

FACT SHEET

IPA II: how to support CSOs providing services to refugees along the Western Balkan route

This fact sheet lays out the results of a consultation launched by SOLIDAR among the members of the IRIS Network, a regional network that brings together CSOs providing social services in the Western Balkans. The IRIS network has been founded in the framework of the EU-funded project "Improving the provision of Social Service Delivery in South Eastern Europe through the empowerment of national and regional CSOs", implemented by the consortium of LIR CD BiH, OGI Croatia, EDC Serbia, SOS telephone Podgorica, Montenegro, CLARD Kosovo, ARSIS Albania, ASYD FYROM, and SOLIDAR- led by ASB Germany.

The consultation aimed at assessing the main needs and challenges for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working in the Western Balkans, with a focus on services and support delivered to refugees on the move along the Western Balkan route. Therefore, the fact sheet presents **recommendations on how to make the best use of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II)** to strengthen the civil society and social service provision in the Western Balkans.



1. INTRODUCTION

The challenges and opportunities for members of the IRIS Network working in the Western Balkan region are up to the tasks and values echoed in the Multi-Country Indicative Strategy Paper (2014-2020). An empowered civil society is an essential component of a participatory democracy and contributes to spur the legislative and structural reforms needed to fulfill the conditions for EU membership. Civil Society Organisations, such as IRIS network members, need an enabled legal and financial environment in order to develop their respective autonomy and representativeness in social services delivery. On one hand, financial support through the Civil Society Facility instrument will allow CSOs to move towards a more targeted assistance, ensuring efficiency, sustainability and focus on results. On the other hand, by providing social services and supporting for the most vulnerable in society, CSOs foster improved economic, social and territorial developments.

2. THE INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA)

The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) is the mean by which the EU, through the European Commission and its DG Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiation (DG NEAR), supports policy reforms to candidate countries and potential beneficiaries with financial and technical help. The tool is aimed at supporting Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey to strengthen democratic institutions, improve legal predictability of the judicial system, foster respect of fundamental rights and promote gender equality, tolerance, social inclusion and non-discrimination.

IPA II (2014-2020) takes into account the structural problems encountered in the initial implementing phase of the IPA I financial framework (2007-2013). More rigorous selection criteria for programmes

and focus on areas with clear needs for a regional approach is set. It simplifies the delivery assistance, including through the introduction of budget support, the simplification of monitoring modalities at local level.

One of the main aims of the IPA II is to support the strengthening of civil society, including capacity building and encouraging the creation of an enabling environment for its participation in policy making. An active and vibrant civil society contributes to fulfilling the conditions for EU membership by empowering citizens to participate in social and political life and combating exclusion and discrimination¹.

Consequently, the EU provides financial support to CSOs in the framework of the IPA II, through the Civil Society Facility (CSF) programme. The CSF consists of three strands: support for national and local civic initiatives and capacity-building to strengthen the role of civil society in the region; support for activities carried out in partnership between civil society organisations (CSOs) from across the region and from EU Member States in order to develop networks and promote transfer of knowledge and experience; support visits to EU institutions and exchange of experience, know-how and good practice between local civil society, the EU and civil society in Member States.

3. HOW TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY FACILITY INSTRUMENT TO SPUR SOCIAL PROGRESS?

The following analysis aims at voicing the IRIS Network's recommendations on conceivable ways of effectively and coherently supporting their daily activities through easier and more coordinated access to the Civil Society Facility instrument and funding.

¹ European Commission, Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) – Multi-country indicative strategy paper (2014-2020), adopted on 30/06/2014





The following questions have been used as benchmarks for the mapping of CSOs' priorities:

- What synergy mechanisms (local/regional) should be strengthened or implemented in order to improve civil society organizations' range of actions?
- What should be done in order to enhance your daily services delivery and guarantee long-term sustainability of CSOs providing social services (with a specific focus on services to refugees and migrants on the move along the western Balkan route)?

3.1 Enabling the environment for CSOs providing social services

Considering that the funds available under the IPA framework are "sound investment into the future of both the enlargement countries and the EU itself" whilst helping "the beneficiaries (...) to provide their citizens with better opportunities and allow for development of standards equal to the ones enjoyed by EU citizens", their focus in the future in relation to CSO development and support should be based on revision and updating of the following strategies:

- Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper (known as «Strategy Paper») which sets out the priorities for EU horizontal and regional financial assistance for the period 2014-2020 to support Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey².
- National - Country Strategy Papers - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey³:

2 http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20140919-multi-country-strategy-paper.pdf

3 http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/key-documents/index_en.htm?key_document=080126248ca659ce

The Country Strategy Papers are the specific strategic planning documents made for each beneficiary for the 2014-2020 period. The aim is to provide for a stronger ownership by the beneficiaries through integrating their own reform and development agenda. Focusing on the political priorities/dimension set out in relation to key areas where financial assistance is most needed also needs to be taken into account. Yet, at the time of drafting the Country Strategy Papers, the EC could not have predicted the unprecedented scale of the refugee crisis and the political impact in the countries covered, where increasing xenophobia coupled with populist rhetoric towards minorities is exacerbating.

Since the increased migrant flow along the Western Balkan route, many CSOs – part of the IRIS network – have started providing emergency support and services on the move. Examples of activities implemented in the Western Balkan region by IRIS members are⁴:

- Humanitarian assistance on the move and first aid services for people in transit (e.g. providing mobile toilets, sanitary containers with showers and hot water, system of taps with running water; distribution of food, tents, blankets, rain-coats; animations for children)
- Provision of direct 24h/day medical assistance at the border between Serbia and Croatia;
- Construction of refugee camps as for example in Subotica (already operative) and in Dimitrovgrad (under construction);
- Assistance to local authorities in crisis management and equipment;
- Building capacity of CSOs providing social services and strengthen cooperation at regional level;
- Services to support the socio-economic integration of migrants and refugees (e.g. programmes

4 More information about the activities implemented by IRIS members to support refugees are available in the SOLIDAR Activity report „Roundtable debate: Migration and fundamental rights. Will the EU live up to its values?“ <http://iris-see.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ACTIVITY-REPORT-roundtable-10-November.pdf>





to fight long-term unemployment of refugees and internally displaced persons);

- Awareness raising and campaigns to promote plurality of society (e.g. peace education for families, intercultural learning).

Some of the aspect to be taken into account by the European Commission when planning the financial assistance for CSO development and work, are the following:

- To focus on the areas and topics where an **urgent response** is most needed, whilst including long-term planning that will cover cross-cutting themes like: promotion of non-violent conflict resolution and human-rights based approach, with special focus on children rights.
- To ensure that **gender equality principles** are taken into account and met when providing social services. Gender analysis and equality for all major projects and actions should be made.
- To promote **freedom of speech** and information sharing, and deliver accurate information without populist political propaganda, and with strong request for non-hate speech and focus on development of trust and social cohesion.
- To **promote the European Union**, with its projects, not only as just economic structure but also as a structure that promotes tolerance and accessibility of social services for all within the country beneficiaries' geographical region.
- To concentrate **support on already established and recognised regional initiatives**, and direct social services providers from national and grass-root level – meaning civil society organizations, since they are on the field and direct providers of social services and by the definition are more mobile, and flexible in their work than governmental institutions.
- To support the initiatives of CSOs who actively engage as professionals and volunteers **people who have been victim of discrimination or**

human right's violations, as they can contribute to the development of the best user-friendly strategies for inclusion and cohesion.

3.2. Improving the Civil Society Facility instrument

As emerged by the feedbacks provided by IRIS members, one solution to make sure that the Civil Society Facility (CSF) could help CSOs to respond both to the “emergencies” and the long-term objectives, is to develop two formats of call for proposals: 1. Short project to respond to emergency situations (such as the refugee crisis) based on more flexible criteria and 2. Long - term calls (2-4 years).

This would allow CSOs providing social services to:

- Deliver direct and flexible assistance (mobile units of specialists).
- Assist State's stakeholders (social services, police officers) on how to respond effectively, by setting up standards according to the core-values of the EU.
- Set-up standard operational procedures for receiving/hosting/supporting the beneficiaries.
- Create short and mid-term integration programs and cultural mediation programs.
- Create short-term employment opportunities and economic recovery initiatives geared towards improving the delivery of basic social services.
- Set-up programs supporting intercultural learning and non-verbal communication.

Projects aiming to increase closer cooperation on regional level needs to be supported. Priority should be given to recognised networks of CSOs from IPA area that have proven record and sound experience of working in mentioned topics and areas. However, projects at National and micro level can equally be supported and specific needs could be targeted by:

- Raising Public awareness campaigns.
- Social media and other information channels in order to raise citizens' awareness.





- Creating information points for the migrants close to the sheltering areas.
- Creating a First Aid point for basic needs.
- Creating a Legal Human Rights info-point.
- Creating a supervision mechanism on how the migrants are being treated by local authorities.
- Raising the awareness of the Local Community (local municipalities, local CSO's and citizens) in order to provide, if needed, the migrants with food, clothes and blankets.
- Facilitating discussions between all the stakeholders and coordination of tailor made responses.
- Organising Public debates between citizens and stakeholders.
- Legal aid to migrants and refugees

3.3. Country- specific feedbacks on the situation of refugees and migrants along the Western Balkan route

Albania⁵

The Albanian government faces structural problems such as divisive political culture and lack of constructive cross-party dialogue. Comprehensive reform strategies need to be implemented and adopted. The administration needs professional know-how guidance and appropriate financial capacity building. Whilst the country has marginally been affected by the recent refugee crisis, all measures linked to the Civil Society Facility (CSF) targeted projects correspond to the needs of Albanian CSOs.

Bosnia and Herzegovina⁶

Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities are facing socio-economic challenges and the political situation is not fixed due to a complex mix of institutional architecture, corruption and political patronage. Strategic framework, such as the ones mentioned earlier on, ensuring appropriate guidance to public

5 Inputs provided by ARSIS Tirana

6 Inputs provided by LIR CD

administration reform are needed. The establishment of official government body coordinating budget allocation and projects implementation, with CSOs, would reduce risks of overlapping responsibilities. Synergy mechanisms, at national and regional, level can be established and/or improved. The legal and institutional framework for the observance of human rights and the protection of minorities requires improvements.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia⁷

Government official information states that over 97,000 people have applied for asylum between 19th June 2015 and 25th September 2015. According to the Law on Amendments and Modifications of the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, the persons who shall express their intention to submit an asylum application can move freely for 72 hours throughout the Republic of Macedonia, and will be treated in accordance with the regulations regarding foreigners. However, information on the ground indicate that the security forces of the Republic of Macedonia do not allow such movement and transport refugees from the southern to the northern border, thus sending them towards Serbia. On 19th August 2015, the Republic of Macedonia declared a crisis situation in the southern and northern borders, which was extended in September, to 15th June 2016, by the Parliament. As a result, of the security crisis declaration, Macedonia has closed its entry points to new refugees, using force in order to prevent refugees from entering its territory. In the Republic of Macedonia there are, currently, two reception centers for asylum seekers - in Skopje and Gevgelija.

Kosovo⁸

Kosovo is at an early stage of alignment with European standards including in the areas of public administration, statistics and financial control. Nevertheless, significant efforts are needed to implement

7 Inputs provided by ASYD FYROM in November 2015.

Find more in SOLIDAR briefing #74 "[Assessing social progress in the Western Balkans 2015](#)"

8 Inputs provided by CLARD





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stricter and professionalized control of the administration and state-owned enterprises. The ongoing refugees' crisis also presents the country with new challenges. The Kosovar Government stated that precautions regarding migration related affairs had been taken. Whilst sounding promising on theory, there are reservations on how Kosovo can manage migrant flows given its fragile socio-economic situation and high unemployment rates⁹. Experts deem that the country is a 'transit destination', used by refugees on the Western Balkans route, thus potentially influencing Kosovar citizens to undertake the same journey in hope for a better life in northern EU Countries and file asylum claims as third country nationals.

Montenegro¹⁰

The impact of the refugee crisis in Montenegro at this moment is low although there have been concerns about future increase of the number of refugees passing through the country, and not enough material and human resources for providing them adequate support in line with human rights standards. Long term planning at Regional and European level is essential for easing the pressure on the authorities and CSOs delivering services. In humanitarian crises, refugees depend on the protection and assistance of Governmental and NGO institutions. Humanitarian aid workers, government, security and law enforcement officials need to be trained professionally in recognizing exploitation forms, physical and psychological.

Serbia¹¹

Serbian authorities are coping with multiple needs and services that need to be provided to refugees passing through the country. The cooperation between civil society organizations and local autho-

⁹ According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics the current unemployment rate is 35.30%

¹⁰ Inputs provided by SOS telephone Podgorica, Montenegro

¹¹ Inputs provided by Education Centre Leskovac in November 2015. Find more in SOLIDAR briefing #74 "[Assessing social progress in the Western Balkans 2015](#)"

rities have been minimal. More cooperation with civil society is needed in order to make sure that beneficiaries' practical needs are taken into account when implementing project financed by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.



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Part of SOLIDAR work is dedicated to the promotion of democratic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, and to ensure the social dimension in the EU Enlargement process. Together with local partners SOLIDAR works to contribute to the promotion of social progress and prosperity in the Western Balkans.

This briefing is based on the inputs from strategic partners from Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, who are part of the IRIS Network. More information on their network can be found at www.iris-see.eu.

SOLIDAR is a European network of membership based Civil Society Organisations who gather several millions of citizens throughout Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR voices the values of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions across the three main policy sectors; social affairs, lifelong learning and international cooperation.

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