, such as in Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, generally hampered policy-making processes and thus CSO advocacy efforts. Relatedly, lack of political will have left significant gaps in the implementation of policies and laws. This especially applies to policies and laws related to the freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression. While government strategies and institutional mechanism for CSO cooperation are in place in most countries, they tend to be only partially funded and therefore not effectively implemented. In general, CSOs involvement in decision-making processes continue to be hampered due to lack of access to draft policies and laws and representation in government working groups. While the EU accession process can be capitalised on as a driver of change, the process has stalled in several countries and the general perception among the CSOs interviewed is that the EU has become less vocal in its dialogue on civic space with governments.

⁴⁴ See Annex 5 for further details.

In addition to political factors, the COVID-19 pandemic further limited the space for effective advocacy due to restrictions on public meetings and the fact that many policy processes stalled as governments' attention turned elsewhere, i.e. to the looming health crisis. At the operational level, the pandemic initially put a stop to (in-person) regional meetings, both among project entities (Steering Group and Task Force Group) and among the supported networks and organisations. The latter caused some delays in the implementation of grants, leading to request for project extensions and budget reallocations. However, most project stakeholders appear to have quickly adjusted to the circumstances, including by using on-line meeting platforms for dialogue and implementation of activities. It is also plausible that travel restrictions and closed borders is part of the explanation why so few of the ad-hoc grants have been of a regional nature.

The war in Ukraine influenced the project in the sense that three ad-hoc grants were awarded to CSOs providing humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian refugees. These grants undoubtedly addressed an immediate need but were largely irrelevant considering the objectives and intended outcomes of the project. There is a fear that the war will cause a further shift in donor funding away from the Western Balkans, but this remains to be seen.

Internal factors

The most significant internal factor influencing project effectiveness was the limited project duration and, consequently, the very short time frame allowed for the implementation of the regional grants. The initial project application to Sida was confined to a period of two years, which was clearly not realistic considering the ambitious objectives and the time need to set up a regranting mechanisms and related management structures from scratch. There is a common sentiment among regional grantees that the implementation period of the grants (a maximum of 10 months for the first grant) was not enough to achieve lasting results, especially when the ambition was to influence policies and laws. The project has since been extended three times, which has allowed BCSDN to issue a second (restricted) call for proposals targeting the recipients of the first grants, but the activity period of these additional grants was equally very short (five months).

The capacity of grantees and the connection between the grants and their other work also influenced project effectiveness. Another internal factor was the strength of the CSO networks, including their advocacy capacity, and the extent to which the regional grants complemented already existing work or marked a continuation of recently completed projects. The latter generally had a positive influence on results achievement although, as noted above, the added-value of the regional grant is not always obvious (especially when the grant was used for co-funding of much larger EU CSF-funded projects).

Grants were overly focused on the first objective of promoting an enabling environment, which affected project effectiveness in terms of strengthening CSO

accountability and transparency. It can be argued that the grant selection process, especially for the ad-hoc grants, was generally not very stringent as many of the activities supported did not answer to an immediate need or come across as very innovative, as noted in section 4.1.2 and also reflected in the support to refugee assistance accounted for above. Similarly, BCSDN could probably have done more to encourage prospective grantees, especially prior the second (restricted) call for regional grants, to prepare grant proposals answering to the need for developing internal accountability mechanisms. This may have helped to ensure more meaningful contributions towards the outcome of CSO effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

In some cases, staff turnover caused disruptions in project implementation but it does not seem to have had any significant effect on effectiveness. BCSDN members have been committed to the project and has had sufficient capacity to implement the tasks assigned to them.

4.4.4 The project MEL system

The project MEL system consists of Theory of Change (ToC), a results framework, and guidelines for monitoring of grants, which includes various templates and forms. There is also a section on monitoring and verification of grants in the project's Internal Manual of Procedures.

The ToC and results framework – the core of the MEL system of the project – overlap and have some significant shortcomings. A first version of the project ToC was developed in early 2020 and was slightly revised as part of the development of a Hub strategy a few months later. Both versions outline a simple results chain building up the three main objectives identified in the project proposal. BCSDN's strategic plan 2021-2024 also includes a ToC, which, in contrast to the project ToC, presents several outcome levels and assumptions. The project results framework, which is a separate document, distinguishes between the outcomes of the Hub and the funding scheme, while explaining the linkages. It establishes outcome indicators and targets and identifies assumptions and risks.

The evaluation team has the following observations on the ToC and results framework:

- The results framework resembles more of a ToC and vice-versa. A ToC should normally show several change pathways and the results framework present the role of the project within the ToC. As such, the outputs (and activities) should be presented in the results framework and not the ToC, whereas assumptions and risks may be reflected in both documents.
- The indicators in the results framework are formulated as outcome statements and are generic and mainly qualitative in nature – while the targets are quantitative and output-oriented (i.e. reflecting the number of grants rather than their contribution to the outcomes).

- The assumptions defined in the results framework do not reflect actual (necessary) conditions for the realisation of outcomes but rather an ideal situation
- There is no baseline data in the results matrix. What is entitled baseline is sources of data.

Project monitoring focuses on individual grants, rather than the grant portfolio or Hub as a whole. As per the guidelines for monitoring and contracts signed, grantees are required to submit narrative and financial reports in a standard format. When external experts are used, they are also required to submit their own mission reports. Local monitors have been assigned by BCSDN members to monitor progress on the ground. This has mainly been done by reviewing/verifying grantees' narrative and financial reports and ensuring that they meet the contractual obligations. A final check of the reports is conducted by the EO (the financial reports are also subject to an independent audit). The reporting to Sida is structured according to project components/objectives (not by results), and does not including information on the progress made against baselines or achievement of targets.

The project has been extensively and excessively evaluated. The evaluations have informed decision-making but the status of some recommendations is not clear. BCSDN conducted a first mid-term evaluation of the project already in early 2020, mainly to assess the institutional set-up of the Hub and the regranting mechanism. Later the same year, Sida commissioned an internal control assessment. This was followed by another mid-term project evaluation, which was completed in early 2022.

The first mid-term evaluation in 2020 provided one significant recommendation – that BCSDN and its members should develop a Hub strategy and a more detailed ToC, both of which was done. The second mid-term evaluation included a more extensive set of recommendations, including to:

- Address the imbalance in the grant portfolio towards the first objective (enabling environment), such as by separating the outcomes more clearly and add evaluation criteria specifically focusing on transparency and accountability;
- Strengthen the role of local monitors, including through capacity building and by stimulating exchange of experiences;
- Extend the implementation period for regional grants;
- Speed up the processing of ad-hoc grants;
- Establish a stand-alone webpage containing all the information on the regranting mechanism/open calls;
- Reconsider the restriction prohibiting grantees from participating in both the call for regional grants and the call for ad-hoc grants.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Evaluation Report on the Project "Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub". No author (undated).

Interviews indicate that BCSDN is well aware of these recommendations and have acted to implement the last three. Since the mid-term evaluation was only completed after the second call for regional grants was issued, the recommendations pertaining to the regional grants remain outstanding. According to BCSDN's management response to the internal control assessment, almost all recommendations had been implemented/completed by March 2022.

Learning has been promoted but not to the extent envisaged in the initial project outline. As indicated above, the evaluations have informed decision-making on adjustments in project implementation and procedures. Dissemination seminars have been organised with project stakeholders to share the findings and recommendations of evaluation for joint reflection, and to agree on changes to be made. The initial project proposal also includes plans for other learning events and to identify learning objectives, conduct case studies of grants for wider learning, and explore the scope for replication of successful initiatives and scaling up of innovations. It also envisages that an evaluation consultant will be contracted at the beginning of the project for on-going evaluation (development evaluation). These latter plans are in line with good practice for promoting learning but have not been implemented.

4.5 IMPACT

The impact criterion addresses the extent of high-level effects to which an intervention has contributed, or is expected to contribute to in the long-term. As agreed during inception, this criterion is only briefly assessed in this evaluation given the relatively short project duration.

The Regional Hub project can be said to have contributed to CSO policy influence and regional cooperation to some extent, but not to more resilient CSOs and networks. As defined in the reconstructed ToC, the desired impact of the Regional Hub project is “enhanced CSO cooperation, resilience and policy influence across the region”. This statement reflects the overall vision for the project and, according to the ToC logic, changes at this level is contingent on significant advances having been made towards the two intermediate outcomes, i.e. “policy and legal change promoting /protecting civic space” and “more effective, transparent and accountable CSOs”.

With regard to the first intermediate outcome, as elaborated on in section 4.4.1, it is clear that the regional grants have contributed to evidence-based advocacy for civic space, and, in a few cases, the proposals of network members have been considered by lawmakers. A few of the ad-hoc grants were also found to have influenced the policy and law-making process. More significantly perhaps, BCSDN members, capitalising on the Monitoring Matrix reports, have led advocacy efforts resulting in changes in laws or the withdrawal of amendments that would have reduced civic space. While these examples indicate that the project has contributed to CSO policy influence, the extent of this influence is not easily gauged. All of the examples are relatively recent and the implications of any changes in policies and laws are yet to be seen or studied. No significant change has been detected towards the second intended outcome since

very few grants have been explicitly focused on transparency and accountability mechanisms, and BCSDN's own work on this topic has mainly been pursued through other projects.

According to the on-line survey among the recipients of the regional grants, a majority of the respondents perceive that their projects have contributed to “building sustained regional cooperation in addressing the discrepancies and bottlenecks of civil society development in the region”. The interviews with grantees convey a more nuanced picture, indicating that the grants have given a boost to cooperation between network members, but not necessarily contributed to more resilient networks. In general, CSO networks have limited funding opportunities and tend to be uniquely dependent on mostly short-term project grants. This is a situation that the Regional Hub project has cemented rather than remedied. As indicated by the interviews, in-between donor-funded projects, most networks tend to maintain communication but are often not in a position to pursue any joint initiatives.

4.6 SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability criterion is essentially about the extent to which an intervention generates lasting change over time. As with the impact criterion, sustainability is difficult to assess when a project is still on-going or has recently been completed, although some signs can be detected.

Project sustainability is most clearly reflected in the cases where it has contributed to changes in policies and laws. Many of the deliverables are also likely to be of future benefit to the grantees although several networks lack funding. In general, it can be assumed that the changes to policies and laws that the BCSDN members and grantees have contributed to are relatively sustainable, although experience shows that policies and laws are regularly challenged in the region, especially at times of political turbulence and change. In other respects, the sustainability of results is more uncertain. Interview with grantees suggest that there is a strong will to continue the efforts initiated with the BCSDN grant, and capitalise on the deliverables produced. The following are some examples in this regard:

- As part of the regional project implemented by the Safejournalists a joint declaration was signed by parliamentarians that sets the scene for continued dialogue with CSOs focusing on media freedom and journalist' safety. Within the same project, a MoU between CSOs was also signed that outlines the direction for further cooperation.
- The certification services promoted as part of the grant to ConWeb whereby the network members in Serbia and Montenegro developed new products that will be offered on the market, contributing to their recognition and financial sustainability (as companies have to pay for the certificates).
- The communication materials and channels (brochures, website, social media) developed as part of the grants to BNLD and SIGN, which will continue to be used at no additional cost.

Nevertheless, the sustainability of results achieved with the grants is to a large extent dependent on the success of grantees in securing new funding. According to interviews, two of the networks had obtained multi-year grants through the EU CSF call for proposals, while others have been successful in the same quest. In fact, several of the networks had no funds for regional activities once the BCSDN grant had been exhausted. A common sentiment is that the grant period was too short to establish conditions for sustainability, even with the extension of five months granted through second (restricted) call.

BCSDN is a well-established network and the Monitoring Matrix report a core product that will continue to be prepared by its members. Regional activities, including regranting, remain unduly dependent on Sida funding With regard to the sustainability of BCSDN and its other work, it is reasonable to expect that BCSDN members will continue to exercise policy influence with support of other projects using the Monitoring Matrix reports as a stepping stone. All of the interviewed BCSDN members expressed their commitment to this end. It is noted that the Monitoring Matrix reports have been produced for more than a decade and are considered a core activity by all members. However, the continuation of the regranting at the regional level is contingent of continued Sida support since no other funds have been raised for this purpose. The dependence on Sida funding extends also to other regional activities. As shown by BCSDN's financial statement for 2021⁴⁶, income from Sida (from two projects) was equivalent to 54 percent of all income (not counting funds carried over from the previous year). The dependence on Sida was also noted in the internal control assessment conducted in 2020, which recommended BCSDN to develop a fundraising strategy to diversify its funding base. This is one of the recommendations that have not yet been acted upon.

4.7 SIDA'S PERSPECTIVES AND OTHER CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

According to the policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, Sida's contributions should be grounded in several "perspectives". The ToR for the evaluation pays particular attention to the gender equality perspective, the poverty perspective and environment and climate perspective. It also calls for an assessment of project transparency and accountability mechanism.

4.7.1 Gender equality, environment/climate and poverty

The gender and environment perspectives were to some extent considered in project design while the poverty perspective was entirely neglected. Generally, the need for and ways of integrating different perspectives do not seem to be well-

46 Figures on income sources in 2022 were not available at the time of the evaluation.

understood among project stakeholders. The initial project proposal conveys a commitment to give special attention to the aspects of environment and gender equality, in line with Sida's priorities. It states that the environment perspective will be considered in the management of the Hub and all of its activities, including the grant projects, which are expected to demonstrate environmental awareness and outline possible environmental effects or benefits. A similar approach is to be applied to promoting gender equality, according to the project proposal, noting that grantees will also be required to submit gender disaggregated data (the project's own results framework do not include any gender-specific indicators). The environment and gender equality perspectives are expected to be mainstreamed in the ad-hoc grants. No reference is made to the poverty perspective.

In the guidelines for applicants to regional grants an evaluation grid is presented that gives extra points to any proposal that contains "specific added-value elements", including (but not limited to) environmental issues and the promotion of gender equality.⁴⁷ No similar scoring information is provided in the call for proposals for ad-hoc grants support.

Both the on-line surveys and the desk review form used by the evaluation team included questions about the perspectives. A majority of the respondents (13 of 22 and 16 of 25) among regional grantees and ad-hoc support grantees answered that they had addressed the gender perspective in their projects to a "high" or "very high" extent. A majority of the regional grantees answered that the environment/climate change perspective had not been addressed at all, while the poverty perspective, on average, was addressed to a "slight" extent. The responses regarding the integration of the environment and poverty perspectives among the ad-hoc support grantees varied considerably.

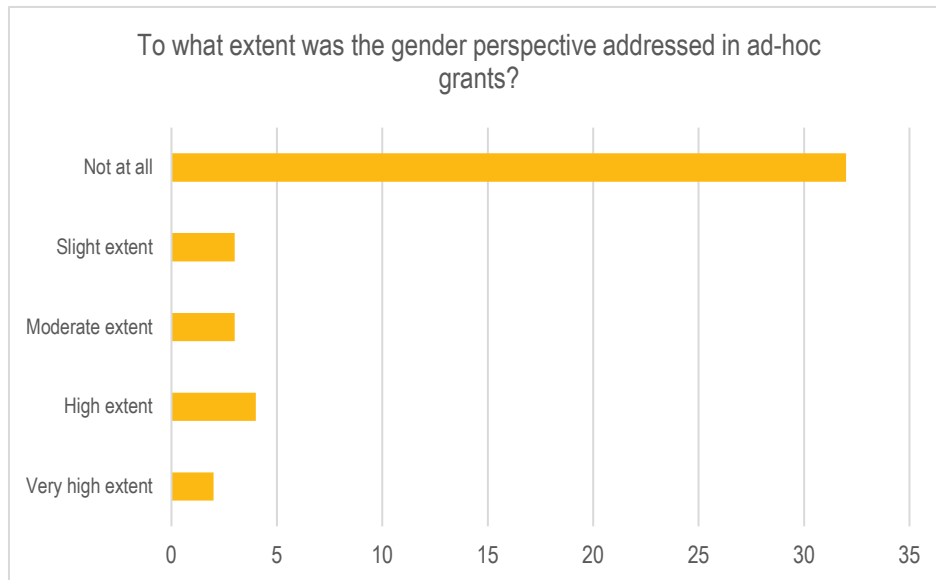
The analysis based on the desk review shows that, on average, the gender perspective was only addressed to a "slight extent" by the regional grant recipient and in a majority of cases (28 of 45 grants) "not at all" by the ad-hoc grant support recipients. Very few regional grants and ad-hoc grants were found to have addressed the environment/climate perspective and the poverty perspective.

The significant discrepancy between the on-line survey responses and desk review analysis can, as in other similar cases, be explained by differences in understanding of what "mainstreaming" means and/or by response bias. As revealed by the desk review, many grant applications included references to the perspectives, while very few of the final reports did. This indicates that the perspectives may have been "forgotten" or neglected somewhere along the way. It is also noted that the grants that did indeed address the perspectives did so through targeted efforts (e.g. support for the protection of environmental organisations and activist, mapping of environmental legislation,

47Restricted Call for Project Proposals. Regional grants. Second call 2022. BCSDN (undated).

policy advocacy with a focus on children and youth at risk, etc.) rather than through integration or dialogue.

Figure 6. The gender perspective in ad-hoc grants



Source: Grant applications and reports (ad-hoc grants)

With regard to BCSDN and its members own work, the evaluation team has screened the Monitoring Matrix methodology and reports for references to the perspectives. The methodology (Monitoring Matrix toolkit) includes 150+ indicators only one of which is gender-sensitive⁴⁸. No indicator relates to the environment/climate perspective or the poverty perspective. The most recently published regional Monitoring Matrix report (for 2021) and national reports only mentions gender equality in passing (mostly in relation to gender-based violence) or in very generic terms, and do not recognise the poverty perspective at all. The environment perspective is addressed in the sense that environmental legislation and related advocacy is referenced to in several contexts. There are no references to the perspectives in the methodology for monitoring CSO capacities.

4.7.2 Accountability and transparency

Due consideration has been given to accountability and transparency principles and mechanisms during project development and implementation. With regard to transparency and accountability, it is noted that the project was designed in a participatory manner including BCSDN members and key decisions were taken by the BCSDN board, where members are also represented. The themes of the open calls were identified based on the Monitoring Matrix reports that are informed by interviews and

⁴⁸ "The legal framework allows both individual and legal persons to exercise the right to association without discrimination (age, nationality, legal capacity, gender etc.)."

surveys among CSOs across the region and which constitute the target group for the grants. The Regional Hub has a dedicated space on BCSDN's website where information about the grants is posted, including guidelines for applicants and an account of awarded grants. As part of the most recent project extension, the website is being further developed to make monitoring data and other resources more accessible. The information provided to prospective applicants is generally comprehensive. In the case of the regional grants it includes details on how the applications are evaluated and scored, as well as how to appeal in case of rejection. There is no information suggesting that non-discrimination aspects have been considered, however.

5 Conclusions

This concluding section of the report attempts to answer the key evaluation questions posed in the ToR, while also highlighting other issues that should be considered in the event that Sida extends its support to BCSDN.

Relevance

The evaluation has shown that the project has been relevant to the regional context for civil society development and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans. Project objectives and priorities are evidence-based and the regional approach well-justified in view of the countries' common characteristics and challenges, the proven benefits of peer-to-peer collaboration, and the potential leverage that networks can gain in the policy dialogue.

Moreover, the project has reached out to a broad target group and covered a wide spectrum of issues of relevance to the enabling environment, answering to the needs and priorities of grantees. Adjustments have been made in response to new and emerging issues and a flexible approach has been adopted to accommodate the requests of grantees.

Coherence

The project has emerged through global and regional partnerships and cooperation, building on the work of other key actors influencing the civic space and CSO accountability agenda. As some grantees have used the BCSDN grants as co-funding of much larger projects, the Fund has to some extent complemented other regional funding mechanisms, although not in a premeditated manner.

Sida's decision to support BCSDN is aligned with consecutive Swedish regional strategies, which share the concerns related to shrinking civic space and lack of accountability. Potential linkages between the support to BCSDN and Sida's civil society portfolio at the country level may need to be further explored, to maximise the contributions towards higher-level outcomes. In many ways, the project offers a perfect fit with the Guiding Principles for Sida's engagement with and support to civil society, and the DAC Recommendation on civil society.

Efficiency

The establishment and operationalisation of the Fund proved to be more resource-intensive than expected, which created initial delays. However, project implementation has since picked up considerably. Even though additional costs incurred through budget revisions and amendments appear well-justified, it could arguably have been more cost-

efficient to delegate the Fund to one of BCSDN's members that already had the capacity and systems in place for regranting. On the other hand, this might have affected the regional relevance of the project. At any rate, the resources invested in the selection and management of ad-hoc grants do not seem to be proportional to the size of the grants.

As confirmed by grantees, BCSDN's Executive Office (EO) today has adequate capacity and systems in place to continue hosting the Fund. Grantees appreciate the simple application and reporting procedures and the cooperation with BCSDN overall. At the same time, a common opinion is that the size of the regional grants and the activity periods are inadequate, and that the time for reporting was not enough.

Effectiveness

There is evidence showing that change has occurred in relation to three of four immediate outcomes – i.e. evidence-based advocacy for civic space, increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment, and increased regional cooperation for civic space. The regional grants to Safejournalists, SEENET and BELhospice stand out as particularly successful to this end, but contributions are also identified among the ad-hoc grants. Capitalising on the national Monitoring Matrix reports, BCSDN members have significantly contributed to evidence-based advocacy.

With regard to the intermediate outcomes, the evaluation indicates that policy and legal change has been achieved to a varying extent across the region. Examples of direct and indirect contributions *towards* such change can be found in all six countries. No evidence has been found that the project has contributed to more effective, transparent and accountable CSOs in any significant way. Contrary to what is reflected in the ToC, global accountability standards and practices have primarily been shared through other projects.

The project MEL system is generally not comprehensive enough – or sufficiently operationalised – to deliver robust and useful information that can be used to assess the achievement of outcomes. While prior evaluations have informed decision-making on project adjustments, learning has not been promoted to the extent envisaged in the initial project proposal.

Impact and sustainability

Given the nature of the project and relatively short implementation period it is not reasonable to expect significant change at the impact level. Nevertheless, the project is deemed to have contributed to CSO policy influence and regional cooperation to some extent.

The prospects for sustainability are best in the cases where legal changes have occurred. Although the regional grants have given a boost to regional cooperation, they have not contributed to more resilient networks. The latter would have required a stronger focus on capacity development, including institutional strengthening. BCSDN's monitoring

of the enabling environment will continue beyond the end of the project but the regranting remains unduly dependent on Sida funding.

Sida's perspectives and cross-cutting issues

The gender and environment perspectives were to some extent considered in project design while the poverty perspective was entirely neglected. In general, the need for, and ways of, integrating Sida perspectives do not seem to be well understood among grantees, let alone by BCSDN and its members. On a more positive note, the project has been implemented in a transparent fashion and accountability mechanisms have been properly established.

6 Recommendations

The following recommendations are directly linked to the conclusions and findings of the evaluation, as presented in the foregoing sections.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS TO BCSDN

1. BCSDN should review its strategic plan to validate and possibly further develop the network's ToC, and as part of this exercise clarify the role and contribution of the Fund. Specific attention should be given to BCSDN's comparative advantage and strategic niche in terms of regranting (vis-à-vis other regranting mechanisms); linkages between national-level and regional regranting, and; the resourcing of future regranting (to decrease dependence on Sida support).
2. BCSDN should develop indicators for its strategic plan and ensure that the objectives and priority themes of any future regional regranting is linked with those indicators. Grantees should be requested to report to BCSDN on a set of joint indicators. This would allow for aggregation of contribution data and analysis of progress at the portfolio level.
3. BCSDN should carefully reflect on what type of grants should be provided in the future. The evaluation team is not convinced that the ad-hoc grants should be continued as many of these grants have lacked a regional dimension. An alternative to discontinuing the ad-hoc grants altogether could be to transfer the management responsibility to BCSDN's members. This would possibly also make the grant management process less resource-intensive since there would be no need for a Steering Group or Task Force Group. In any case, more stringent evaluation procedures are called for to ensure that ad-hoc grants are used for the intended purposes.
4. BCSDN should increase the size of regional grants and extend the activity period to at least two-three years, to ensure better conditions for grantees to contribute to higher-level outcomes. In this connection, BCSDN should also consider whether regional grants should be awarded based on open calls or through direct selection. The latter would put BCSDN in a better position to promote strategic partnerships and focus its resources on the most relevant CSO networks. Regional grants, rather than the ad-hoc grants, could also be used to promote innovation.
5. BCSDN should complement the regional grants with capacity development. This may entail general awareness raising, tailored training and mentoring, and learning events for grantees to share experiences and good practices. The focus should arguably be on strengthening CSO accountability and transparency, given the

limited progress that has been made to this end. Training and mentoring may also be warranted to ensure that different perspectives (e.g. gender, environment/climate, poverty) are well understood and applied.

6. BCSDN should encourage its members to develop communication/advocacy plans for national Monitoring Matrix reports, and prepare a similar plan for the regional Monitoring Matrix report (with a focus on advocacy at the EU level). This could help to ensure a more proactive approach to countering the prevailing narrative on civil society, both nationally and regionally.
7. BCSDN should, as part of the overall review of the Monitoring Matrix methodology, consider introducing perspective-sensitive indicators. The same should be considered for the new methodology for monitoring CSO capacities as well as BCSDN's strategic plan.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO SIDA

1. Sida should consider continued support to BCSDN with a view to further strengthen regional advocacy and cooperation for civic space and CSO accountability. This would be highly justified in light of the intentions conveyed by the current regional strategy for reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey and contribute to the implementation of Sida's Guiding Principles as well as the DAC Recommendation on civil society.
2. In the event that further support is agreed on, Sida should shift from short-term project funding to long-term core funding. The 2020 internal control assessment shows that BCSDN has the capacity to handle such funding given that the implementation of the recommendations from this assessment can be verified. In line with good practice, the core funding should be anchored in BCSDN's (revised) strategic plan.
3. Sida should, together with BCSDN, consult with other BCSDN donors on how to best pool resources to avoid overlaps and promote synergies. Consideration should also be given to ways of rationalise Sida's own support given that BCSDN, until recently, received Sida funding through three different projects (the other two projects being the ones with CPDE and the Global Standard for CSO Accountability). It would be pertinent to avoid a situation in the future where BCSDN is funded by Sida through several projects, especially if core funding is granted through the regional project.
4. Sida should consider or organising a training for BCSDN EO and members on the "Sida perspectives", with a particular focus on gender equality, environment/climate change and poverty. Subsequently, Sida should ensure that the perspectives are carefully analysed by BCSDN as part of the development of a new project and/or a revised strategic plan. This analysis should inform how the perspectives can be applied, i.e. through integration, targeted efforts and/or dialogue.

5. Sida should ensure that Swedish embassies in the region are informed of any future contribution to BCSDN and encourage contacts with national BCSDN members to explore complementarities and the wider use of the Monitoring Matrix reports. Sida may also consider to set up an informal working group through which Sida and embassy staff could share and reflect on experiences and good practices of promoting civic space and civil society development in the region.

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of Sida Support to Balkan Civil Society Development Network, 2019-2022

Date: 3 November 2022

1. General information

1.1 Introduction

In many countries in the WBT-region, the space of civil society is shrinking. The environment for CSOs has been deteriorating during several years. The civil society is not always acknowledged as a transformative part of society, decision makers have a tendency to neglect the role of civil society and the population in general sometimes has a weak understanding of the function of civil society. In spite of this civil society continues to persistently promote e.g. participation, inclusion, non-discrimination, empowerment, advocacy, watch-dogging and implements complementary programs/projects with a focus on service delivery.

Sweden has a new strategy for reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for the period 2021-2027. In line with the previous strategy, strategic collaboration with civil society continues to be central in the current strategy. Support to civil society promoting the respect for democracy, contributing to increased trust and improving conditions for accountability is specifically defined in the strategy. Priority will be given to helping build resilience to anti-democratic influences.

Sweden's support to civil society is long term and different modalities – project-, program- and core support – are being used. Sweden is also contributing at a policy-level by emphasising the global role of civil society to promote accountability both internally and externally. Both the Global Standard on CSO Accountability and the OECD/DAC recommendation on enabling civil society in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, constitute important guiding instruments.

1.2 Evaluation object: Intervention to be evaluated

The project “Promoting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub”, carried out by Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) aims at establishing a regional civil society development hub to enhance the cooperation and resilience of civil society organizations in the Western Balkan countries by connecting and empowering them in innovative uptakes of the enabling environment and their practices of accountability. To achieve the project aim, the following objectives have been identified:

- To contribute to a conducive environment for civil society development that enables CSO's to be influential actors in society.
- To support effective, transparent, and accountable CSOs that contribute to protecting civic space.
- To strengthen regional cooperation for promoting civic space through the Civil Society Development Fund.

The project is being implemented by BCSDN's Executive Office in Skopje, North Macedonia with the support of its six Western Balkan members:

- MCIC – Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, Republic of North Macedonia
- CI – Civic Initiatives, Serbia
- CPCD – Centre for Promotion of Civil Society, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- CRNVO – Centre for Development of Non-Governmental Organizations, Montenegro
- Partners Albania for Change and Development, Albania
- KCSF – Kosovar Civil Society Foundation, Kosovo

The agreement between Sida and BCSDN was entered 2019-09-01 and is valid until 2023-07-31. Three amendments have been made to the agreement, the latest one including decision on additional funding, is valid since 2022-02-28.

1.3 Evaluation rationale

The activity period within current agreement will come to an end on 31 December 2022, with a possible extension during the first six months of 2023.

In order to have a continued and improved understanding of the development of the contribution and improvements that could be made, Sida has decided – in line with discussions with BCSDN – to carry out an external evaluation of the project.

A delayed mid-term evaluation was carried out during the fall of 2021. The mid-term evaluation and this upcoming external evaluation, will constitute a well-founded base for both BCSDN and for Sida, to take decisions on future steps.

2. The assignment

2.1 Evaluation purpose: Intended use and intended users

As stipulated in the agreement between BCSDN and Sida, an external evaluation should be made at the end of the agreement period. The focus shall be on the results achieved by the project and the functioning of the fund.

It is expected that the evaluation should provide Sida with input to upcoming discussions concerning the strategic support to civil society organisations in the Western Balkans in general, and more specifically how the collaboration with Balkan

Civil Society Development Network, could be further developed during a possible next phase of support.

The evaluation should also provide BCSDN with additional input regarding how improvements can be made in relation to the work of the BCSDN hub and the fund.

The evaluation is to be designed, conducted, and reported to meet the needs of the intended user and tenderers shall elaborate in the tender how this will be ensured during the evaluation process.

2.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation will include the entire period of the intervention to the date of the evaluation mission and if needed, the scope of the evaluation may be further elaborated by the evaluator in the inception report.

2.3 Evaluation objective: Criteria and questions

The objective of this evaluation is:

- Evaluate the intervention “Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub” and formulate recommendations as an input to upcoming discussions concerning the preparation for possible continued support to regional civil society promotion in the Western Balkans.

The evaluation questions are:

Relevance:

- How has the project addressed the relevant needs in the region regarding civil society? Have new, more relevant needs emerged and how has the intervention addressed them?
- How relevant is the project to the target groups?
- To what extent has the project contributed to shaping and/or improving the situation for civil society organisations in the Western Balkans?

Coherence:

- How coherent has the design and the implementation of the contribution been in relation to the challenges of civil society in the Western Balkans?
- To what extent has the contribution contributed to cross-border collaboration and integration?
- In what way has the intervention’s design and implementation considered the work of other actors working in the same area? To what extent has BCSDN coordinated effectively and created synergies in their work?

Effectiveness:

- To what extent has the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups?
- Has the M&E system delivered robust and useful information that could be used to assess progress towards outcomes and contribute to learning?
- What are the partners' suggestions for changes to the programme structure to achieve better results and efficiency?

Efficiency:

- To what extent has the intervention delivered, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way?
- Is the BCSDN management team adequately resourced to enable the achievement of desired outcomes?

Impact:

- To what extent has the project or programme generated, or is expected to generate, significant positive or negative, intended, or unintended, high-level effects?

Sustainability:

- To what extent will the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue over time and after the end of the agreement period?

Other questions:

- Has the project contributed to poverty reduction? If so: which dimensions of poverty were addressed by the project?
- Has the project considered environment and climate aspects? If so, in what way and with what scope and results?
- Has the project been implemented in a transparent fashion? Are there accountability mechanisms included in the project? Has the project considered non-discrimination aspects?
- What are the key lessons learned?

Questions are expected to be developed in the tender by the tenderer and further refined during the inception phase of the evaluation.

2.4 Evaluation approach and methods

It is expected that the evaluator describes and justifies an appropriate evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection in the tender. The evaluation design, methodology and methods for data collection and analysis are expected to be fully developed and presented in the inception report.

A *gender-responsive* approach/methodology, methods, tools, and data analysis techniques should be used⁴⁹.

Sida's approach to evaluation is *utilization-focused*, which means the evaluator should facilitate the *entire evaluation process* with careful consideration of how everything that is done will affect the use of the evaluation. It is therefore expected that the evaluators, in their tender, present i) how intended users are to participate in and contribute to the evaluation process and ii) methodology and methods for data collection that create space for reflection, discussion and learning.

In cases where sensitive or confidential issues are to be addressed in the evaluation, evaluators should ensure an evaluation design that do not put informants and stakeholders at risk during the data collection phase or the dissemination phase.

2.5 Organisation of evaluation management

The evaluation is commissioned by the EUROLATIN department at Sida in Stockholm. The intended user is Sida in Stockholm. However it's also expected that BCSDN will find the recommendations to be useful when further developing the future work of the BCSDN regional hub. BCSDN has been given the opportunity to contribute to the ToR and have provided input. BCSDN will also be provided with an opportunity to comment on the inception report as well as the final report but will not be involved in the management of the evaluation. Hence the commissioner will evaluate tenders, approve the inception report and the final report of the evaluation. The start-up meeting and the debriefing/validation workshop will be held with the commissioner only.

2.6 Evaluation quality

All Sida's evaluations shall conform to OECD/DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation⁵⁰. The evaluators shall use the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation⁵¹ and the OECD/DAC Better Criteria for Better Evaluation⁵². The evaluators shall specify how quality assurance will be handled by them during the evaluation process.

⁴⁹ See for example UNEG United Nations Evaluation Group (2014) Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations <http://uneval.org/document/detail/1616>

⁵⁰ OECD/DAC (2010) Quality Standards for Development Evaluation.

⁵¹ Sida OECD/DAC (2014) Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.

⁵² OECD/DAC (2019) Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use.

2.7 Time schedule and deliverables

It is expected that a time and work plan is presented in the tender and further detailed in the inception report.

It is expected that a field visit to one or preferably two of the countries members of the BCSDN will take place. North Macedonia should be one of the countries.

The table below lists key deliverables for the evaluation process. Deadlines for deliverables have not been defined at this point. Sida requests the evaluation process to be carried out as soon as possible. Deadlines for deliverables may be suggested by the consultant and negotiated during the inception phase.

Deliverables	Participants	Deadlines
1. Start-up meetings/virtual meetings.	EUROLATIN	
2. Draft inception report/virtual meeting		
3. Inception meeting (comments to be sent before the meeting)	EUROLATIN and BCSDN	
4. Data collection, analysis, report writing and quality assurance	Evaluators	
5. Debriefing/validation workshop (meeting)	EUROLATIN and BCSDN	
6. Draft evaluation report		
7. Comments from intended users to evaluators	EUROLATIN coordinates input given from BCSDN	
8. Final evaluation report		

The inception report will form the basis for the continued evaluation process and shall be approved by Sida before the evaluation proceeds to implementation. The inception report should be written in English and cover evaluability issues and interpretations of evaluation questions, present the evaluation approach/methodology *including how a utilization-focused and gender-responsive approach will be ensured*, methods for data collection and analysis as well as the full evaluation design, including an *evaluation matrix* and a *stakeholder mapping/analysis*. A clear distinction between the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection shall be made. All limitations to the methodology and methods shall be made explicit and the consequences of these limitations discussed.

A specific time and work plan, including number of hours/working days for each team member, for the remainder of the evaluation should be presented.

The final report shall be written in English and be professionally proofread. The final report should have clear structure and follow the layout format of Sida's template for decentralised evaluations. The executive summary should be maximum 3 pages.

The report shall clearly and in detail describe the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection and analysis and make a clear distinction between the two. The report shall describe how the utilization-focused approach has been implemented i.e. how intended users have participated in and contributed to the evaluation process and how methodology and methods for data collection have created space for reflection, discussion and learning between the intended users. Furthermore, the gender-responsive approach shall be described and reflected in the findings, conclusions, and recommendations along with other identified and relevant cross-cutting issues. Limitations to the methodology and methods and the consequences of these limitations for findings and conclusions shall be described.

Evaluation findings shall flow logically from the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions should be substantiated by findings and analysis. Evaluation questions shall be clearly stated and answered in the executive summary and in the conclusions. Recommendations and lessons learned should flow logically from conclusions and be specific, directed to relevant intended users and categorised as a short-term, medium-term, and long-term.

The report should have a maximum of 35 pages excluding annexes. If the methods section is extensive, it could be placed in an annex to the report. Annexes shall always include the Terms of Reference, the Inception Report, the stakeholder mapping/analysis, and the Evaluation Matrix. Lists of key informants/interviewees shall only include personal data if deemed relevant (i.e. when it is contributing to the credibility of the evaluation) based on a case-based assessment by the evaluator and the commissioning unit/embassy. The inclusion of personal data in the report must always be based on a written consent.

The evaluator shall adhere to the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation⁵³.

The evaluator shall, upon approval by Sida/Embassy of the final report, insert the report into Sida's template for decentralised evaluations (see Annex C) and submit it to Nordic Morning (in pdf-format) for publication and release in the Sida publication database. The order is placed by sending the approved report to Nordic Morning (sida@atta45.se), with a copy to the responsible Sida Programme Officer as well as Sida's Evaluation Unit (evaluation@sida.se). Write "Sida decentralised evaluations" in

⁵³ Sida OECD/DAC (2014) Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.

the email subject field. The following information must always be included in the order to Nordic Morning:

1. The name of the consulting company.
2. The full evaluation title.
3. The invoice reference “ZZ980601”.
4. Type of allocation: "sakanslag".
5. Type of order: "digital publicering/publikationsdatabas.

2.8 Evaluation team qualification

In addition to the qualifications already stated in the framework agreement for evaluation services, the evaluation team shall include the following competencies: experience in evaluating similar interventions targeting civil society development in the Western Balkans, the enabling environment but also the shrinking space of the civil society.

It is highly desirable that the evaluation team includes the following competencies: A good understanding of Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), gender equality, CSO Accountability and the OECD/DAC recommendation on civil society.

A CV for each team member shall be included in the call-off response. It should contain a full description of relevant qualifications and professional work experience.

It is important that the competencies of the individual team members are complimentary. It is recommended that a local evaluation consultant is included in the team, as they often have contextual knowledge that is of great value to the evaluation.

The evaluators must be independent from the evaluation object and evaluated activities and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

Please note that in the tender, the tenderers must propose a team leader that takes part in the evaluation by at least 30% of the total evaluation team time including core team members, specialists and all support functions, but excluding time for the quality assurance expert.

2.9 Financial and human resources

The maximum budget amount available for the evaluation is 750 000 SEK.

Invoicing and payment shall be managed according to the following:

After the approval of the final report.

The contact person at EUROLATIN Department at Sida is Birgitta Jansson (birgitta.jansson@sida.se) The contact person should be consulted if any problems arise during the evaluation process.

Relevant Sida documentation will be provided by the responsible Programme Officer at Sida and BCSDN will provide additional documentation. Sida and BCSDN will provide suggestions for the stakeholders to be interviewed and provide contact information.

The evaluator will be required to arrange the logistics including any necessary security arrangements.

3. Annexes

Annex A: List of key documentation

- Outline project proposal – Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub, 2019-05-07
- Evaluation report on the project (Mid-term evaluation) 2022-02

Annex B: Data sheet on the evaluation object

Information on the evaluation object (i.e. intervention)	
Title of the evaluation object	Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub”
ID no. in PLANIt	12715
Dox no./Archive case no.	18/001082
Activity period (if applicable)	2019-09-01 – 2022-12-31
Agreed budget (if applicable)	22 000 000 SEK
Main sector	Democracy and Human Rights
Name and type of implementing organisation	BCSDN
Aid type	Project Support
Swedish strategy	Strategy for Sweden’s Reform Cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2027

Information on the evaluation assignment	
Commissioning unit/Swedish Embassy	EUROLATIN, Sida
Contact person at unit/Swedish Embassy	Birgitta Jansson
Timing of evaluation (mid-term, end-of-programme, ex-post, or other)	Near end of project

Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation criteria and questions from ToR	Refined questions and sub-questions	Data collection methods	Data sources
Relevance: Is the intervention doing the right thing? - How has the project addressed the relevant needs in the region regarding civil society? Have new, more relevant needs emerged and how has the intervention addressed them? - How relevant is the project to the target groups? (To what extent has the project contributed to shaping and/or improving the situation for civil society organisations in the Western Balkans)⁵⁴	- How well does the project align with the findings of the BCSDN's regional monitoring of the environment for civil society development and similar external analysis? To what extent is it addressing the findings related to CSO capacities? - What is the perceived value-added of the regional approach? What other funding is available for regional projects focusing on promoting civic space and CSO accountability? - What new developments and needs have occurred in the project context since 2019? Has the project responded to these developments and needs? How? - Has the project reached out to relevant networks and actors? If not, why? What networks and actors are underrepresented, if any?	- Desk review - Key informant interviews with: - BCSDN EO - BCSDN Board and Hub Steering Group - Hub Task Force Group - Subgrantees - Swedish embassy staff - Other stakeholders - On-line surveys of subgrantees	- BCSDN monitoring matrices - External situational analysis/studies on civic space and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans, e.g.: - EC country progress reports - EU FRA country reports on civic space - USAID CSO Sustainability Index reports - EU guidelines for civil society support - BCSDN progress reports to Sida - Subgrant applications and reports to the Hub

⁵⁴ This question fits better with the effectiveness and impact criteria and will be addressed in those contexts.

	• Have thematic priorities been aligned with subgrantee priorities and needs? What needs/priorities, if any, remain unaddressed or under-addressed? • Have gender dimensions been considered in project conceptualisation? Has a gender analysis been carried out? If so, has this analysis informed gender mainstreaming approaches?		• Basic data on awarded subgrants • Online survey reports • Interview notes
Coherence: How well does the intervention fit? • (How coherent has the design and the implementation of the contribution been in relation to the challenges of civil society in the Western Balkans?)⁵⁵ • (To what extent has the contribution contributed to cross-border collaboration and integration?)⁵⁶ • In what way has the intervention's design and implementation considered the work of other actors working in the same area? To what extent has BCSDN coordinated effectively and created synergies in their work?	• Are project objectives, approaches and messages consistent with the new Swedish regional strategy? How well does the project fit with other Swedish civil society support in the six countries? • To what extent is the project and Sida's contribution aligned with the OECD/DAC Recommendation on Civil Society? • Were strategic choices about project focus and scope made with due consideration to other relevant actors and initiatives? What dialogue and coordination has been pursued with such actors and initiatives? Have any synergies been created? • What internal synergies, if any, exist with other projects implemented by BCSDN and its members?	• Desk review • Key informant interviews with: ○ BCSDN EO ○ BCSDN Board and Hub Steering Group ○ Hub Task Force Group ○ Sida and embassy staff ○ Other stakeholders	• Strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2027 and Sida's strategy plans • OECD/DAC Recommendation on Civil Society • EU guidelines for civil society support • BCSDN project proposal and Hub Strategy 2019-2021 • BCSDN progress reports to Sida • Information on similar initiatives (Sida appraisal memos, project proposals, basic data on other donor-support projects) • Interview notes

⁵⁵ This question fits better with the relevance criterion and will be addressed in that context.

⁵⁶ This question fits better with the relevance and effectiveness criteria and will be addressed in those contexts.

Efficiency: How well are resources being used? • To what extent has the intervention delivered, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way? • Is the BCSDN management team adequately resourced to enable the achievement of desired outcomes?	• To what extent have activities and outputs been delivered as anticipated in work plans and budgets? What are the reasons for any delays or additional costs? • Is the distribution of costs reasonable considering the results achieved? Could outputs have been delivered with fewer resources without reducing their quality and quantity? • Have project governance and management structures and systems ensured timely decision-making? Have agreed roles and responsibilities been respected and performed in practice? • What is the experience and lessons from the subgrant arrangements, i.e.: ○ Organisation and announcement of open calls ○ Eligibility criteria ○ Grant periods and size ○ Application procedures ○ Evaluation and selection procedures ○ Reporting requirements	• Desk review • Key informant interviews with: ○ BCSDN EO ○ BCSDN Board and Hub Steering Group ○ Hub Task Force Group ○ Subgrantees • On-line surveys of subgrantees	• BCSDN project proposal and Hub Strategy 2019-2021 • Annual project budgets and work plans • BCSDN financial reports and progress reports to Sida • Audited financial statements • Internal manual of procedures for the Hub • Minutes of steering group and task force group meetings • Calls for proposals • On-line survey reports • Interview notes
Effectiveness: Is the intervention achieving its objectives? • To what extent has the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups? • Has the M&E system delivered robust and useful information that could be used to assess progress	• What significant changes, if any, have taken place in relation to the intermediary outcomes in the re-constructed ToC, i.e.: ○ Policies and laws for promoting/protecting civic space (regionally and in specific countries) ○ The effectiveness, transparency and accountability of CSOs (regionally and in specific countries) • What changes have taken place in terms of the immediate outcomes of the ToC, i.e.	• Desk review • Key informant interviews with: ○ BCSDN EO ○ BCSDN Board and Hub Steering Group ○ Hub Task Force Group ○ Subgrantees ○ Swedish embassy staff ○ Other stakeholders • On-line surveys of subgrantees	• BCSDN monitoring matrices • External situational analysis/studies on civic space and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans, e.g.: ○ EC country progress reports ○ EU FRA country reports on civic space ○ USAID CSO Sustainability Index reports

towards outcomes and contribute to learning? • (What are the partners' suggestions for changes to the programme structure to achieve better results and efficiency?)⁵⁷	○ Evidence-based advocacy for promoting civic space (regionally and in specific countries) ○ CSO understanding of an enabling environment (regionally and in specific countries) ○ Regional CSO cooperation for promoting civic space ○ The sharing of global accountability standards and good practices (regionally and in specific countries) • To what extent have the achievement of immediate outcomes contributed to the intermediary ones? What has been the contribution of other actors and initiatives? • To what extent have innovations (e.g. new ideas, solutions, new ways of working, etc.) been supported and realised? • What factors have facilitated/impeded the achievement of results? Have assumptions held true and any risks materialised? • Has the M&E system been properly set up and operationalised to capture outcome-level results? Does it provide sex-disaggregated data? Has project planning considered past results and lessons, including evaluation recommendations?		• BCSDN progress reports to Sida • Prior evaluations • Subgrant reports to the Hub • Online survey reports • Interview notes
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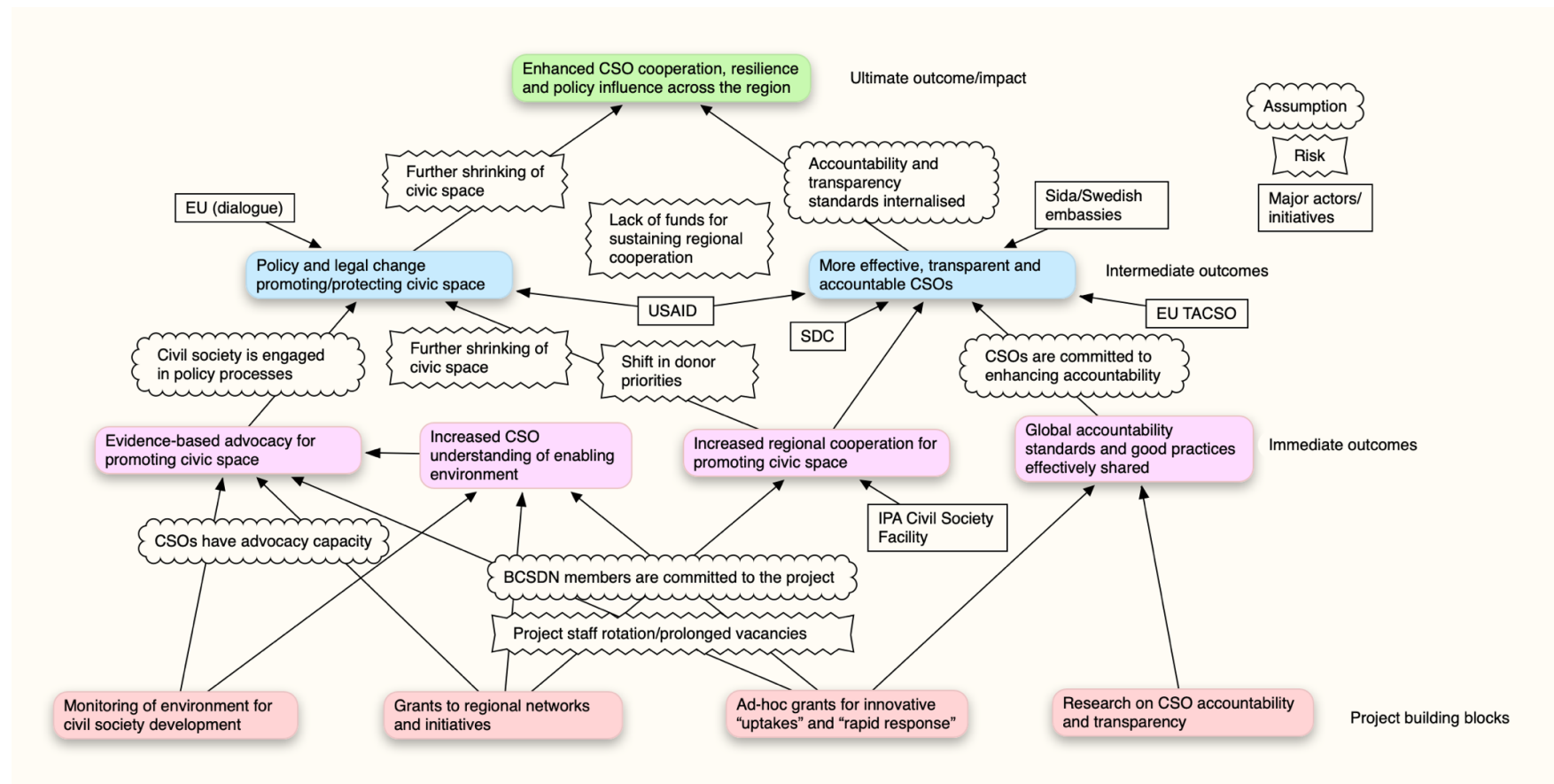
⁵⁷ This question fits better with the efficiency criterion and will be addressed in that context.

Impact: What difference does the intervention make? To what extent has the project or programme generated, or is expected to generate, significant positive or negative, intended, or unintended, high-level effects?	- Are there any signs of change in relation to the ultimate outcome/impact defined in the re-constructed ToC: - Enhanced cooperation, resilience and policy influence across the region - What factors and actors are contributing to change at this level? Is there any evidence of the project's contribution? - What unintended effects – both positive and negative – of the project can be detected? Has the project contributed to gender equality?	- Desk review - Key informant interviews with: - BCSDN EO - BCSDN Board and Hub Steering Group - Hub Task Force Group - Swedish embassy staff - Other stakeholders	- BCSDN monitoring matrices - External situational analysis/studies on civic space and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans, e.g.: - EC country progress reports - EU FRA country reports on civic space - USAID CSO Sustainability Index reports - BCSDN progress reports to Sida - Subgrant reports to the Hub - Interview notes
Sustainability: Will the benefits last? To what extent will the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue over time after the end of the agreement period?	- To what extent are the project outcomes likely to be sustainable? How sustainable are the regional networks? How sustainable is the Hub itself? To what extent have supported activities been internalised by BCSDN and its members? - What key factors contribute to sustainability or lack of sustainability? Has the project been designed in a way that promotes sustainable outcomes? - What can be improved? What could be done to decrease the reliance on Sida funding?	- Desk review - Key informant interviews with: - BCSDN EO - BCSDN Board and Hub Steering Group - Hub Task Force Group - Subgrantees - On-line surveys of subgrantees	- BCSDN monitoring matrices - External situational analysis/studies on civic space and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans, e.g.: - EC country progress reports - EU FRA country reports on civic space - USAID CSO Sustainability Index reports - BCSDN progress reports to Sida - Prior evaluations - Subgrant reports to the Hub - Online survey reports

			• Interview notes
Other questions: • Has the project contributed to poverty reduction? If so, what dimensions of poverty were addressed by the project? • Has the project considered environment and climate aspects? If so, in what way and with what scope and results? • Has the project been implemented in a transparent fashion? Are there accountability mechanisms? Have non-discrimination aspects been considered? • (What are the key lessons learnt?)⁵⁸	• Have cross-cutting perspectives – poverty, gender, and environment/climate – been considered during project design and implementation? To what extent have these cross-cutting perspectives been integrated or pursued through targeted efforts? Has any dialogue been conducted on the perspectives? What can be improved? • To what extent has the project itself adhered to basic transparency and accountability standards, e.g. in terms of: ○ Stakeholder engagement ○ Decision-making ○ Reporting and information disclosure ○ Grant management ○ Complaints mechanisms	• Desk review • Key informant interviews with: ○ BSCDN EO ○ Hub Steering Group ○ Hub Task Force Group ○ Subgrantees • On-line surveys of subgrantees	• BSCDN project proposal and Hub Strategy 2019-2021 • Annual project budgets and work plans • BSCDN progress reports to Sida • Internal manual of procedures for the hub • Calls for proposals • On-line survey reports • Interview notes

⁵⁸ This question will be addressed across different criteria and the answer will be summarised in a separate section of the evaluation report.

Annex 3: Theory of Change



Annex 4: Overview of Regional Grants

#	Name of the network	Name of lead organisation	Place of lead organisation	Project title 1st phase	Project title 2nd phase	Geographical scope of project
1	Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR)	Youth Initiative for Human Rights Serbia	Serbia	To Reconcile is To Reinforce	Mainstreaming Human Rights Practices	BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia
2	Informal network of organizations for improving the role of civil society in implementation of palliative care	Centre for palliative care and palliative medicine "BELhospice"	Serbia	Palliative Care- My Care, My Right	We care!	Serbia, Albania and Montenegro
3	ERA – LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey	ERA – LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey, Serbia	Serbia	Our region- our rights: Strengthening regional cooperation, resilience and sustainability of the LGBTI movement in Western Balkans	-	Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, BiH and Albania
4	Think for Europe Network (TEN)	Center for European Policy (CEP) – for the 1st phase	Serbia	Western Balkan Civil Society Empowerment for a	Western Balkan Civil Society Empowerment for a Reformed	Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia

ANNEX 4 – OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL GRANTS

#	Name of the network	Name of lead organisation	Place of lead organisation	Project title 1st phase	Project title 2nd phase	Geographical scope of project
		European Policy Institute (EPI) – for the 2nd phase	North Macedonia	Reformed Public Administration – WeBER 2.0	Public Administration – WeBER 2.0	North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania
5	Western Balkans Regional Platform for advocating media freedom and journalists' safety (Safejournalists)	Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM)	North Macedonia	Improving the dialogue between journalists' associations and parliaments in Western Balkans for stronger civil society sector	Improving the dialogue between journalists' associations and parliaments in Western Balkans for stronger civil society sector-phase II	North Macedonia, Serbia, BiH, Montenegro
6	ConWeb (Network of national consumers' organizations of South East Europe)	Consumers Organisation of Macedonia (COM)	North Macedonia	CSOs partnership improves consumer confidence, environment and competition!	CSOs partnership improves consumer confidence, environment and competition!	North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia
7	Balkan Network for Local Democracy Skopje (BNLD)	European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)	North Macedonia	CSOs networking for better local democracy in the Balkans	CSOs Strengthening Regional Connections for Protecting Civic Space	North Macedonia, Serbia, BiH, Albania (1st phase only), Kosovo, Montenegro
8	South Eastern European Indigenous Grant- makers Network (SIGN)	Association HORUS	North Macedonia	SIGN for Philanthropy Education and Promotion (SIGN 4 PEP)	SIGN – Sustainability and Visibility	BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia

ANNEX 4 – OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL GRANTS

#	Name of the network	Name of lead organisation	Place of lead organisation	Project title 1st phase	Project title 2nd phase	Geographical scope of project
9	At-Risk Youth Social Empowerment Network (ARYSEN)	NGO Juventas	Montenegro	Civil Society Organisations in Western Balkans and their role in provision of social services and prevention of social exclusion	“Civil Society Organizations in Western Balkans and their role in provision of social services and prevention of social exclusion – Phase II”	Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
10	South East Europe network on natural resources, energy and transport (SEENET)	Center for Environment (CZZS)	BiH	Stay Safe and Speak Out	Stay Safe and Speak Out	BiH, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania

Annex 5: Selected Examples of Contributions to Intended Outcomes

This annex provides further details on significant contributions to intended outcomes defined in the re-constructed ToC. In line with the Contribution Analysis approach, these examples have been selected with due consideration to the influence of other actors/initiatives and external factors.

1. Immediate outcomes

Evidence-based advocacy for civic space

- The regional grant to the Safejournalists was used to conduct four baseline studies on media-related legislation in the region, which were subsequently used as references in dialogues conducted with Members of Parliament at national and regional roundtables, focusing on the topic of media freedom and journalists' safety.
- The regional grant to SEENET, which produced a mapping of the legal framework related environmental human rights in the region and video documentary on the need for protection of environmental CSO and defenders and their freedom of public expression.
- The regional grant to BELhospice, which financed a survey of the needs and barriers of implementation of palliative care in the region. The survey results were shared with authorities in three countries and were followed by proposed policy changes.
- The ad-hoc grant to ELSA (BiH) that helped establishing a non-formal network of CSOs in Sarajevo, to advocate for the improvements to proposed legislation on freedom of assembly.

BCSDN member contributions:

- The 2020 CSO-government dialogue on the draft Law on Public Procurement in Albania, led by Partners Albania and reflecting concerns raised in the 2019 Monitoring Matrix for Albania.
- The input provided by KCSF in 2022 to the draft Law on Public Gatherings, which was indirectly based on the Monitoring Matrix for Kosovo.
- The advocacy conducted by the MCIC to block amendments to the draft Law on Lobbying, using the 2019 Monitoring Matrix for North Macedonia as a reference.
- The 2021 appeal process against the amendments to the Criminal Code in Serbia, which was led by Civic Initiatives and reflected concerns related to shrinking space for freedom of expression raised in the Monitoring Matrix for Serbia.

Increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment

- The regional grant to SEENET that included awareness raising among CSOs and the general public on the lack of legal protection of environmental organisations and defenders.
- The regional grant to the Safejournalists through which roundtables with CSOs were organised to validate and share the results of baseline studies on media-related legislation.
- The regional grant to BELhospice, which conducted awareness raised among CSOs and the general public about palliative care principles and values as required for the protection of human rights for vulnerable groups.
- The ad-hoc grant to Media Center Montenegro that financed CSO consultations on the amendments to three media-related laws.

Increased regional cooperation for civic space

- The regional grant to the Safejournalists that resulted in MoUs being signed between journalist associations and CSOs across four countries and a joint declaration of parliaments and journalists' associations from the same countries.
- The regional grant to SEENET that brought environmental CSOs from various countries together in the organisation of a joint awareness raising campaign, centered on documentary movie "Stay safe and speak out".
- The ad-hoc grant to Censor (BiH) that consolidated the work of a regional CSO network in the housing sector and contributed to adjusting the Road Map of the network.
- The ad-hoc grant to Finance Think (North Macedonia), which supported the initial set-up of a network of economic think tanks, which subsequently developed two joint projects.

2. Intermediate outcomes***Policy and legal change promoting/protecting civic space***

- The second regional grant to Safejournalists, which influenced key pieces of legislation adopted by parliaments (i.e. the Criminal Code in Montenegro, the Law on Civic Liability for Insult and Defamation in North Macedonia), and prompted several more initiatives to amend existing laws (i.e. the Criminal Code of BiH and the Law on Public information and Media in Serbia) to ensure better protection of journalists' safety and rights.
- The two ad-hoc grants to ELSA (BiH), which helped CSOs to organise themselves in the advocacy for changing legislation on freedom of assembly in Sarajevo Canton in line with international and European standards, and resulted in proposals being submitted to the government working group on the law.
- The ad-hoc grant to Media Center Montenegro for a campaign to improve draft media laws (the Law on National Public Broadcasting Radio-Television and the Law on Electronic Media), including a proposal for amendments that would

contribute to greater protection from inappropriate influence of political parties on public broadcasters.

- The ad-hoc grant to Zero Waste (Montenegro) for preparing comments and proposal on the Draft Law on Waste Management, which according to the final grant report have partly been taken into consideration and integrated with the new law (i.e. the proposal on additional strengthening of Extended Producer Responsibility).

BCSDN member contributions:

- The 2020 amendment to the Law on Public Procurement in Albania, which includes a separate article on social services and other special services, allowing for greater and more meaningful participation of CSOs in public tender procedures. Partners Albania led CSO advocacy on the amendment, and facilitated the dialogue with the government. The amendments to the law reflect the recommendations provided in the Albania Monitoring Matrix report for 2019.
- Changes made in 2021 to the NPO Registration Law in Albania, which protects the right of associations without the obligation to be registered. Partners Albania mobilised CSOs to advocate for these changes, and prepared a legal analysis and proposals in this regard. As a result, 32 articles of the draft law were altered.
- The new Law on Lobbying in North Macedonia, adopted in 2021. The draft law initially included CSOs, undermining their role to advocate for the public good and greater government accountability, but was changed following strong criticism from CSOs. The Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) was part of the working group on the draft law, and put forward arguments based on the findings of the 2019 Monitoring Matrix of North Macedonia.
- The withdrawal of proposed amendments to the Criminal Code of Serbia, which would have negatively affected the freedom of expression and journalists' protection. Civic Initiatives was a key player in the public debate on the amendments.
- The draft Law on Public Gatherings in Kosovo in 2022, which considers most of the comments and recommendations from civil society. The Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF) provided inputs to the working group on the law, which is pending final approval by the Parliament.
- The adoption of the government Strategy for the creation of an enabling environment for the development of civil society in Serbia for the period 2022-2030. Civic Initiatives has taken the lead in advocacy for the establishment of a Council for Cooperation and Development of Civil Society, as provided for by the Strategy.

Annex 6: Data Collection Tools

Desk review form – Regional project grants

Name of project:	
Documents reviewed	• Project application, including LFA • Final narrative report
Date	
Reviewed by	

Questions

#	Project application, including LFA	Collected information/observations
1	What was the thematic focus of the grant?	
2	What type of activities were supported?	<i>Select one or several of the following:</i> • Research/analysis • Awareness raising • Policy and legal advocacy • Capacity development • Community development/mobilisation • Communication/visibility activities • Other activities
3	What countries were targeted by/involved in the project?	
4	What was the specific objective of the project?	
5	What were the expected results of the project?	
6	Are any cross-cutting perspectives considered in the application?	<i>Select one or several of the following:</i> • Poverty • Gender • Environment/climate change
7	Are there any references to cross-cutting perspectives in the project LFA (e.g. explicit reference to the perspectives in outcome statements or indicators)	(2-3 sentences)

#	Final narrative report	Collected information/observations
8	What are the key reported results?	(one paragraph)

#	Final narrative report	Collected information/observations
9	Does the report include any explicit references to cross-cutting perspectives and how they have been addressed?	Indicate if any of the following approaches have been used: • <i>Integration of perspectives</i> • <i>Targeted efforts</i> • <i>Dialogue</i>

#	All documents	Reviewer's concluding assessment
10	To what extent were the specific objectives of the project achieved?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
11	To what extent were the expected results achieved?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
12	To what extent did the project contribute to <i>increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
13	To what extent did the project contribute to <i>increased evidence-based advocacy for promoting civic space</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
14	To what extent did the project contribute to <i>increased regional cooperation for promoting civic space</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
15	To what extent did the project contribute to <i>policy and legal change for promoting civic space</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
16	To what extent did the project contribute to <i>more effective, transparent and accountable CSOs</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
17	Any signs of impact and/or sustainability, e.g. in terms of	(2-3 sentences)

#	All documents	Reviewer's concluding assessment
	<i>lasting regional cooperation in addressing the discrepancies and bottlenecks of civil society development in the region?</i>	
18	To what extent was the <i>gender perspective</i> addressed/integrated?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
19	To what extent was the <i>poverty perspective</i> addressed/integrated?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
20	To what extent was the <i>environment/climate change perspective</i> addressed/integrated?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
21	Other findings and observations with a bearing beyond the project?	

Desk review form – Ad-hoc grants

Name of project:	
Documents reviewed	• Project application • Final narrative report
Date	
Reviewed by	

Questions

#	Project application, including LFA	Collected information/observations
1	What type of funding was applied for?	<i>Select one of the following:</i> • <i>Support for immediate needs</i> • <i>Support for innovation</i>
2	What is the thematic focus of the application/activity?	
3	What countries were targeted by/involved in the activity?	
4	What was the specific objective of the activity?	

#	Project application, including LFA	Collected information/observations
5	What were the expected results of the activity?	
6	Are any cross-cutting perspectives considered in the application?	<i>Select one or several of the following:</i> • Poverty • Gender • Environment/climate change

#	Final narrative report	Collected information/observations
7	What type of activities were supported?	<i>Select one or several of the following:</i> • Research/analysis • Awareness raising • Policy and legal advocacy • Capacity development • Community development/mobilisation • Communication/visibility activities • Other activities
8	What are the key reported results?	<i>(2-3 sentences)</i>
9	Does the report include any explicit references to cross-cutting perspectives and how they have been addressed?	<i>Indicate if any of the following approaches have been used:</i> • Integration of perspectives • Targeted efforts • Dialogue

#	All documents	Reviewer's concluding assessment
10	To what extent were the specific objectives of the activity achieved?	• To a very high extent • To a high extent • To a moderate extent • To a slight extent • Not at all
11	To what extent were the expected results achieved?	• To a very high extent • To a high extent • To a moderate extent • To a slight extent • Not at all
12	To what extent did the activity contribute to <i>increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment</i> ?	• To a very high extent • To a high extent • To a moderate extent • To a slight extent • Not at all

#	All documents	Reviewer's concluding assessment
13	To what extent did the activity contribute to <i>increased evidence-based advocacy for promoting civic space</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
14	To what extent did the activity contribute to <i>increased regional cooperation for promoting civic space</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
15	To what extent did the activity contribute to <i>policy and legal change for promoting civic space</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
16	To what extent did the activity contribute to <i>more effective, transparent and accountable CSOs</i> ?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
17	If support for innovation was applied for – what innovations did the activity help to introduce?	(2-3 sentences)
18	To what extent was the <i>gender perspective</i> addressed/integrated?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
19	To what extent was the <i>poverty perspective</i> addressed/integrated?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
20	To what extent was the <i>environment/climate change perspective</i> addressed/integrated?	• <i>To a very high extent</i> • <i>To a high extent</i> • <i>To a moderate extent</i> • <i>To a slight extent</i> • <i>Not at all</i>
21	Other findings and observations with a bearing beyond the activity?	

*Interview guides***Interview guide for BCSDN Executive Office**

Name and title of interviewee	
Gender	
Organisation	
Data and time of interview	

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the evaluation and the interview
Explain how any information collected from the interview will be reported
Ask the interviewee to confirm that he/she is willing to participate in the evaluation
Ask the interviewee to present him/herself

Questions

Evaluation criteria/question	Notes on response
Relevance	
1. How have you ensured that the project responds – and continue to responds – to the needs for CSOs in the region? Have any new needs emerged since the start of the project?	
2. How do you ensure the outreach of the project, especially the sub-grants, to the target groups? Are any target groups left out or under-represented?	
3. In your experience, what has been the added-value of the regional approach? Could you give any examples of how this added-value has been demonstrated in practice?	
Coherence	
4. In what ways has the work of other actors been considered during project design and implementation? What coordination, if any, has taken place? Have you noticed any change in donor priorities?	
5. To what extent has other member projects and activities been considered? Have any synergies been created? If so, please give examples	
Efficiency	
6. What main challenges have you encountered during the implementation of the project? What is the reason for any delays?	
7. Do you feel that the project has been sufficiently resourced (human and financial resources) to achieve its objectives?	
8. How have the Steering Group and Task Force Group worked in practice?	
9. Do you see any room for improvement with regard to the methods and tools for project planning and management?	
10. Do you see any room for improvement with regard to the management of the regional and ad-hoc grants?	

Effectiveness	
11. What change, if any, has occurred with regard to civic space and CSO accountability in the region since 2019? Please give examples	
12. What has the project's contribution to these changes been? How do you know? Please give examples (inspiring and/or outstanding success stories)	
13. What factors have facilitated/impeded the achievement of results? To what extent have BCSDN members been committed to the project?	
14. Have any adjustments to the project been made based on prior results and lessons learnt?	
15. Do you see any need for improvement of the project M&E system?	
Sustainability	
16. Are the results of the project likely to be sustainable?	
17. What has been done to promote sustainability? What other factors have contributed to sustainability or lack of sustainability?	
Other questions	
18. How have cross-cutting perspectives – poverty, gender and environment/climate – been considered during project design and implementation?	
Lessons learnt and recommendations	
189. What are the main lessons learnt from what works well and less well in the project so far?	
20. Do you have any final recommendations?	

Interview guide for BCSDN Board and Hub Steering Group

Name and title of interviewee	
Gender	
Organisation	
Data and time of interview	

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the evaluation and the interview
Explain how any information collected from the interview will be reported
Ask the interviewee to confirm that he/she is willing to participate in the evaluation
Ask the interviewee to present him/herself

Questions

Evaluation criteria/question	Notes on response
Relevance	
1. How have you ensured that the project responds – and continue to responds – to the needs for CSOs in the region?	

2. In your experience, what has proven to be the added-value of the regional approach?	
<i>Coherence</i>	
3. In what ways has the work of other actors been considered? What coordination, if any, has taken place? Have you noticed any change in donor priorities?	
<i>Efficiency</i>	
4. What main challenges has the project encountered during implementation? How have these challenges been addressed?	
5. Do you feel that the project has been sufficiently resourced (human and financial resources) to achieve its objectives?	
6. How has the Steering Group functioned? In general, do you perceive that roles and responsibilities in the project are clearly defined and performed in practice?	
7. Do you see any room for improvement with regard to the management of the regional and ad-hoc grants?	
<i>Effectiveness</i>	
8. What change, if any, has occurred with regard to civic space and CSO accountability in the region since 2019?	
9. What has the project's contribution to these changes been? Please give examples (inspiring and/or outstanding success stories)	
10. What factors have facilitated/impeded the achievement of results?	
11. How regularly and in what form do you receive information on project progress and results? Do you see any need for further improvement of the M&E system?	
<i>Sustainability</i>	
12. Are the results of the project likely to be sustainable? If so, how do you know?	
13. What has been done to promote sustainability? What other factors have contributed to sustainability or lack of sustainability?	
<i>Lessons learnt and recommendations</i>	
14. What are the main lessons learnt from what works well and less well in the project so far?	
15. Do you have any final recommendations?	

Interview guide for BCSDN members/Task Force Group members

Name and title of interviewee	
Gender	
Organisation	
Data and time of interview	

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the evaluation and the interview

Explain how any information collected from the interview will be reported
Ask the interviewee to confirm that he/she is willing to participate in the evaluation
Ask the interviewee to present him/herself
Ask the interviewee(s) to provide a brief overview of the organisation and their roles and responsibilities in the Sida-funded project with regard to a) research/the annual monitoring matrix and b) regranting:

Questions

Evaluation criteria/question	Notes on response
Relevance	
1. Do you feel that the project responds – and continue to responds – to the needs for civil society development and CSO accountability in your country? Have any new needs emerged since the start of the project?	
2. How do you ensure the outreach of the project to the target groups? Are any target groups left out or underrepresented?	
3. In your experience, what has been the added-value of the regional approach? Could you give any examples of how this added-value has been demonstrated in practice?	
Coherence	
4. In what ways has the work of other actors been considered during project implementation? What coordination, if any, has taken place? Have you noticed any change in donor priorities?	
5. How have the other projects and activities of your organisation been considered? Have any synergies been created? Please give examples	
Efficiency	
6. What main challenges have you encountered during the implementation of the project? What is the reason for any delays?	
7. Do you feel that the project has been sufficiently resourced (human and financial resources) to achieve its objectives?	
8. How has the Task Force Group functioned? In general, do you perceive that roles and responsibilities in the project are clearly defined and performed in practice?	
9. Do you see any room for improvement with regard to the management of the regional and ad-hoc grants? What are the lessons learnt with regard to: Organisation and announcement of open calls Grant period and size Application procedures Evaluation and selection procedures Reporting requirements?	
Effectiveness	

10. What change, if any, has occurred with regard to the environment for civil society development and CSO accountability in your country since 2019? Please give an overview of trends and particular challenges	
11. What has the project's contribution to these changes been?	
12. Have the ad-hoc grants contributed to any major innovations? To what extent have these innovations been replicated?	
13. What factors have facilitated/impeded the achievement of results?	
14. Do you see any need for improvement of the project MEL framework, including the monitoring guidelines? To what extent has learning been promoted in the project?	
<i>Sustainability</i>	
15. Are the results of the project likely to be sustainable? If so, how do you know?	
16. What has been done to promote sustainability? What other factors have contributed to sustainability or lack of sustainability?	
<i>Other questions</i>	
17. How have cross-cutting perspectives – poverty, gender, and environment/climate – been considered in the project and specifically the regional and ad-hoc grants?	
<i>Lessons learnt and recommendations</i>	
18. What are the main lessons learnt from what works well and less well in the project so far?	
19. Do you have any final recommendations? In what shape would you like to see the project to continue, if at all?	

Interview guide for Swedish embassy staff

Name and title of interviewee	
Gender	
Organisation	
Data and time of interview	

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the evaluation and the interview	
Explain how any information collected from the interview will be reported	
Ask the interviewee to confirm that he/she is willing to participate in the evaluation	
Ask the interviewee to present him/herself	
Briefly describe the focus and scope of the regional Hub project	
Please briefly describe Swedish civil society support in your country, including any support to promoting civic space	

Questions

Evaluation criteria/question	Notes on response
Relevance	
1. What do you think is the added-value, if any, of a regional approach to promoting civic space and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans?	
Coherence	
2. Based on what you know about the BCSDN project do you see any complementarities or overlaps with Swedish support in your country? How can synergies be improved?	
3. What other donors are promoting civic space and CSO accountability in your country? Have there been any shift in donor priorities in this regard?	
Effectiveness	
4. Have you seen any change with regard to civic space and CSO accountability in your country since 2019?	
5. Has any policy or legal change towards promoting or protecting civic space occurred? To what extent have CSOs contributed to such change?	
6. What other factors have facilitated or impeded such change?	
7. Are you familiar with the annual monitoring report that is published by BCSDN/the national member organisation? Have you consulted and made use of this report in any way?	
Lessons learnt and recommendations	
8. Do you have any general recommendations with regard to future Swedish support to civil society and the promotion of civic space in the Western Balkans?	

Interview guide for donors, other NGOs, external stakeholders

Name and title of interviewee	
Gender	
Organisation	
Data and time of interview	

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the evaluation and the interview	
Explain how any information collected from the interview will be reported	
Ask the interviewee to confirm that he/she is willing to participate in the evaluation	
Ask the interviewee to present him/herself	
Please briefly describe Your relationship with BCSDN, if any your organisation's civil society support, including any support to promoting civic space and CSO accountability	

Questions

Evaluation criteria/question	Notes on response
Relevance	
1. How relevant is BCSDN's focus on an enabling environment and CSO accountability given the changing context in the Western Balkans?	
2. Do you see any added-value in taking a regional approach to promoting civic space and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans?	
Coherence	
3. Based on what you know about BCSDN do you see any complementarities or overlaps with the approach and support of your organisation?	
4. To your knowledge, what other sources of funding for promoting civic space and CSO accountability exist? Have there been any shift in donor priorities in this regard?	
5. Are you familiar with the annual monitoring matrix/report that is published by BCSDN/the national member organisation? Have you consulted and made use of this report in any way?	
Effectiveness	
6. What significant developments in the enabling environment and in terms of CSO accountability have you taken note of in the Western Balkans?	
7. Has any policy or legal change towards promoting or protecting civic space occurred? To what extent have CSOs contributed to such change?	
8. What other factors have facilitated or impeded such change?	
Lessons learnt and recommendations	
9. Do you have any recommendations to BCSDN in terms of future priorities and approaches?	
10. Do you have any general recommendations with regard to future Swedish support to civil society and the promotion of civic space in the Western Balkans?	

Interview guide for government representatives

Name and title of interviewee	
Gender	
Organisation	
Date and time of interview	

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the evaluation and the interview
Explain how any information collected from the interview will be reported
Ask the interviewee to confirm that he/she is willing to participate in the evaluation

Ask the interviewee to present him/herself	
Please briefly describe your relationship with BCSDN (the national member), if any	

Questions

Evaluation criteria/question	Notes on response
Relevance	
1. Please briefly explain the environment for civil society development? What are the key policies, laws, strategies and bodies related to this area?	
2. How relevant is BCSDN's focus on the enabling environment and CSO accountability in view of the country context?	
3. Do you see any added-value in taking a regional approach to promoting an enabling environment and CSO accountability in the Western Balkans?	
Coherence	
4. Apart from BCSDN/the national member organisations, what other CSOs are working to promote an enabling environment and CSO accountability in your country?	
5. Do you see any complementarities or overlaps with the approach and support of other CSOs? What synergies could be explored?	
6. Are you familiar with the annual monitoring matrix/report that is published by BCSDN/the national member organisation? Have you consulted and made use of this report in any way?	
Effectiveness	
7. What key progress and challenges in terms of the enabling environment and CSO accountability have you noted?	
8. Has any policy or legal change towards promoting or protecting civic space occurred? To what extent have CSOs contributed to such change?	
9. What other factors have facilitated or impeded such change?	
Lessons learnt and recommendations	
10. Do you have any recommendations to BCSDN in terms of future priorities and approaches?	
11. Do you have any general recommendations with regard to future Swedish support to civil society and the promotion of civic space in the Western Balkans?	

Guide for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with recipients of ad-hoc grants

Participants' names, titles, gender, and organisation	
Data and time of FGD	

Introduction

Explain the purpose of the evaluation and the FGD

Explain how any information collected from the FGD will be reported
Ask the participants to confirm that they are willing to participate in the evaluation
Ask the participants to briefly present themselves

Questions

Evaluation criteria/question	Notes on response
Relevance	
1. Why did you apply for an ad-hoc grant from BCSDN? What was the need? What other funding of this nature is available?	
Efficiency	
2. What is your experience from the grant management process, e.g. with regard to The announcement of the call Requirements and application procedures Grant period and size Timeliness Reporting requirements?	
3. To what extent was the BCSDN support different from ad-hoc grants provided by other donors?	
Effectiveness	
4. What added-value did the grant bring? What other results beyond the supported activity, if any, did it contribute to?	
Recommendations	
5. What can be improved in future open calls of this nature?	
6. Do you have any general recommendations to BCSDN or Sweden with regard to future civil society support and the promotion of civic space in the Western Balkans?	

Survey questionnaire – regional grants

This is an on-line survey conducted by FCG Sweden on behalf of Sida. Your responses are very valuable to us and will inform the evaluation of Sida's support to the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) and the project "Promoting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub" 2019-2022.

The survey will focus on your partnership with BCSDN and the results achieved through the grant received by your organisation. Your answers will feed into recommendations for the improvement of the Regional Civil Society Development Hub and the re-granting component in particular.

Responses are anonymous and this survey is not linked to any funding call or decision.

The survey should not take more than 20 minutes to complete. If a question is not relevant to your organisation, skip to the next one. Feel free to consult colleagues in your

organisation/network to ensure that the responses are as objective and representative as possible.

Thank you very much for your time!

Introduction

Questions	Choices
1. What is your gender?	Female Male Other
2. What is your position in the organisation?	Senior manager Project manager Other position
3. What role did your organisation have in the project?	Applicant/lead organisation Partner organisation
4. What is the status of the grant?	Approved but not started Ongoing Completed
5. What type of activities were covered by the grant? (multiple answers possible)	Research/analysis Awareness raising Policy and legal advocacy Capacity development (e.g. training, mentoring) Community development/mobilisation Communication/visibility activities Other activities
6. In what countries are/were grant activities implemented? (multiple answers possible)	Albania Bosnia and Hercegovina Kosovo Montenegro North Macedonia Serbia All of the above

Relevance

Questions	Choices
7. How did you learn about the grant?	BCSDN webpage BCSDN mailing list Social media Partner organisation Other
8. What convinced you to apply for a grant?	Money Simple procedure

(multiple answers possible)	Perfect fit with the needs/priorities of my organisation/network Wish to enhance cooperation with regional partners Try out an innovative approach Immediate needs that had to be addressed Other (please specify)
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Comments:

9. To what extent was your project application designed to contribute to a more conducive environment for civil society development?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

10. To what extent was your project application designed to contribute to improved CSO accountability?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

Efficiency

Questions	Choices
11. How complicated were the application procedures?	Not at all complicated Moderately complicated Neutral A little complicated Very complicated

Comments:

12. To what extent do you think that the grant size/budget is reasonable?	To a very high extent To a high extent
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	To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

13. How complicated were the reporting procedures/requirements?	Not at all complicated Moderately complicated Neutral A little complicated Very complicated
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Comments:

14. In general, how satisfied are you with BCSDN's management of the grant?	Very satisfied Satisfied Neutral Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied
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Comments:

Effectiveness

Questions	Choices
15. To what extent were the objectives of your project application achieved?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all

Comments:

16. To what extent did you project contribute to increased CSO understanding of the enabling environment?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

17. To what extent did your project contribute to increased evidence-based advocacy for promoting civic space?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

18. To what extent did you project contribute to increased regional cooperation for promoting civic space?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

19. To what extent did you project contribute to policy and legal change for promoting civic space?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

20. To what extent did you project contribute to more effective, transparent and accountable CSOs?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

Sustainability

Questions	Choices
21. To what extent did your project contribute to building sustained regional cooperation in addressing the discrepancies and bottlenecks of civil society development in the region?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all

Comments:

Other questions

Questions	Choices
22. To what extent was the gender perspective addressed in your project?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all

Comments:

23. To what extent was the poverty addressed in your project?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

24. To what extent was the environment/climate change addressed in your project?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

Recommendations

25. Do you have any other comments or suggestions to BCSDN? What would you change if you had the chance to improve future calls for proposals?

26. Do you have any general recommendations to Sida with regard to future support to civil society and the promotion of civic space in the Western Balkans?

Survey questionnaire – ad-hoc grants

This is an on-line survey conducted by FCG Sweden on behalf of Sida. Your responses are very valuable to us and will inform the evaluation of Sida's support to the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) and the project "Promoting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub" 2019-2022.

The survey will focus on your partnership with BCSDN and the results achieved through the grant received by your organisation. Your answers will feed into recommendations for the improvement of the Regional Civil Society Development Hub and the re-granting component in particular.

Responses are anonymous and this survey is not linked to any funding call or decision.

The survey should not take more than 20 minutes to complete. If a question is not relevant to your organisation, skip to the next one. Feel free to consult colleagues in your organisation/network to ensure that the responses are as objective and representative as possible.

Thank you very much for your time!

Introduction

Questions	Choices
1. What is your gender?	Female Male Other
2. What type of organisation do you represent?	Individual civil society organisation Member of regional network Member of informal regional network (non-registered)
3. What role did your organisation have in the project?	Applicant/lead organisation Partner organisation
4. What is your position in the organisation?	Senior manager Project manager Other position
5. What is the status of your grant from BCSDN?	Approved but not started Ongoing Completed
6. What type of funding did you apply for?	Support for immediate needs Support for innovation
7. What type of support did you receive? (multiple answers possible)	Expert/peer organisation support from another country in the region

	Support to regional conference/workshop/community actions or similar
8. In what countries was the activity implemented? (multiple answers possible)	Albania Bosnia and Hercegovina Kosovo Montenegro North Macedonia Serbia All of the above

Relevance

Questions	Choices
9. How did you learn about the grant? (multiple answers possible)	BCSDN webpage BCSDN mailing list Social media Partner organisation Other
10. What convinced you to apply for a grant? (multiple answers possible)	Money Simple procedure Perfect fit with the needs/priorities of my organisation/network Wish to enhance cooperation with regional partners Try out an innovative approach Immediate needs that had to be addressed Other (please specify)

Comments:

11. To what extent did the supported activity address the need for a more conducive environment for civil society development?

To a very high extent
To a high extent
To a moderate extent
To a slight extent
Not at all

Comments:

12. To what extent did the supported activity address the need for improved CSO accountability?

To a very high extent
To a high extent

	To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

Efficiency

Questions	Choices
13. How complicated were the application and reporting procedures?	Not at all complicated Moderately complicated Neutral A little complicated Very complicated

Comments:

14. To what extent was the support provided in a timely manner?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
---	---

Comment:

15. In general, how satisfied are you with BCSDN's management of the ad-hoc grants?	Very satisfied Satisfied Neutral Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied
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Comments:

Effectiveness

Questions	Choices
16. To what extent were the objectives of the supported activity achieved?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all

Comments:

17. If you applied for support to “immediate needs” – what immediate needs did the activity help to address?

Expert inputs to draft policy or law
Public campaigns/consultations
Response to hostile attacks
Improvement of internal accountability standards
Regional advocacy
Regional networking
Other

Comments:

18. If you applied for support to “innovation” – what innovations did the activity help to introduce?

New working methods
New accountability mechanisms
New campaigning methods
New methods for promoting civic space
Regional activities for constituency engagement
Regional activities for multi-sectoral cooperation
Regional exchange of best advocacy practices
Other

Comments:

Other questions

Questions	Choices
19. To what extent was the gender perspective addressed in the activity?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all

Comments:

20. To what extent was the poverty addressed in the activity?	To a very high extent To a high extent To a moderate extent To a slight extent Not at all
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Comments:

21. To what extent was the environment/climate change addressed in the activity?

To a very high extent
To a high extent
To a moderate extent
To a slight extent
Not at all

Comments:

Recommendations

22. Do you have any other comments or suggestions to BCSDN? What would you change if you had the chance to improve future calls for proposals?

23. Do you have any general recommendations to Sida with regard to future support to civil society and the promotion of civic space in the Western Balkans?

Annex 7: Documents consulted

Project context

2019 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index. Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. 23rd Edition – October 2020. USAID, ICNL, and FHI360.

2020 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index. Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. 24th Edition – September 2021. USAID and FHI360.

2021 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index. Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. 25th Edition – November 2022. USAID and FHI360.

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Assessment of the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society against the Guidelines for EU support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region, 2014-2020, for the period 2018-2019. EU TACSO.

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Desk study on Sida's alignment with the OECD/DAC Recommendation on Civil Society. FCG Sweden/Jonas Lövkrona. August 2022.

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Project management

Assessment of Internal Control of Balkan Civil Society Development Network. EY. 4 November 2020.

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BCSDN Regional Civil Society Hub – Extension proposal 2022.

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Evaluation Report on the Project “Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub”. No author (undated).

Grant Agreement between Sida and BCSDN regarding “Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub”. Sida contribution No. 1271501.

Guidelines for the Monitoring System for projects supported by the Regional Civil Society Development Hub. BCSDN (undated).

Independent Auditor’s Report and Financial Report. BCSDN. Project “Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub”. For the period 1 September 2019-31 August 2020. Grant Thornton.

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Internal Manual of Procedures. “Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub”. Version 1.0. BCSDN. February 2020.

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Results Framework – Funding Scheme. BCSDN (undated).

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Project deliverables

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Application forms and final narrative reports for all 46 ad-hoc grants.

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Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Country reports 2019-2021. BCSDN.

Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Regional reports 2019-2021. BCSDN.

Annex 8: Key Informants

#	Name	M/F	Position/project	Organisation
1	Allen, Richard	M	Team Leader	TACSO, Serbia
2	Aloisi, Daniele	M	Task Manager	EC/DG NEAR
3	Avdiji, Tuba	F	Monitoring Officer	Civic Initiatives, Serbia
4	Balla, Fjoralba	F	Monitoring Officer	Partners Albania
5	Berglund, Anna-Klara	F	BCSDN Project Manager, EUROLATIN	Sida
6	Bijedic, Aisa	F	Programme Officer	Embassy of Sweden, BiH
7	Bosilkova-Antovska, Anja	F	Policy & Advocacy Coordinator	BCSDN
8	Carlestam, Viveka	F	Senior Policy Specialist for Civil Society	Sida
9	Chaushoska, Jasmina	F	Task Force Member	MCIC, NM
10	Cuche, Etienne	M	Policy Officer	EC, DG NEAR
11	Dakic Dordevic, Biljana	F	Executive Director	Trag Foundation, Serbia
12	Damchevska, Sonja	F	Project Manager	AJM, NM
13	Darin, Lollo	F	Country Programme Coordinator	Sida
14	Dekov, Vladko	M	Advocacy Manager	HOPS, NM
15	Dimov, Darko	M	Monitoring Officer	MCIC, NM
16	Divjak, Tina	F	Board chair	BCSDN
17	Dokuzovski, Branko	M	Executive Director	HORUS, NM
18	Dordevic, Izabela	F	-	ERA, Serbia
19	Dzartova-Petrovska, Biljana	F	Senior Programme Manager	Embassy of Sweden, NM
20	Filopovic, Tamara	F	General Secretary	Independent Journalists' Association, Serbia
21	Grncarevska, Martina	F	Legal Advisor	COM, NM
22	Hafner Ademi, Tanja	F	Former BCSDN Executive Director	Independent

#	Name	M/F	Position/project	Organisation
23	Hoic, David	M	Western Balkans Policy Officer	EESC
24	Hoxha, Taulant	M	Executive Director	KCSF, Kosovo
25	Isirova, Nina	F	Project Manager	HORUS, NM
26	Janeva, Katica	F	Executive Director	ALDA, NM
27	Johnson, Ylva	F	Programme Officer	Embassy of Sweden, NM
28	Keruti, Konstandina	F	Task Force Member	Partners Albania
29	Kacarska, Simonida	F	Executive Director	EPI, NM
30	Kamilovska, Snezana	F	Policy and Advocacy Officer	MCIC, NM
31	Katuži, Rezarta	F	Programme Officer	Embassy of Sweden, Albania
32	Knezevic, Jovana	F	Project Manager	Center for European Policy, Serbia
33	Koeshall, Nathan	M	Executive Director	Catalyst Foundation, Serbia
34	Koncar, Milica	F	Project Coordinator	CZZS, BiH
35	Kovacic Josic, Dragana	F	Project Coordinator	CZZS, BiH
36	Lazarevic, Milena	F	Executive Director	Center for European Policy, Serbia
37	Lonchar Velkova, Marijana	F	Executive Director/Project Manager	COM, NM
38	Madzgalj, Vera	F	Executive Director	BELhospice, Serbia
39	Markovic, Zorana	F	Executive Director	CRNVO, Montenegro
40	Melbing, Maria	F	Head of Unit, EUROLATIN	Sida
41	Mitrevski, Gjorgji	M	Community Support Coordinator	Eco-vest, NM
42	Nesik, Ilina	F	Former BCSDN Executive Director	Liberties
43	Naumova, Silvana	F	Programme Manager	HOPS, NM
44	Nikolic, Zoran	M	National Project Coordinator	NOPS, Serbia
45	Novakovic, Ana	F	Project Officer	TRAG Foundation, Serbia
46	Nuredinoska, Emina	F	Former MCIC staff, former TACSO P2P Manager	Independent
47	Perovic, Valentina	F	Project Manager	BELhospice, Serbia
48	Petrovic, Amel	M	Project Manager	CPCD, BiH

#	Name	M/F	Position/project	Organisation
49	Petrovic, Natasha	F	Deputy Director	BTD
50	Ristovska, Vaska	F	Project Manager	EPI, NM
51	Sahlstrand, Ylva	F	Programme Manager	Embassy of Sweden, Kosovo
52	Scepanovic, Nina	F	Project Coordinator	Juventas, Montenegro
53	Skoric, Vanja	F	Programme Director	ECNL
54	Spasovksa, Biljana	F	Executive Director	BCSDN
55	Stevkovski, Dejana	F	Task Force Member	Civic Initiatives, Serbia
56	Stojanovska, Biljana	F	Grant Manager	BCSDN
57	Todorović, Sofija	F	Project Coordinator	YIHR, Serbia
58	Uros	M	Project Officer	Prevent, Serbia
59	Velat, Dubravka	F	Chairperson, Hub Steering Group	Independent
60	Velkova, Ivana	F	Communication Officer	ALDA, NM
61	Vukojevic, Mia	F	Western Balkans Fund Director	RBF
62	Zajmi, Rron	M	Task Force Member	KCSF, Kosovo
63	Zoric Petrovic, Jasmina	F	Programme Officer	Embassy of Sweden, Serbia



Evaluation of Sida's support to the Balkan Civil Society Development Network 2019-2022

The evaluation assessed the project 'Protecting Civic Space – Regional Civil Society Development Hub' implemented by the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) in the Western Balkans. The project aimed to enhance cooperation and resilience of civil society organizations (CSOs) through a regranting mechanism and monitoring of the enabling environment. The evaluation found that the project was relevant to the regional context, aligned with global and regional partnerships, and addressed the needs and priorities of grantees, demonstrated coherence by building on partnerships and complementing other regional funding mechanisms. The project has achieved change at the outcome level, such as evidence-based advocacy and increased regional cooperation for civic space. However, it has not significantly contributed to effective, transparent, and accountable CSOs. BCSDN should review its strategic plan, consider grant types, and strengthen capacity development. Sida was recommended to continue supporting BCSDN through long-term core funding, coordinate resources with other donors, and promote the Sida perspectives. Swedish embassies were encouraged to engage with national BCSDN members.

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