

ECONOMIC AND INVESTMENT PLAN FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

Part I: State of play of specialized civil
society organizations and think tanks
in the region

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society organizations and think tanks in the
region

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Table of content

FOREWORD.....	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION: RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY.....	5
SPECIALISED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS & THINK TANKS: ACTIONS AND IMPACT	8
REGIONAL FEATURES	20
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	22

FOREWORD

In October 2020, the European Commission adopted the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans (WB). With an earmarked EUR 9 bn in grants and up to EUR 20bn in loans, it aims to support the long-term post-COVID recovery of the countries and provide impetus to the accession reforms. It builds on the key EU strategic documents and initiatives for the WB region, namely the Green Agenda, the Digital Agenda, the Innovation Agenda, the Enlargement Package 2020-2022, Economic and Reform Programmes, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Common Regional Market.

The most visible form of EIP are its investment flagships – a total of 24 projects approved by 2022 in 6 sectors, including key railway, road and waterway interconnections, renewable energy and electricity transmission networks, waste water management, new healthcare facilities, and broadband infrastructure. In the area of Sustainable transport, the key flagship projects focus on connecting East to West, North to South and the coastal regions. In the Energy sector, the flagship priorities are aimed towards renewable energy, transition from coal and renovations with the purpose of ensuring energy efficiency. Environment and climate flagship priority is improved waste water and waste management. The investment flagships also include digitalization by upgrading the digital infrastructure and the development of human capital.

At the same time, the WB countries suffer from serious structural weaknesses related to rule of law, good governance and, absence of critical knowledge and implementation capacity. All three influence the smooth implementation of projects, create cost overruns and reduce the cost-benefit ratio. Finally, they damage the legitimacy of the EU action and support in WB6.

One aspect to mitigate the three above mentioned variables would be to strengthen the involvement of specialized CSO and think tanks (SCSO&TT) in all the phases of the project cycle. Their inclusion could lead to increased transparency, accountability and integrity of the Project Cycle Management (PCM)¹. Local public institutions in charge of EIP and the implementation of its flagship projects will largely benefit from CSO expertise.

By engaging at all project stages SCSO&TT will better represent the needs and properly protect the interests of their constituents. This will strengthen the legitimacy of the whole PCM process, increase its visibility, improve project impact and provide the right feedback to European taxpayers as well as to those in SEE6. This is what our initiative is about.

Supported by Kingdom of Norway through SMART project, and in partnership with five Think Tanks all over Western Balkans we have adopted a three-step approach.

The first step is to develop an in-depth understanding of SEE6 SCSO&TT profile regarding the Flagship Project PCM. This will allow to identify and build up a comprehensive view of their strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for their involvement at the local, national and regional level. Our endeavour aims to shed light into expertise, knowledge illustrated by concrete

¹ PCM steps are: Project Identification, Project assessment / appraisal / screening, Planning and design, Procuring / Tendering, Contract implementation and execution, and Evaluation and audit

examples of CSO engagement in infrastructure projects. This following publication covers the 1st step.

In the second phase we will look at the mechanisms in place and institutions involved at each step of PCM and how SCSO&TT are engaged (or not), what are the entry point and what should be done to increase their impact. The 2nd part will be published early 2024.

In the third step we have selected 12 EIP Flagships – two in each country – to monitor. Representing most of EIP sectors we have looked at their stage of advancement, the related risks and how they have been mitigated, their strategic importance and contribution to community, entry points for CSO engagement, and impact on the ground.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) can play a vital role in infrastructure project cycle management by engaging in various stages of the process. By actively engaging in infrastructure project cycle management, CSOs can ensure that projects are more inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of local communities. Their involvement can help bridge the gap between project developers, authorities, and affected communities, fostering better decision-making and promoting more equitable, environmentally and socially sustainable, and beneficial infrastructure development.

Ardian Hackaj
Project Manager
October 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study highlights the context and the state of affairs of engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) and in large infrastructure projects (LIP) in the Western Balkans (WB). It emphasizes the uneven levels of CSO involvement across different issue areas; and identifies key factors shaping the current situation of limited CSO involvement, such as CSO and donor priorities (particularly the EU as the main donor, lender and investor for all the WB countries), the critical knowledge mass and capacity of CSOs and the willingness of other domestic and international actors to create the necessary enabling environment.

The specialized CSOs and think tanks (SCSO&TT) are viewed as key players in enhancing CSO involvement in the infrastructure development in the WB region and as a key legitimacy factor. The study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the state of CSOs, including their capacity, strengths & weaknesses, relationships, opportunities, constraints, and potential impact on infrastructure policies and projects. It underlines the need for increased CSO involvement in LIPs, particularly those projects under the EU's EIP.

The methodology includes desk research, communication with CSOs, self-assessment questionnaires, and quality control of collected data. It also builds on case studies with the highest impact on policies and projects. The study initially considered a total of 144 CSOs, out of which 28 organizations were pre-selected and categorized by country and sector. The sectors covered mirror the categorization of the EIP falling into Sustainable Transport, Clean Energy, Environment & Climate, Digital Future, Private Sector, and Human Capital.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of key findings on SCSO&TT profile regarding their engagement in WB6 LIP. We found that the majority of the surveyed SCSO&TT have the most experience in Clean Energy, Environment and Climate, and Human Capital sectors. In contrast, Sustainable Transport and Digital Future are the sectors with the least focus and experience among the surveyed organizations.

The survey further indicates that SCSO&TT in WB6 have had meaningful impact on policy-making, and in certain steps of LIP project cycle. They are actively involved in participation in working groups, public discussions, advocacy, and cooperation with government institutions, local governments, other CSOs, and media. When it comes to LIP, however, CSOs are mostly involved only in monitoring and watchdog activities. The bulk of their activities consist in detecting irregularities, evidencing non-compliance and / or corruption, signalling and eventually preventing projects that may harm citizens' interests, improving transparency, accountability, and ensuring responsible public budget spending.

The involvement of CSOs is driven by their efforts to exert impact, and conditioned by the enabling environment shaped by formal obligations for CSO consultation imposed by the EU and other donors. A strong network and good relationships with stakeholders, access to funding from independent sources, relevant expertise, and access to information and project documents are key prerequisites for impactful CSO actions.

This section also provides specific examples of achievements and best practices gathered from various organizations in all the WB countries. These examples demonstrate how CSOs have contributed to legislative changes, policy development, environmental protection, and other

critical areas in their respective countries, showcasing the significant role that CSOs play in influencing policies and projects, contributing to positive societal and environmental impacts

Chapter 2 titled "Regional Features," highlights the diversity and capacities of the SCSO&TT in the WB6, particularly in the context of infrastructure projects. It appears that there is not a unique model of SCSO&TT organization and/or engagement: they cover various areas, have different areas and levels of expertise, and operate according diverse organizational structures. These organizations are involved in policy research, advocacy, service provision, media-related work, and representation of various interests at local and central levels. Most of the surveyed organizations have significant expertise in policy-making processes, particularly in areas related to good governance, public finance management, and public procurement. However, more than half of them did lack specific knowledge of the project cycle management of infrastructure projects, indicating the need to strengthen their capacity in this area.

While many SCSO&TT work with national governments and local and regional authorities, we found that only a quarter of our sample had working relations with International Financial Institutions (IFIs). A strong network and relationships with various stakeholders, access to funding, and expertise are crucial for their effective involvement. SCSO&TT actively participate in government-led consultations, sector working groups, and other consultation forums. However, the challenges they face include a lack of publicly available information and data, lack of political will to include them in making decisions, and a decision-making procedure often applied in a non-transparent or simplified procedures, without taking onboard CSO concerns and suggestions.

There is a clear need for an enabling environment that allows SCSO&TT to participate and exert positive policy and project impact in infrastructure development. The study suggests a structured approach to CSO engagement in infrastructure projects, similar to their engagement in other areas like rule of law, environment, and anti-corruption. This would require a change in the mindset and practices of stakeholders, and in the respective mechanisms so as to ensure CSO involvement in the EIP and the project cycle management of LIPs.

The study also recommends the creation of a regional network of SCSO&TT and a roster of experts who can support and exchange ideas, proposals, and best practices. Targeted support from peer organizations, experts, IFIs, and the international donor community can significantly contribute to increased SCSO&TT involvement and improved LIP governance.

Finally as the product of a collective effort this study aims to open a debate on the role of citizen and of CSO in policy-making and in infrastructure project cycle. Even if LIP directly impact their life and wellbeing, their identification, drafting and design, financing, implementation, and operation are opaque. However the EU membership drive and the obligations of WB6 administrations to adopt EU norms and standards in good governance, have made available some engagement mechanism and entry points for CSO. The first step is to know CSO profile and features required for such an engagement. This is the goal of this paper.

INTRODUCTION: RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

A number of both demand and supply side factors have conditioned the gradual interest and engagement of CSOs, so shaping in their professional profile. On one hand, the domestic situation and internal developments in different countries mandate a response by CSO, leading them to seek for avenues, opportunities and support to influence policy and sometimes even political developments. On the other hand the priorities of the donor community, especially the EU as the biggest donor in all the Western Balkan (WB6) countries, impose their own donor agendas over CSO, by channeling – and subsequently conditioning CSO engagement – in some areas rather than in others. Moreover, the capacity of the organizations, the willingness of other domestic actors, namely governments at all levels, to include and enable CSO participation in the processes they lead and coordinate, as well as the nature and complexity of the issue area, play an important role.

The result is a patchwork of activity areas with various degrees of CSO involvement and impact, across the six countries. While some sectors receive a great deal of attention, funding and consequently CSO efforts, others are largely “under the donor radar” hence without major CSO involvement. One of the areas that has largely remained a prerogative of national authorities and their international partners (donors and lenders) is the area of infrastructure and the implementation of large infrastructure projects.

Yet, infrastructure development has been one of the most significant and tangible aspects of the WB region’s cooperation with the EU. Since the 1990s, the EU provided the WB with €11bn in direct grants from the EU budget, which mobilized around €20bn in infrastructure investments.² The broader area of infrastructure (including the sectors of transport, energy, environment, digital and social infrastructure) will also absorb the lion’s share of the EU funding for the region in the forthcoming period, through the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) until 2027, and through the pre-accession assistance in the next multi-annual financial framework.³ Lately the Growth Plan adds EUR 6 bn to overall EU engagement in WB6, out of which 50% will be channelled through WBIF, hence towards large infrastructure projects.

Infrastructure is also one of the strongest levers for a country’s overall socio-economic development: transport and energy infrastructure has a direct impact on growth and development, while social infrastructure significantly influences the overall quality of life of the citizens. Depending on the planning of infrastructure development, citizens living in that country or region can directly feel its impact and benefits in a number of ways. On the other hand, poorly planned and implemented infrastructure projects can lead to time and cost overruns, minimizing the cost-benefit ratio and leading to losses, which are on average equal to one third of the project costs.⁴

This study aims to inform and facilitate further activities in the course of the project aimed to improve LIP management and effectiveness by increasing the involvement of CSO in the next generation of LIP, especially those planned under the EU’s EIP for the Western Balkans. To that

² European Commission. 2020. Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/communication_on_wb_economic_and_investment_plan_october_2020_en.pdf

³ The EIP includes projects in the following sectors: Sustainable Transport, Clean Energy, Environment & Climate, Digital Future, Private Sector, Human Capital.

⁴ Schwartz, Gerd, Manal Fouad, Torben Hansen, and Geneviève Verdier, eds. 2020. Well Spent: How Strong Infrastructure Governance Can End Waste in Public Investment. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. 30.

effect, it aims to provide comprehensive and in-depth insights into the state of play of CSO sector in the region that have been – or could be - active in the implementation of the EIP. It also provides a first assessment of their capacity, strengths, relationships, opportunities, constraints and potential to exert impact on the infrastructure policy and project cycle. These organizations – labelled as specialized CSO and think tanks (SCSO&TT) - have skin in the game, and the potential to be the pioneers driving overall CSO involvement in the complex and highly important area of infrastructure development in the WB.

Methodology

The aim of the study is to build up the profile of CSOs actively engaged in the six sectors covered by the EIP: Sustainable Transport, Clean Energy, Environment & Climate, Digital Future, Private Sector, and Human Capital and to “isolate the winning features of a successful engagement”. For that purpose, we adopt a bottom-up approach, which largely builds on the CSO self-assessment, under the quality control of the project partners in each country. The methodology consisted of the following steps:

- **Desk research.** The starting point was the project partners’ existing knowledge and in-depth understanding of their national CSO context. Data collection techniques included consultation of national registries, networks and projects/programs/initiatives in areas related to infrastructure projects and the EIP (EU funds, infrastructure, anti-corruption, public finance management, public procurements etc.), consultation of the CSO websites, web search of the pre-selected organizations and review of their media appearances.
- **Email and personal communication.** The project team reached out to the pre-selected organizations to inform them about the project and the study, establish initial communication and a working relationship built on trust. The approached CSOs were asked to confirm the initial findings, and provide some additional information with regard to their successful actions in order for the research team to obtain a basic understanding of the features of their interventions. A total of 60 CSOs were included in this step and the country distribution is available in Table 1.
- **Self-assessment.** Based on the findings of step 2, project partners in each country invited shortlisted organizations to fill in a pre-defined form/questionnaire (Annex 1 of the Methodology). The form consisted of closed answers/multiple choice whenever possible in order to facilitate the data analysis and yield meaningful data. Each shortlisted organization completed the questionnaire together with a national representative of the project partners, during a semi-structured interview that served to clarify any potential dilemmas or misunderstandings in relation to the questions and answers.
- **Quality control.** Project partners performed quality control of the forms before submitting them for data analysis and drafting the study. Project partners invested their utmost efforts into securing the broadest possible outreach in order to ensure that all the relevant organizations are considered in the first phase of the data collection. The filtering process which led to the final identification was based on the Methodology prepared and adopted by the project partners in May 2023, but depended also on the responsiveness and willingness of targeted organizations to participate in the self-assessment process.
- **Case studies.** The best practices and the organizations with the highest perceived impact on policies and projects were further developed into case studies which served as basis to draw conclusions.

The study is structured as follows: Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study's key findings related to SCSO&TT in WB6. We found that the majority of the surveyed SCSO&TT have the most experience in Clean Energy, Environment and Climate, and Human Capital sectors. In contrast, Sustainable Transport and Digital Future are the sectors with the least focus and experience among the surveyed organizations.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the work of organizations in the dominant sector and examples of their most impactful actions. It discusses the features of those interventions and the way they were achieved focusing on the discernable patterns and necessary "inputs" (expertise, capacity, network, relationships / access, innovative ideas, support etc.). It also identifies the gaps and "blind spots", that is the sectors where we see significantly less CSOs involvement and aims to identify the main reasons thereof.

Chapter 3 summarizes the state of play at the regional level, makes comparisons across countries and sectors and draws conclusions on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints that contribute to or deter increased involvement of CSOs in the LIP cycle and the EIP implementation. Finally, we draw conclusions and provide some policy recommendations to improve the involvement of SCSO&TT in the project cycle of LIP and especially in the framework of the EIP.

SPECIALISED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS & THINK TANKS: ACTIONS AND IMPACT

The study, in its initial step, considered a total of 144 CSO - the country distribution is available in Table 1. For an in-depth observation, 28 organisations categorized per country and per sector were pre-selected for step of self-assessment.⁵

Table 1: No of organizations per country considered in each step

Country / No of organizations	Albania	B&H	Kosovo	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia	Total
Desk research	15	20	18	30	35	26	139
Email/phone meeting	10	10	8	10	12	10	60
Self- assessment	5	7	2	2	5	7	28

We found that two thirds of the surveyed Specialized Civil Society Organizations&Think Tanks (SCSO&TT) had specific policy or project experience in Clean Energy, Environment and Climate and Human Capital. The Sustainable Transport and Digital Future are the sectors in which the surveyed SCO&TT from the WB region have the least focus and thus experience. Detailed overview of the results from the survey is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: No of pre-selected organizations: overview per country and per sector

Sector/Country	Albania	B&H	Kosovo	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
Sustainable transport	1	1	0	1	0	3
Clean energy	2	4	1	0	1	5
Environment & climate	1	4	2	0	1	5
Digital future	0	2	2	0	1	2
Private sector	2	0	0	0	3	3
Human capital	1	2	2	1	3	2

When it comes to what has been achieved by the respective SCSO&TT in the WB region thus far and the meaningful impact on policies and/or projects that has been achieved via the actions taken by the organizations that were included in the survey, the results are inspiring. However, they also suggest that more focus and inclusion is needed for CSOs to have tangible and meaningful impact in improving the implantation of the EIP.

⁵ This number does not include the six organizations implementing this project.

Most of the SCO&TT in the region are involved in **policy making activities** such as participation in the drafting, monitoring or change/adjustment of sector strategies, policies and legislation at the national and local level via advocacy and campaigning activities. Engagement in policy making activities is mainly undertaken via participation in various sector working groups, public discussions, cooperation and joint activities with government institutions/bodies, local governments, or cooperation with other CSOs and the media.

There are numerous examples of **watchdog activities**: CSO preventing the implementation of certain planned activities or projects that go against the citizens interest (environmental, economic or other), including by reducing bureaucratic procedures or excessive monetary burdens, improving transparency, accountability and encouraging prudent public/budget spending. In addition to the conventional involvement in public-private policy dialogue and consultation processes often supported by the EU, SCSO&TT sometimes act out of the box in a proactive manner **as agenda-setters**⁶.

Another important aspect of their work is the **monitoring** component (even if ex-post), namely monitoring of the preparation and implementation of projects and/or policies. Most of the results and positive impact has been made as a result of monitoring of the different phases of the policy/project cycle, starting from the activities in the consultation phase until the final implementation phase (consultations preceding infrastructure projects, implementation of public procurement procedures and selection of the best option, adequate implementation of the project including in compliance with the legislative procedures and/or contract provisions, prudent budget spending etc). As a result, despite all the obstacles such as strong influence of interest groups, or difficult access to relevant and accurate information and documentation of public interest, SCO&TT have managed to detect irregularities and / or noncompliance or corruption phenomena. In the absence of agency in project / policy cycle, CSOs actions include **informing the general public, mobilizing citizen protest movements, or carrying legal action** as the final resort when other options have been exhausted.

The pattern of **CSO involvement is the outcome of the efforts of CSOs to exert impact, but depends on the overall enabling environment and mechanisms which channel CSO involvement into certain areas**. This enabling environment has been mostly shaped by formal obligations for CSO consultation imposed by the EU, other multi-lateral and bilateral donors, or IFI⁷, as well as from the proactive attitude of CSOs which leverage their expertise and influence in the public sphere in line with their own vision, mission and action priorities.

Having an extensive network and good relationship with various stakeholders (including policymakers, media and other relevant stakeholders) is one of the prerequisites for having access to relevant sources of information, exercising advocacy and successful impacting policy-making and / or project cycle. Topical expertise and detailed understanding of the national institutional and policy landscape and respective mechanisms is essential. Moreover, access to relevant and correct information and to documents from relevant and reliable sources (institutions, bodies and organizations) is crucial for timely and accurate follow up actions.

In addition, **access to funding from sources not directly linked to the policy or project in focuss**, is necessary for successful and appropriate implementation of different CSO actions. Nonetheless, the available information shows that in some instances the CSO expertise was provided without any external funding and in line with the CSO mission and role to protect the public interest.

⁶ The CSO agenda setting activities have been more noticeable in the framework of Berlin Process

⁷ IFI are obliged to conduct stakeholder engagement exercises for the projects they finance, so providing a very good entry point for CSOs to engage

The next section illustrates some of the achievements and best practices. The examples are presented by country and by EIP sector.

SERBIA

PRIVATE SECTOR

The **Business Support Network (BSN) & Railway Cluster for SEE** has been involved in the process of legislative changes to the Law on Public Procurement, to the Law on Planning and Construction, and of the Law on Communal Service, with the aim to reduce bureaucratic procedures and parafiscal costs of doing business in Serbia. These changes were made possible by following and influencing the implementation of the Serbian legislation in terms of stakeholders' compliance and transparency, creation of a more competitive and resilient SME sector and creation of more attractive business environment in Serbia.

HUMAN CAPITAL

ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE

The **Center for ecology and sustainable development (CEKOR)** participated in activities related to the preparation of the Strategy for Sustainable development of Serbia; to the action on fair resettlement of Roma population under the Gazela bridge in Belgrade (with the support of the EBRD), and in finding the best solutions regarding displacement issues for the Sava bridge settlement in Belgrade. They also led the efforts to discourage the EBRD from financing the Kolubara B thermo-power plant in line with the country's need and plans for decarbonization. Their activities contribute towards sustainable development of Serbia and building a better and just society including cleaner environment.

CENTER FOR ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (CEKOR)

CEKOR was founded at the Faculty for Forestry at the Belgrade University in 1999, with the faculty staff as its expert base. Nine years later, CEKOR was moved by several of its founders to Subotica, and registered as an independent think tank and activist CSO, while keeping strong links with the initial team of highly experienced experts. They have remained engaged in different projects led by a small secretariat of 5 employees.

The focus of the activities remained environment and sustainable development, addressing environmental and social impact of different policies and concrete projects in the areas of energy and transport, and more recently mining.

Participation in different organisations, networks and coordination mechanisms has been very helpful in increasing CEKOR's impact and visibility, in particular the membership in the CEE Bankwatch Network, which focuses on monitoring the social and environmental impact of projects financed by IFIs. They also participate in the Joint EU-Serbia Consultative Committee, the National Convention on the EU, the Working Group preparing the Strategy and Action Plan for Climate Change, the Sector Working Group for Energy and Environment in the framework of the civil society – public sector mechanism for planning and utilization of interneational development funds (SECO mechanism), the Monitoring Committee (MC) of Interreg VI-A IPA Hungary-Serbia Programme for the period 2021-2027, and the Working Group for Local Air Quality Plan of Subotica city.

Their key donations come from EU funds (CSF, Multi-beneficiary IPA Cross-border projects), OSF, UNDP, EU member states' embassies etc.

ENVIRONMENT &
CLIMATE

CLEAN ENERGY

The RES Foundation participated in the creation of a legislative framework for energy poverty in Serbia and provided a major contribution to the national definition of energy poverty. Their efforts were channeled through the National Coalition for Energy Poverty established by the Government of Serbia in 2021. In that endeavour, the overall trust, understanding, involvement and goodwill among relevant national, regional and international stakeholders on the above-mentioned topic did increase. Moreover, CSO engagement led to new opportunities for making progress in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda in Serbia and in the broader region.

In this respect, the RES Foundation is actively engaged in preparing analyses of the EU policies, mechanisms and funding in the area of energy transition in Serbia, providing evaluation and recommendations.⁸

CLEAN ENERGY

The Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute (RERI) engages in infrastructure projects through monitoring of the procedures and taking legal actions in cases where irregularities and harmful impacts on the environment and public interest have been identified. One of their biggest achievement has been the defense of the public interest in terms of preservation of cultural heritage and environmental protection. Namely, they filed a lawsuit against the construction of a cable car in the Kalemegdan Park in Belgrade due to its potential irreparable harm to the cultural heritage and the environment. The lawsuit resulted in the annulment of the construction permit for construction of the said cable car. Their argumentation led to the establishment of a positive judicial practice in the Supreme and Administrative Court,⁹ and can be used as a baseline in future efforts to preserve the public interest in the implementation of infrastructure projects.

RENEWABLES AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATORY INSTITUTE (RERI)

RERI was founded in 2017 by a group of lawyers. It has a permanent team of 13 employees and a roster of external experts. In its wider team it gathers engineers and experts in urban and spacial planning, environment protection and green energy transition. It promotes access to justice and the respect of international and European standards and values in environmental protection. It offers an open platform for citizens, organisations and different legal entities to report on cases of legal breaches and corruption related to environmental protection at the local and central level. RERI's mission is to strengthen and promote the rule of law through concrete legal actions. Its actions are focused on energy market integration, decarbonisation and clean energy, just transition, digitalisation of the energy system and smart grids, energy efficiency, including the modernisation of district heating, and energy security. RERI is currently a member of the working group for development of the Strategy for Environmental Protection, a strategic document that defines the directions for environmental protection in Serbia, in line with the goals of the Sofia Declaration and the five pillars of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. RERI is also a member of the working group for development of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the relevant Action Plan.

Its main donors include the EU (CSF), OSF, ECF (European Climate Foundation), HBS, Client Earth, and the Rockefeller Brothers.

⁸ Tackling the Immediate Challenges of the Energy Poverty in the Western Balkans – the Possible Role for the EU, RES Foundation, The Greens/EFA in the European Parliament, Brussels, 2023, <https://extranet.greens-efa.eu/public/media/file/1/8447>

⁹ The engagement in this project (filing of a lawsuit) did not require any specific financial resources, considering that RERI relied on its own expertise and human resources.

Transparency Serbia is the organization whose activities and initiatives greatly contributed and induced meaningful positive impact on the public awareness and knowledge with regard to fighting corruption. They participated in the formulation of anti-corruption strategies, of respective action plans, as well as in various legislative acts and regulations related to the public administration reform, to the judicial reform, to open data, budget systems, public procurement, financing of the media, financing of political entities, free access to information, investigation of financial crime, whistleblowers protection, etc. In particular, Transparency Serbia submitted around 70 comments on a very important strategic act for the fight against corruption in the framework of EU integration - the Action Plan for chapter 23 of the accession negotiations.

Moreover, Transparency Serbia has monitored several infrastructure projects conducted after the 2014 floods; the procedure related to the implementation of the “Belgrade Waterfront” project; the concession for the Belgrade Airport, loans; the contract related to the Kostolac coal plant, the construction of several highways, etc.

TRANSPARENCY SERBIA

Since 2002, Transparency Serbia has been the leading CSO in Serbia when it comes to anti-corruption policies and other related areas, such as public procurement and public-private partnership, free access to information, campaign financing and budget transparency. It has 9 permanent employees and a wide network of external experts.

When it comes to infrastructure projects, Transparency Serbia has been engaged in activities related to monitoring, advocacy, research and legal analyses. They focus on issues such as the strategic and legal environment; procedures adjacent to the implementation of infrastructure projects, like urban planning; the selection of companies awarded with infrastructure contracts through public procurement and concessions); the lack of proper procedures in projects based on inter-state agreements; implementation of projects and compliance with contract provisions. They have also worked on increasing the public awareness about various forms of corruption, the risks and prevention measures. Transparency Serbia is an accredited member of the leading global anti-corruption organization, Transparency International. Since March 2023, they are a member of the working group drafting the new Anti-Corruption Strategy. Several areas of this Strategy are directly related to infrastructure projects, such as the concepts of “public procurement”, “state – owned enterprises” and “infrastructure and spacial planning”.

Transparency Serbia also takes part in the National Convention on the EU, other networks and coalitions at the national, regional and global level and ad-hoc policy discussions organized by national and international institutions in Serbia and abroad (e.g. OSCE, ODIHR, UNCAC, RAI, OECD, European Commission, EBRD, relevant parliamentary committees, government ministries, independent public authorities and local governments). Their main donors include the EU, USAID, Helvetas, MFA Germany, MFA Czech Republic, MATRA, OSCE, UNDP, FOD, Norwegian Aid.

PRIVATE SECTOR

CEVES scope of action fall in the area of private sector development. CEVES has made a significant contribution to the Serbia SME Strategy for the period 2023-2027 which, at the moment of writing, is in the adoption phase. Namely, the draft Strategy incorporates CEVES' recommendations in several key areas, such as the reduction of administrative barriers for SMEs, support for SMEs' exports to the global market, promoting digitalization and innovation in business, and building the capacities of institutions supporting SMEs, particularly through the Agency for Insurance and Financing Export (AOFI).

DIGITAL FUTURE

The Informatics Association of Serbia (IAS) periodically analyses the adoption and implementation of policy initiatives and submits recommendations to the Government and other state institutions. Even though only a part (25%) of the proposals and initiatives have been adopted by the institutions, the Association continues with its activities and insists on appropriate implementation.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

*ENVIRONMENT &
CLIMATE*

Center for Energy, Energy Efficiency and Environment from BiH has trained a group of BiH policy-makers, activists and members of political parties in trainings on topics related to climate-neutral society, climate policies and energy transition. This has allowed for better access of CSO to decision-makers, as well as establishment of common understanding on sensitive policy topics.

*ENVIRONMENT &
CLIMATE*

The Center for Environment is an organization which influences policy-making through advocacy and active campaigning. Their campaigns and citizen mobilization action against small hydropower plants (HPP) have led to the cancellation of several planned projects and ultimately, through joint efforts with other CSOs, to a country-wide ban on the further construction of such HPP.

PRIVATE SECTOR

GEA Association actively contributes to public policies related to employment, favorable business environment and local economic development. Here GEA contributed towards the introduction and implementation of incentive measures for self-employment at the local level, for the reduction of parafiscal charges in Republika Srpska, and for the application of new methodologies for strategic and operational planning at the central and local government level.

THE CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

The Center for Environment established itself as a significant player in various areas of environmental advocacy and policy-making processes at local, national and regional level. While the organization predominantly identifies as an activist civil society organization, it has garnered substantial experience and expertise over the years. Its experience spans across various domains including infrastructure projects and good governance practices which encompass democratic institutions, fight against corruption, transparency, and accountability.

One of the priorities of the Center for Environment is its longstanding commitment to sustainability and environmental protection. The organization is also involved in clean energy projects that aim at the integration of the energy market, decarbonization, clean energy, smart grids, energy efficiency, and energy security. Their advocacy and campaign work in environmental and climate projects have influenced policy-making processes, although the Center was not directly engaged by the client or policy-makers in the policy-making process.

The Center for the Environment, with nearly 25 years of existence, possesses a well-established team that has been diligently monitoring specific processes over the years. Financially, the organization operates independently of local or state-funded projects, which grants them a certain degree of flexibility in their operations. Strategically and statutorily, the Center is structured as an organization that utilizes projects not only to secure funds to carry out the desired activities but also to extend their involvement beyond project tasks. Each member is engaged in what is known as programmatic work, which involves monitoring infrastructure projects, building collaborations, strengthening partnerships, conducting campaigns, etc.

According to their views, some organizations may have the personnel capable of comprehending, commenting on, and engaging with infrastructure projects, but they are often constrained by time and financial resources. Others, based on their experience, either fail to grasp the significance of such activities or actively choose not to get involved, preferring to remain within their comfort zones.

KOSOVO

ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE

The **Balkan Green Foundation** contributed to block the construction of a new coal power plant in Kosovo, as part of an NGO coalition for advocating on the importance of clean energy alternatives and environmental protection, through engagement with experts, research, public awareness and media campaigns.

ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE

Fondacioni Jeshil designed and implemented two pilot composting schemes as part of the *Let's Talk About Food Waste* initiative. The implementation of this initiative created an opportunity to influence the national policy through advocacy, by including the treatment of organic waste and food waste in the Charter for Sustainable and Green Municipalities, and in the financial mechanism issued by the Prime Minister's Office in 2022, with the overall aim of implementing the Green Agenda in Kosovo. By combining research, public engagement, advocacy, and collaboration, Fondacioni Jeshil contributes to the policies for safeguarding and effectively monitoring environmental sustainability.

BALKAN GREEN FOUNDATION, KOSOVO

When it comes to their and overall CSO engagement in large infrastructure projects (LIPs), the Balkan Green Foundation has come to the conclusion that deep expertise in the field of sustainable development, environmental protection, and related fields is crucial. This expertise includes technical in-depth knowledge of the processes, policies, and human behavior to understand and tackle the complexities of environmental issues. Currently and unfortunately, most of the expertise is found outside the local CSOs.

Moreover, successful engagement in LIPs in this sector requires the establishment and maintenance of effective long-term partnerships and collaboration with various stakeholders. CSOs should establish partnerships with local communities, government agencies, academia, businesses, local and regional CSOs from other sectors as well, and experts. This approach is currently being successfully implemented in their project "SolarCollab" funded by KFOS – Kosovo Foundation for Open Society. This is essential for gaining support, knowledge, and involvement in green projects, as well as ensuring long-term sustainability.

Finally, Green Agenda projects are resource-intensive projects and more funds are needed for research, equipment, experts, but also for capital investments namely in renewable energy in the communities where the projects are being implemented.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Transparency International Macedonia has contributed to the implementation of the Government Anticorruption Plan "Action 21". Besides the participation in the policy making process and formulation of legislation related to whistleblowing and whistleblower's protection, TI-Macedonia has organized trainings for the public officials for handling whistleblowers' reports and also created a platform for protection of whistleblowers where all the contact details of these officials are available and regularly updated: <https://ukazuvac.mk/>.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The Skopje-based Center for Research and Policy Making has recently initiated the establishment and is actively involved in two inter-sectoral Working Groups (which include representatives from national, regional, and local government, among other partners). The first WG, led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, has been mandated to draft new legislation for simplified worker registration, aiming to reduce informal labour in various economic sectors. The second WG focuses on reforms of finding a sustainable solution for utilizing organic waste from wineries generated during the grape production process.

ENVIRONMENT &
CLIMATE

The Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis Skopje - IDSCS has been one of the main advocates to enhance the protection of critical infrastructure in light of the war in Ukraine. It has contributed to the creation of a working group which should prepare a draft-law on critical infrastructure. Their engagement aims to ensure the sustainability of critical infrastructure, from cyber security to maintaining irrigation systems, road infrastructure, and overall physical infrastructure as vital to the social and economic benefit of the community.

INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY SOCIETAS CIVILIS SKOPJE (IDSCS)

IDSCS is continuously and on a regular basis engaged in the process of policy-making and monitoring of policy implementation. Among others, they have been engaged in the process of drafting the following laws:

- Law on crises management - where IDSCS advocated to incorporate integrity policies into crisis management procedures.
- Law on Public enterprises – where through advocacy activities IDSCS aims to redefine the criteria for selection of members of management and supervisory boards in public enterprises.
- Proposal for a Law on a screening mechanism for foreign investments, where they prepared guidelines for the introduction of a mechanism for filtering corrosive foreign capital and suppressing corruption.

Their entry point in such endeavors have been domestic institutions which consult CSOs in order to leverage their expertise and increase the legitimacy of the policy making process. Most of their recommendation and policy interventions are considered in the legislative proposals submitted to the parliament. On the other hand, the main challenges that IDSCS team identify are inconsistencies in the process of creating and implementing policies, due to the frequent change of office holders in the subject areas, frequent elections and continuous political instability.

Thus far they have not been involved in the project cycle of LIPs, although they have the experience of working on large EU-funded projects in other areas. In their view, the key conditions to be fulfilled for CSO involvement in infrastructure projects are EU support, political will to provide access through different mechanisms mechanisms and topical expertise. It is important to network with policy makers within institutions and work together on solutions, seek support from the decision makers of the institution and advocate in cooperation with international partners. Impactful actions must be tailored according to the domestic specific context and always question foreign experts (consultancy) support.

ALBANIA

SUSTAINABLE
TRANSPORT

The Business and Economic weekly magazine Monitor – a specialized media - has been involved in monitoring of infrastructure projects under the EU Connectivity Agenda and exercising transparency on the the Albanian Government engagement on the ongoing EIP financed by the EU. Their activities contribute to in depth research, increased transparency and credible information to the broader public and to interested stakeholders, paving the way for increased accountability.¹⁰

¹⁰ Some of the most relevant Monitor articles on LIP can be found here: <https://www.monitor.al/alternativa-korridoresh/> (2012), <https://www.monitor.al/berisha-te-ndertohet-korridori-8-i-rendesishem-per-rajonin/> (2013), <https://www.monitor.al/bullgaret-kerkojne-rruget-shqiptare/>(2016), <https://www.monitor.al/boyko-borissov-nga-korridori-i-8-te-i-transportit-do-te-perfitoje-nje-rajon-i-tere/>(2019), <https://www.monitor.al/rikthet-korridori-8-2/>(2023)

MONITOR MAGAZINE

Monitor is the only business and economic weekly magazine in Albania. The magazine, which exists for over 20 years, also acts as a think tank and offers news, analysis, opinions and statistics on economic and business issues. They emphasise the importance of linking infrastructure projects with their real economic impact on the country. In this context, they are involved in several policy-making processes for large infrastructure projects by lobbying and advocating. A good example is the advocacy work for the inclusion of Corridor VIII in the TEN-T network.

Furthermore, Monitor Magazine has also monitored several large infrastructure projects that are linked to the Berlin Process and the Economic and investment Plan. Their contribution to some of the projects includes articles on the relocation of the Port of Durrës to Porto Romano, the diversion of the last segment of Corridor VIII and more generally TEN-T Corridor VIII projects on the Albanian side, the rising costs of the Skavica plant, and the Photovoltaic park on Vau e Dejes.

Albanian Institute of Science

The Albanian Institute of Science (AIS) is an organization that aims to promote transparency and accountability through an online database. The institute has been instrumental in reporting cases of corruption, with a specific focus on the procurement phase of large infrastructure projects. One of their notable achievements is the preparation of Sectoral Allocation Concessions and PPPs approved between 2017-2020, mainly for infrastructure projects. This highlights that out of the 100 highest-value tenders, 35 of them were awarded without competition. In 2019, they also filed a lawsuit to the Constitutional Court for infringements to the public procurement law in the implementation of the reconstruction program after the earthquake.

ALBANIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE (AIS)

Since it was established in 2011, AIS was involved in different policy-making process aimed to ensure openness, transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. AIS specific field of expertise is in public procurement and financial control, thus they have worked a lot on chapters 5 and 32 of the EU acquis. In this context, AIS was involved in the consultation procedure for the Law on public procurement and its amendments, as well as the amendments to the Law on financial management and control. However, only some of the organisation suggestions were taken into consideration.

AIS has also followed closely the implementation of these laws and in one of the identified cases filed a lawsuit to the Constitutional Court for infringements to the public procurement law in the implementation of the reconstruction program (after the earthquake in Albania in 2019).

Their last endeavor was to bring to the attention of citizens that the Government has approved a Decision of the Council of Ministers that contradicts the law on procurement. They have also created several databases, such as the Open Data database on [Open Data Albania Platforms](#); a database that monitors tendering and contacting - [Open Procurement](#), which includes the [Red Flag system](#) for contracts where the procurement procedure does not follow the right path; database for [monitoring public spending](#) and the integrity of elected and appointed senior public officials; database for [concessions](#) etc.

Some of their successful endeavours include the preparation of [Sectoral Allocation Concessions and PPP approved between 2017-2020](#), which are mainly for infrastructure projects, bringing to evidence that among the [100 highest value tenders in 2021](#), 35 are with RedFlag without competition.

MONTENEGRO

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

The Network for promotion of the NGO sector (MANS) has monitored the Bar – Boljare highway since its inception. It has been the sole CSO in Montenegro that had the capacity to engage in this endeavor and act as a watchdog. As a result of the MANS push, after the government change in 2020, important documents labeled by previous governments as confidential since 2015 have been made public.

NETWORK FOR THE AFFIRMATION OF THE NGO SECTOR (MANS)

The Network for the Affirmation of the NGO Sector (MANS) has been active in Montenegro for more than 20 years in the area of fight against corruption and organized crime. From 2015, they have been advocating for more transparency on the Chinese-highway construction. One of the concrete measures they put forward was the creation of an independent monitoring committee in the Parliament. Although at one-point the parliamentary majority supported the idea, the committee was never formed. MANS also pointed out to potential corruption in the selection of subcontractors, because when the Chinese company CRBC appointed a company as subcontractor, an approval by the Ministry of Transport was necessary.

During the oversight of the construction of the Smokovac-Matasevo section, MANS had alerted on the devastation of the Tara riverbed. In 2018 they discovered that the CRBC endangered the river's course, and that Tara's riverbed in some parts was displaced. Even after MANS published videos which proved the lack of public oversight, main documents concerning the conceptual design of the project, such as all the documents produced by the two state commissions with over 50 members, including their control reports, were declared secret. Together with six other CSOs, MANS filed a criminal complaint for abuse of official position, negligent performance of the official duty of supervision, and causing environmental pollution, which ultimately resulted in the devastation of the Tara river.

MANS also filed a criminal complaint against the former Minister of Transport Ivan Brajovic, who participated in the preparation and contracting of the construction of the Smokovac-Matasevo section due to suspicion of abuse of official position, which damaged the state budget for approximately 134 million euros. The documentation obtained by MANS showed that in one of the reports, the State Commission for Technical Inspection of Works on the Bar-Boljare Highway warned of a series of omissions during the construction of the Tara 1 and Tara 2 bridges, as well as several buildings on the Matasevo interchange.

MANS also organized a round table on the topic "Bar-Boljare Highway - four years later" as part of a project financed by the Delegation of the European Union in Podgorica. In June 2019, MANS Research Center published new recordings which showed that instead of taking the excavated construction waste to the intended location, CRBC illegally deposited this waste on agricultural land along the Drcka river, a tributary of the Tara river. In that part, the coast of Drcka was devastated by sand and stone. In 2020 MANS did a case study where they highlighted the insufficient work done by the Prosecutor's Office in the case of the devastation of the internationally protected Tara river. After the change of government in 2020, they continued to call for more transparency, especially regarding the devastation of Tara river as well as financial documentation on the allocations from the state treasury for both CRBC and subcontractors.

Social Justice Action (ASP) is mainly focused on the monitoring of infrastructure projects. One of the greatest achievements and positive impact of their activities is detecting and informing the public about the irregularities, ulterior motives and corruption as part of the project for construction of Jezerine-Lubnice road. As a result, the investor and the constructing company have been under greater pressure from the public and scrutiny from the new government.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTION (ASP)

Social Justice Action (ASP) from Montenegro focuses on the monitoring of capital budgeting and individual public infrastructure projects. Among them, the Jezerine-Lubnice road, funded through an EBRD loan, has been the most controversial. One of their achievements is detecting and informing the public about the irregularities, ulterior motives and corruption risks as part of the project for construction of this road. ASP indicated that through the implementation of this project, pipes for small hydroelectric plants were installed as a part of the private business of one of the companies connected to the contractor, although they were not mentioned in the original project. Through the Law on Free Access to Information, ASP tried to obtain documentation on the VAT exemption from Montenegro's Tax Administration, with no avail. Thanks to whistleblowers, ASP revealed that the project was lacking in quality preparation and sufficient research of the terrain. ASP also continuously pointed out to the potential corruption risks in this project and the fact that more than three deadlines for the construction of the Jezerine-Lubnice road were breached. In July 2023, they uncovered that this investment will ultimately cost more than double the originally contracted 34.69 million euros. As a result, the investor and the constructing company have been under great pressure from the public and scrutiny from the newly formed governments. ASP's oversight of this controversial project also led to an investigation by the Special State Prosecution launched in September 2022.

REGIONAL FEATURES

The organizations considered as relevant for the purpose of this mapping exercise represent are quite diverse in terms of the areas they cover and **have different expertise and experience which spans across all the EIP sectors**. They also have different organizational structure and approach to the topic of infrastructure more broadly, ranging from a broader, policy-level impact to flagging and addressing shortcomings in specific infrastructure projects.

Most of the surveyed organizations fall in the category of think tanks, followed by activist CSO and civil society entities. They are registered as associations, foundations or other non-governmental organizations. In addition to policy research and analysis, they engage in advocacy, service provision, media-related work and representation of business, professional and public interests at the local and central level. Thanks to their insistence on increased transparency and information-sharing as a shared priority, they have a crucial role in **bridging the information gap between the stakeholders involved in policy and project implementation, and the citizens**.

The majority of the surveyed organizations have significant experience and expertise in relation to policy-making processes in their respective areas, which means that there is a **significant pool of know-how that could be leveraged**. Most of them have experience in areas which we have defined as relevant for the implementation of the EIP and LIP more broadly – first and foremost good governance - but also on aspects related to public finance management and public procurement. Only half of the surveyed organizations, though, have engaged specifically in policy and projects in the area of infrastructure, while the rest **lack specific knowledge of the project cycle management of infrastructure projects**. This implies that there is a need to strengthen their capacities to engage in this area. But even under these circumstances, there are substantial examples of impactful actions, although they are limited in number compared to the broader scope of CSO activities.

Few CSOs have had specific consultancy contracts on specific EIP or other LIPs. This means that they cover those areas on their own will and volition, not as engaged by EU, IFI or national structures. Their experience extends across the phases of the large infrastructure PCM, although their key focus seems to be on project preparation, tendering and implementation. Interestingly, the phase of needs analysis and identification, where CSOs have a significant contribution to make stemming from their role to voice and represent citizens interests, even in situations where they lack the broader infrastructure-related expertise, appears to be the phase where they have been the least involved.

Some of the surveyed CS organizations employ highly qualified individuals that also have relevant experience (having previously worked either in the national institutions on relevant positions, such as IPA operating structures and contracting units responsible inter alia for the management of LIP, or as consultants on individual LIP-related assignments). An interesting feature is that, while employed by NGO, those highly qualified CSO&TT professionals often work on an individual basis for business consultancies contracted by IFI or EU to assist national institutions with LIPs.

Almost all of the surveyed CSOs work with national governments whose institutions, agencies and public enterprises are in most instances the “owners” of LIPs. Many of them also work with local and regional authorities, as well as EU institutions and bilateral donors. **Only a quarter, though, work with IFIs. This may be explained by the lack of specialized CSO profile required by IFI. As in a vicious circle** it directly contributes to the experience deficit in the area of infrastructure, as a big portion of LIPs tend to be funded through loans from IFIs. IFI must foresee the engagement of CSO in different stages of PCM. Very often for IFI this is the only way to make sure that LIPs proposed by WB6 governments are legitimate and respect citizens’

interest, embed European values and norms from project identification stage, and do not obey only the financial parameters.

What CSOs are lacking in this context is not merely access to policy makers and other relevant stakeholders. There is an intensive exchange ongoing between CSOs and government representatives, as the former are often invited to government-led, donor-led and other consultation fora. The most notable example is the involvement in the sector working groups (SWG), which were initially intended to be the gathering to discuss both policy and project-related aspects in the course of the IPA 2 programming and implementation. **Half of the surveyed organizations are members of the SWGs** and almost half of them are members of other consultation fora with government representatives or meetings organized at other levels (local, regional and European). Their engagement in this fora is usually on voluntary basis (unpaid).

However, the challenges that CSO representatives often put forward include the **lack of publicly available information and data and lack of political will** by government officials and civil servants to include them in actual decision-making. Oftentimes initiatives are processed and decisions are made in **non-transparent or simplified/shortened procedures**, that do not provide for meaningful CSO engagement. Often there are even instances of major disagreements and even public attacks on CSO which discourage their meaningful involvement.¹¹

Hence, the main issue seems to be the project promoters' willingness to take onboard CSO suggestions and proposals when making decisions, which limits CSO ability to influence policy and project decisions ex-ante and sometimes reduces public consultations to a box-ticking exercise. Moreover, CSO involvement and consultation, even for box-ticking purposes, is limited to the area of policy and becomes marginal when it comes to LIP-related discussions and decision-making. LIPs are not discussed with CSO representatives in the SWGs. **National Investment Committees, the inter-ministerial structures tasked specifically with the discussion, selection and approval of LIPs at both technical and political level do not include CSO representatives.**

¹¹ RES Foundation programme director was involved in the preparation of the first single project pipeline in the Republic of Serbia and left the process due to disagreements with the methodology used.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even if there are few specific examples of SCSO&TT engagement in the area of infrastructure, on EIP and LIP implementation, they have the potential to exert positive policy and project impact, provided they are given an opportunity and enabling environment. The existing examples of successful CSO actions demonstrate that having an extensive network and good relationship with various stakeholders, including policymakers, media and other relevant factors is a prerequisite for having access to relevant sources of information, exercise advocacy and carry on successful and impactful actions.

Access to funding from independent sources (usually international organizations and donors) is necessary for successful and appropriate implementation of various action steps, as CSOs in the region operate on the basis of project-based donor-funding and their priorities need to align with those of the donors in order to secure proper financial resources.

SCO&TT in the region are involved in policy making activities through the participation in SWG or submission of individual or group initiatives and proposals, in advocacy and in raising public awareness. The most important and meaningful impacts and achievements of SCSO&TT are related to the creation and/or adjustment of government strategies or legislation (law, by-laws, rules and regulations) in the course of alignment with the EU requirements and for the greater good of the general public or specific groups, depending on the issue at stake. However, **there is serious lack of CSO involvement in the area of infrastructure, both at the policy and especially at the project level.** Monitoring, advocacy and watchdog activities account for most of the CSO engagement in the area of infrastructure, especially in situations when CSOs have not been engaged in policy-making and project-related decisions.

While it is not the goal to provide a scientifically-backed geographical profile we noted a **critical mass of CSO&TT in the region** involved in some phases of the project cycle. Almost half of the surveyed organizations have specific hands-on experience working on large infrastructure projects. But each country seem to have its own specifics: we found that CSO engagement in infrastructure in Montenegro has been mostly driven by controversial deals in the area of transport carried on to protect public interest. In BiH and Kosovo, the biggest focus and impact has been in the area of environment as an area of pressing interest for the citizens, while in North Macedonia CSO activities in infrastructure have been driven by concerns related to corruption and national security.

In short, **there is no structured approach to CSO engagement in infrastructure projects**, differently from CSO engagement in rule of law, environment, anti-corruption, social, foreign policy etc. SWGs have failed to fulfil their full “inclusiveness” function and have only focused on discussing policy-related aspects, as CSOs seem to be regularly included in policy discussions. **None of the surveyed CSOs has been involved in the meetings of the National Investment Committees or regional coordination, consultation and decision-making levels (WBIF).** Hence, a new approach is needed that combines a **change in the mindset and practices of involved stakeholders (policy-makers, implementing agencies/enterprises, donors and lenders), along with the creation of mechanisms that will enshrine CSO involvement in the EIP and the PCM of LIPs.**

Given the fact that some countries are ahead of the others in the region in regards to implementation of LIP, it would be also useful to support to the creation of a regional network of SCO&TT and roster of experts who will closely cooperate and support each other, exchange innovative ideas, proposals or best practices regarding specific topics, including access to finance or fundraising activities. Support from peer organizations and experts in terms of knowledge,

experience and information sharing, as well as from IFIs and the international donor community in terms of providing financial and other support would greatly contribute towards increased involvement of SCSO&TT to the benefit of improved LIP governance.

Based on the available information and data, **there is already a relevant pool of experienced and knowledgeable in-house and external experts in civil society in all the countries in the region for the implementation of LIP that can serve as the initial core for such an “exercise”**. Those experts would be perfectly able to engage and deliver in specific LIP-related contracts and start a positive spiral that would lead to meaningful CSO engagement, as it would help to further build up the CSO know-how, secure financial stream for permanent and structured involvement and support the creation and strengthening of “CSO in infrastructure” networks.

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