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| Western Balkans Fund |
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| Guidelines for Call for Research Papers |
| “Impact of COVID-19 on sustainability of Civil Society Organizations in the Western Balkan region” |
| Deadline for submission of Research Papers: **7/February/2021** |

**- For further information regarding the Western Balkans Fund objectives and its scope of work please consult the http://westernbalkansfund.org/web.**

**- Guidelines represent a general framework to guide the potential applicants through the process of application.**

**- On behalf of WBF we wish you success and good luck, reassuring you on our full support and transparency.**

# Overview

Civil Society Organizations in the Western Balkans continue facing many uncertainties and difficulties caused by COVID-19 crisis. This is one of the main findings of the survey on assessment of COVID-19 impact led by Western Balkans Fund[[1]](#footnote-1) implemented during October 2020. In total **194 respondents participated** in the online survey.

Throughout the Western Balkans region, despite the active involvement of CSOs in providing services in a crisis response, in most cases CSOs **have not** been included in the national coordinated crisis response incentive package, and even less in the consultations or decision-making processes and crisis management mechanisms., **55% respondents** have noted a visible asymmetry of power between the policy makers and CSOs, therefore it is crucial for decision makers to embrace and better understand the value of CSOs work.

CSOs throughout the WB region have **traversed their approach** to help the most vulnerable groups of people in the communities they serve, furtherly affected during this period - **82% respondents** stated that restriction of movement prevents people to people activities that require meeting physically. This is particular case for regional cooperation that requires engaging communities around the region to come together and participate. This is not possible when social distancing measures are in place, while the mainstays of regional initiatives are difficult to achieve under strict distancing or quarantine measures.

In some locations around the Western Balkan region, lockdowns also **inhibit access to information**. Before the pandemic CSO had access to information from work premises, while with the restrictions introduced, CSOs are limited with access to information and resources, what made them shift the entire approach in working online by using different platforms as one of the ways to communicate and cooperate with their associates, partners, target groups/beneficiaries and keep working on their regular projects' activities and objectives. **45% respondents** embraced the use of digital methods for reaching out, however the number of active users remains small, as a result of lack of digital literacy among CSOs around the region.

Gaining momentum for regional civic initiatives is difficult during times of crisis, also it is very difficult to keep the momentum for Western Balkans Fund in supporting regional initiatives, since CSOs, media and public orientation are focused on the emergency. Distancing and quarantine measures are **reducing the civic environment**, may lead to curbing civic engagement and restricting fundamental rights. It is at utmost importance for civil society organizations and government work together in preventing such reduction of civic engagement happen.

WBF learned that the most crucial consequence caused by the state of emergency, is the **direct impact in the sustainability** of the civil society organizations. CSO sector during the crisis continues to face financial difficulties to cover salaries and regular administrative costs, putting in danger the continuity of the organizations' work and existence. In addition, civil society organizations in the region face with lack of **access** to available funds. However, most of donor support in recent past was provided as direct action grants, therefore **62% respondents** urge for greater flexibility from donors, as well as institutional support.

However, considering all the difficulties with financial sustainability, the CSOs around the Western Balkans are demonstrating resilience and agility as they adapt to changing circumstances. They continue identifying some key opportunities as they seek to cope with the pandemic by building sector solidarity and accelerating digital transformation.

Western Balkans Fund considers it too early to comprehend the full impact of COVID-19 on CSOs around the Western Balkan region, especially as the pandemic is still spreading. According to the current assessment, the impact will be long-lasting as COVID-19 has exacerbated historical and ongoing challenges that hamper the CSO sector. If left unattended and without a concrete support, a significant number of CSOs will close down, people working in the sector will lose their jobs, and the various constituencies that depend on CSOs’ services and advocacy interventions will suffer the consequences. Still, many **CSOs remain optimistic** about the future, **62% of respondents** felt that they would emerge stronger and more agile after the pandemic, while **48% of respondents** felt that COVID-19 would result in greater public appreciation for their work.

However, WBF has limited information related to specific areas of intervention such as how much COVID19 has impacted cultural initiatives, education and scientific initiatives and sustainable development in the WB region. Moreover, the level of impact related to reconciliation processes, cross-border cooperation, freedom of expression, rule of law, gender equality and youth received minimal focus due to COVID19 pandemic.

## Aim and objectives of the Call

The **overall objective** of the WBF Call for Research Papers is to determine the impact of the COVID-19 on Western Balkan region Civil Society Organizations and identify challenges, opportunities, lessons learned and recommendation that could provide bigger sustainable support for the CSO sector.

With this Call for Research Papers with its integrated approach, WBF **aims to present** an overview of the dual **challenges confronting** WB region CSOs of keeping their organizations afloat, while also responding to the needs of the communities in which they operate, also **highlighting opportunities** that emerged from the crisis, and lessons that could be addressed in support of the recovery and sustainability of WB CSOs. More specifically, the priorities of the Call for Research Papers are:

1. To analyze the support given by Contracting Parties addressing the CSO sector needs;
2. To analyze the design of the response package in each Contracting Party and its effectiveness in contributing to sustainability of CSO sector;
3. To assess the flexibility of the responsive package for CSOs with varying areas of intervention;
4. To assess the performance and progress attained in the implementation existing projects by CSOs during COVID-19 against initially envisaged results;
5. To identify lessons learned for CSO performance during crisis;
6. To assess donor flexibility in support to ongoing projects;
7. To identify opportunities that provide bigger sustainable support for the CSO sector;
8. To analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the donor support and national response package by each CP and to draw recommendations to better prepare governments, donor community and CSO sector for future similar situations and develop action plan for future projects.
9. To provide clear recommendations on obtaining sustainability in any potential crisis.

Research Paper should have **advocacy** approach as an explicit component. Research Paper should be **policy-driven** research where the principal objective is to assemble an evidence base for immediate policy initiatives and propose capacity building, networking, or the development of the skills of those involved. For more information on the research structure please see Annex C.

# Eligibility requirements

In order to be eligible for funds under this Call, the lead applicant must be:

* Researcher[[2]](#footnote-2)/s
* Think Tank organization coming from the Western Balkan region;
* Research university department coming from the Western Balkan region;
* Civil Society Networks and Advocacy Platforms representing CSO sector from the Western Balkan region.
* The applicant (Researcher) must take responsibility for leading and developing the research paper.[[3]](#footnote-3)

# Financial value and duration

The overall indicative amount made available under this Call for Research Papers is **EUR 41,000**.

* Any funds requested under this Call must **not exceed EUR 2,300**.
* Funding includes salary costs, funding for the research, supporting tools for the research, communication and other support to administer the research;
* Duration of the research is **one (1) month**;

# Location

Research should take place in the WB6 region. The Research may focus on the region as a whole or address the situation in each contracting party (CP) individually.

# Approach and Methodology

The applicant shall consider applying rich research methodology, by including primary and secondary data research of governmental documents related to the crisis response package, development of a questionnaire, and interviews with CSO representatives, beneficiaries and the donor community in the region. WBF listed below some of the approaches but it doesn’t limit the research to enrich the application with other approached and tools.

1. **Desk Research:** Review of early and available information, data or reports available in respective CP including other details that are necessary for this research;
2. **Surveys:** Surveys must serve to collect information in respective Contracting Party;
3. **Interview:** Interviews may be carried out in person i.e. face-to-face but in order to avoid physical contact, it can also be administered by computer technology such as Skype, Google Meeting or ZOOM.
4. **Focus Groups:** It involves a detailed study of a particular group. The researchers interested in analyzing the situation can invite more individuals covering CSO sector and the narrow focus of the discussion that will enable extraction of more targeted information and data.
5. **Analysis of data:** Creation of a database of information received from the field and issue results.

Applicants shall understand that these analyses provide a way for understanding the overall situation created by COVID-19 impacted the CSO sector. Research Paper should have **advocacy** approach as an explicit component. Research Paper should be **policy-driven** research where the principal objective is to assemble an evidence base for immediate policy initiatives and propose capacity building, networking, or the development of the skills of those involved.

* Applicants should present in their methodology, the expenditures related to the research, which up to 60% of the total budget shall be allocated for the researcher/s, up to 20% of the costs should cover communication tools, and up to 20% for survey software, data collection and analysis program or other means that directly impact the research paper.

# Application Process

The applicants are invited to submit full Research Paper in English language following instruction and format included in Annex E and Budget Annex F[[4]](#footnote-4)[[5]](#footnote-5).

The application must be submitted online to the following email:

[WBFapplications@westernbalkansfund.org](mailto:WBFapplications@westernbalkansfund.org)

Upon submission of the full application online, the applicant will receive a confirmation of receipt. Unless the confirmation of the receipt is not received within 7 days after the deadline please contact the WBF.

Please note that incomplete Research Papers may be rejected.

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## Application deadline

The deadline for the submission of Research Papers is following: **February 7.2021 at 23:59 hrs (WB6 time**).

The applicant is advised to avoid waiting until the last day to submit the application, since heavy Internet traffic or a fault with the Internet connection (including electricity failure, etc.) could lead to difficulties in submission.

# Additional information

## Evaluation and selection of Research Papers

Research Papers will be examined and evaluated by the WBF Secretariat, while the final approval of the list with awarded grants will be made by the Council of the Senior Officials of the Western Balkans Fund[[6]](#footnote-6).

Please note that the WBF strives to award Research Papers in equal and balanced proportions across the WB6 Contracting Parties.

All Research Papers will be evaluated according to the steps and criteria enclosed in the Section 8.3.

If the examination of the application reveals that the proposed action does not meet the eligibility criteria stated in Section 2, the application may be rejected on this sole basis.

## Administrative and eligibility check

During the administrative and eligibility check the following will be assessed:

1. If the deadline has been met. Otherwise, the application will be automatically rejected.
2. If the research paper satisfies the eligibility criteria specified in the Section 2 of this Guidelines.
3. If any of the requested information is missing or is incorrect, the application may be rejected on that sole basis and the application will not be evaluated further.

## Evaluation grid

The project Research Papers that pass the administrative and eligibility check will be evaluated on the relevance and design of the proposed action. The project Research Papers will receive an overall score out of 100 in line with the evaluation grid below.



## Notification of the WBF’s decision

The applicants **will be informed** in writing about the application status. This letter will be sent by e-mail. Applicants shall be notified about the final outcome related to their application status by the end of **February 2021**.

The contract shall be signed within 1 month following the notification of the award decision.

## Indicative timeline

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | Date | Time |
| Deadline for requesting any clarifications from the WBF | 25 January 2021 | By 11:59 am |
| Deadline for submission of Research Papers | February 7 2021 | By 23:59 |
| Notification of reward | February 2021 |  |
| Contract signature | February 2021 |  |

8. Development of a Regional Report

* 1. WBF assisted by, at least, two well-known Experts from the region, from the research papers developed by awarded applicants will develop a comprehensive Regional Report with Recommendations and future actions to be taken by policy makers, donors, CSOs.
  2. Two online ZOOM/Web Benares with stakeholders to discuss the findings of the research papers. Around 100 participants from Civil Society Sector are foreseen to take part.
  3. The most important findings and recommendations of the Project will be presented to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of WB6 Contracting Parties.

# Annex E

\*Font used should be Times New Roman 12 with 1,5 space.

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| Name of the researcher |  |
| Origin of the lead researcher[[7]](#footnote-7):  *(please keep* ***ONLY options*** *that respond to you)*: | * Albania * Bosnia and Herzegovina * Kosovo\*[[8]](#footnote-8) * Macedonia * Montenegro * Serbia |
| Date of establishment: |  |
| Type of the organization:  *(please keep* ***ONLY options*** *that respond to you)*: | * Individual Researcher * Civil Society Organisation (CSO) * Think Tank * Advocacy Platform * University * Public Institution * Other, please indicate: |
| Lead researcher’s postal address: |  |
| Lead researcher’s telephone number: |  |
| Contact person for this action: |  |
| Contact person’s email: |  |
| Website of the organisation: |  |

1. **Introduction**

Briefly review the significance and describe the current status of the situation that is the focus of the research. Please document it with credible and documented references. Describe if there is any preliminary work done which led to this research. Provide clear background of the situation and clear description of the goal and objectives. *(max 2,000 words or 2 pages).*

1. **Methods and methodology**

Clearly and succinctly explain your methods so that it can be duplicated. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the study and statistical analyses should be included. Introduce research instruments in a consistent manner with the objectives of the research. (*include costs related to the research, max 2,000 words or 2 pages*).

1. **Analysis**

Describe the type of the research you will conduct. Describe the materials used and include the authors names and publication title. *(max 3,000 words or 3 pages)*

1. **Results**

Provide findings and meaning of your results in this section here. Be careful to not make definitive statements. Your results suggest that something is or is not true. This is true even when your results prove your hypothesis. Focus on a central contribution and write for those who do not know your work. *(max 2,000 words or 2 pages).*

1. **Conclusion**

Provide the conclusion of the research and data based on your current observation. *(max 2,000 words or 2 pages).*

1. **Recommendations**

Provide recommendations in a coherent manner in accordance with the situation and the overall research goal. *(max 2,000 words or 2 pages).*

# Annex F

The financial framework must be part of the Research Paper, which shall include, expenditures related to the research, which up to 60% of the total budget shall be allocated for the researcher/s, up to 20% of the costs should cover communication tools, and up to 20% for survey software, data collection and analysis program or other means that directly impact the research paper.

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| HR | Unit Cost | Total Costs |
| 1. Lead researcher |  |  |
| Total HR costs |  |  |
| Communication |  |  |
| 1. Xx |  |  |
| Total Communication Costs |  |  |
| Data analysis |  |  |
| 1. Software |  |  |
| Total Software Costs |  |  |
| Total budget |  | 2,300 EUR |

1. The Western Balkans Fund’s main objective is to foster cooperation between its members (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo\*, Serbia), by strengthening neighborly relations and regional cohesion and to advance the integration of the WB into the European Union. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Independent Researcher or member of an organization who will take the responsibility in collecting information, analyzing data and developing the final research paper [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I **Exclusion Criteria:** The applicant (Researcher) does not meet the eligibility criteria set in the Section 2. Proposed research paper is published before, or is under consideration for publication anywhere else; They are bankrupt or having their affairs administered by the courts, have entered into an arrangement with creditors, have suspended business activities; They are directly affiliated to the government; They, or persons having powers of representation, decision making or control over them, have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organization, money laundering or any other illegal activity. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **Upon the selection of winning applicants WBF**, will require NGO/Institution/ Registration form scanned [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **Upon the selection of winning applicants WBF**, will require letter of attestation is needed ONLY for the independent researchers, issued by the entity to which independent researcher is member of. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Clarification: The Council of the Senior Officials of the Western Balkans Fund is composed by the appointed officials from the Ministries of the Foreign Affairs of the WB6 members. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. An organisation’s must be established under the national law of the contracting party concerned and that the head office is located in an eligible contracting party. Any organisation registered outside of WB6 cannot be considered an eligible organisation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)