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Support to the Promotion of Civil Society regional actions in the Western Balkans

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ISSUED BY THE WESTERN BALKANS FUND

ISSUE IV, JANUARY 2023



2nd Call for Proposals Awarding Ceremony



Thirty-six grants, with 127 Civil Society Organisations as direct beneficiaries, were awarded in December 2022 as winners of the Second Call for Proposals of the European Union and Western Balkans Fund joint Grant Scheme.

The grants divided equally between the Contracting Parties of the Western Balkan Region aim to improve cooperation and enhance Reconciliation at the regional level. Culture, education, science and research, sustainable development, environmental issues, and women empowerment are the main fields of intervention of the awarded grants.

The Second Call for Proposals, totalling a budget of 500.000 Euros, with up to 15.000 Euros awarded per project, is the largest in the history of the Western Balkans Fund. The application phase opened in May 2022, lasting until 9 July.

Similarly to the 1 CfP, the WBF team embarked on a regional tour of Info Sessions in 12 locations divided equally between Contracting Parties, 7 Info Days and numerous Remote Mentorship Sessions provided in all the official languages of the Region.

The evaluation stage, conducted by the joint team of internal and external evaluators, recommended the shortlisted projects in late October, and after receiving the endorsement of the European Union and Contracting Parties, the list was endorsed by the Council of Senior Officials of WBF and the European Union is Informed on the decision.

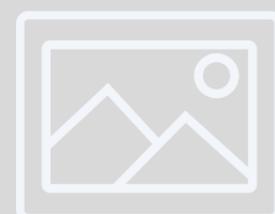
The Grantee Partnership Workshop and the Awarding Ceremony happened on the 19th of December, 2022. The implementation of the project starts on January 2023



[List of the Awarded Projects](#)



[Remarks of the Executive Director](#)



[Selected Pictures](#)



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IN DEPTH

The 36 grantees of the 2 CFPs attended a day-long workshop on 19 December 2022.

The workshop started with a general orientation and introduction session by Ms Ksenija Vukmirovic, Programme Manager and followed by Mr Fjordi Bisha, EU Program Manager. The session outlined the general contractual and financial principles, as well our critical requirements during the project implementation. Ms Ksenija Vukmirovic, Project Manager, briefed the winning applicants about the Reporting, Monitoring and Visibility requirements. The session also helped the team consolidate a calendar of events and plan the critical success stories.

The second part of the Workshop, was a Group Session titled Elevating Regional Cooperation and was conducted by Ms. Dafina Beqiri, Senior Programme Manager and Mr. Uros Citakovic, M&E Officer. Interactively, the grantees exchanged their expectations and suggestions about the Regional Cooperation, People to People links and Reconciliation of our Region.

Workshop Session for the grantees



[Selected Pictures](#)

Ten more tasks completed

During the trimester covered by the fourth issue of the Joint Action Newsletter, ten more tasks have been completed, with several others ongoing.

Evaluation and Selection of Applications

The evaluation started in September by a team composed of internal and external evaluators. From more than 300 applications received, 60 ended up in the final voting panel, held in late October. Finally, 36 projects, equally distributed between Contracting Parties, were recommended for support to the European Union and WBF Contracting Parties. Upon receiving confirmation for the suggested list, the Western Balkans Fund notified the winners on November 2022.

Endorsing the Reporting

The report on the Evaluation and Selection Process by the CSO Members and communication with EU/DGNEAR achieved

successfully during the trimester. The clearance received paved the way for the Awarding Ceremony of the 2 CfP on 18 December 2022.

Publication of the results

Upon receiving the final green light from the higher bodies and the European Union, the Western Balkans Fund officially published the list of winning projects on 2 December 2022. The applicants were notified of their status, winner, reserve list or not-winner since mid-November 2022.

Signature of the Grant Contracts for 2 CfP

Grantees of the 2 CfP were requested to bring Tirana their official stamp to sign the contract. Most signed the grant contract shortly after completing the workshop session on 18 December 2022. The few grantees who couldn't attend or did not have the authorisation to use the official stamp were presented with an original copy of the contract to be signed, stamped and mailed to the Secretariat. They had the contract successfully signed by the end of the year.

Awarding Ceremony, Communication and Promotion

The Awarding Ceremony, held on 18 December 2022, attracted many distinguished guests. The Ambassador of OSCE in Albania,

the Ambassador or Representatives of Embassies of many EU countries, such as France, Hungary, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland and many other partner countries or institutions were present in the Ceremony to deliver the winning certificates to the grantees. Despite the required number of success stories already met, the Western Balkan Fund communication team will continue to pay special attention to the 2nd Call for Proposal projects, supporting their visibility and reporting on their achievements, including other success stories, during the whole of 2023.

Full list of accomplished tasks

1. Evaluation of applications – CfP2
2. Selection of the winning applications
3. Report on the Evaluation and Selection process outcome
4. Endorsement by Committee of Senior Officials and EU/DGNEAR
5. Publication of results
6. Signing of the contracts
7. Preparatory work for the Awarding Ceremony
8. Awarding Ceremony
9. Preparatory work on training and workshop materials
10. Training and workshop of 2 CfP grantees

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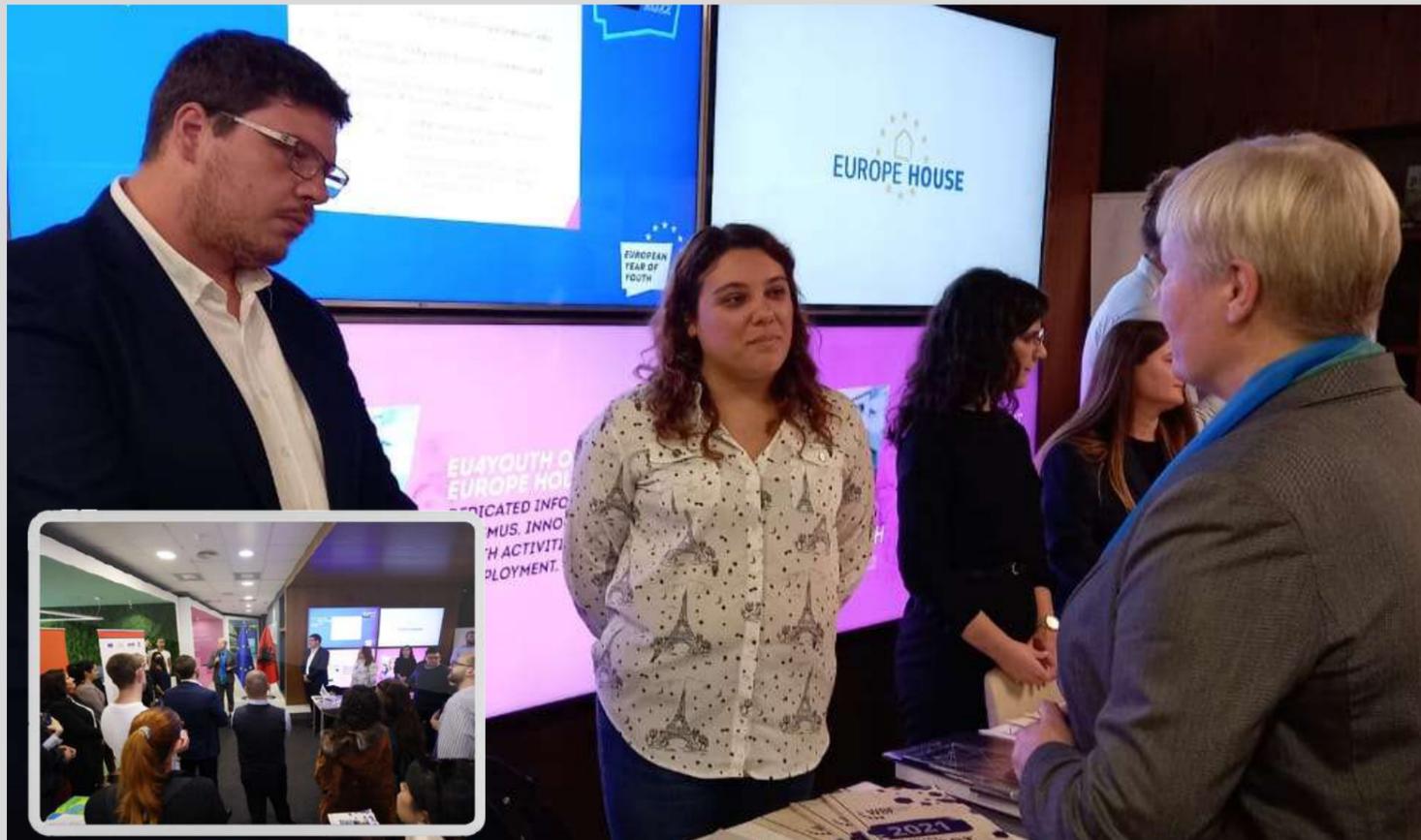
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MORE

WBF at #EU4Youth Open Day

On 13 October 2022, at the #EU4Youth Open Day, the Western Balkans Fund had the pleasure of presenting the funding opportunities we provide to the EU Delegation Ambassador to Tirana, H.E. Christiane Hohmann, and dozens of students and young people interested in giving their contributions to Regional Cooperation and Reconciliation. During this fair, the WBF Team met with dozens of students and other potential stakeholders interested in the interventions we provide. One day earlier, WBF participated in the discussions of a round table dedicated to the challenges and funding opportunities for youth in our Region. The panels were streamed live by the EU Delegation webpage and broadcast in the local media.



The Western Balkans Fund team, at the meeting with H.E. Christiane Hoffman, EU Ambassador to Albania

UN Women congratulates our women empowerment network

UN Women Europe and Asia congratulate the "I Love Balkan" Regional Conference, funded by the Western Balkans Fund and the European Union, as part of the First CfP. The Conference, with partners from all the Contracting Parties of the Region, served as a platform to discuss and exchange experiences and best practices on women's entrepreneurship among stakeholders from the Western Balkans region. The Conference included a dedicated panel discussion on topics ranging from entrepreneurship, women in business and the environment. "With this Conference, we are making a strong impression that today we are ready for the construction of collapsed bridges. The economic empowerment

of women and youth and their cooperation are key to improving political, economic and social issues in our Region," said Sanija Murati, Director of the Balkan Women Association, created with the aim of improving the capacities of women entrepreneurs in the Western Balkans. "Women are the real heroes of every single family. Women are the glue holding together our communities. Women are the ones that endure the most difficult of times," said Gjergj Murra, Executive Director of the Western Balkans Fund, speaking at the Conference. "Investing in women entrepreneurs is a game-changer. When women entrepreneurs are supported and have equal access to economic

opportunities, everyone benefits," said Vlora Tuzi Nushi, Head of UN Women Kosovo. Shqipe Breznica, Director of Help – Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe in Kosovo, highlighted that the "economic empowerment of women supports integration and inclusion since by being financially stable and independent all marginalised groups become more confident and competent, and from the margins gradually move to the centre and make sure that their voices are heard." As part of the Conference, the "Balkan Women's Association" launched the "Women Book", a publication featuring 60 success stories of women entrepreneurs from across the Western Balkans, some of whom were present at the event.



Women are the real heroes of every single family. Women are the glue holding together our communities. Women are the ones that endure the most difficult of times - Gjergj Murra, Executive Director of the Western Balkans Fund



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Monitoring & Mentoring of the 30 projects of the 1st CFP



All the projects of the 1 Call for Proposal, in total 30, have been monitored on site, online or hybrid by the EU/WBF Project and the Secretariat staff. During the timeframe reported in this Fourth Issue of the Newsletter, we have successfully visited all the Contracting Parties. In doing so, we have been close to the projects everywhere the project took place, including outdoor or remote trips. Being close to grantees also had a dual purpose, permitting our organisation to solidify its growing mentorship role. On different occasions, we reached out to support the grantees with their paperwork and other important details of PCM.

At this moment, we are entering the closing phase of all the projects of the First Call for Proposals. Until the end of December 2022, 12 projects have closed. Immediately after the approval of the final reports, the second and final instalment was wired to the grantees. The remaining project has entered the last phase of their implementation or are currently under review.

DISCLAIMER

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IN BRIEF



Supporting Regional Youth Mobility

Increasing Regional Youth Mobility is one of the main goals of WBF grants. In November, we participated in the Regional Conference organised by our grantees, GERMIN, Centre for Support of Local and Regional Development (CeP) and ESTIMA Association. The Conference concluded the implementation of a pilot initiative that allowed six first-generation fellows to complete a fellowship program at the partner organisation based in another Contracting Party. During the fellowship, they conducted research projects on various subjects related to migration and development.

Tackling brain drain and mass migration

Enhancing Youth Regional Mobility and Cooperation in the Region tackles brain drain and mass migration of the youth. Thanks to GERMIN, Centar za podršku lokalnog i regionalnog razvoja – CEP and Association Estima, we have created a platform of migration think tanks and empowered young researchers who will be able to impact the future of our Region positively. In Prishtina, Mr Bisha, WBF/EU project manager, attended the final Conference to deliver his remarks.

Environment and animal welfare protection

Different projects continue to support the environmental and habitat protection of the Western Balkans Region. A flagship initiative, a project run by the Center for Protection and Research of Birds Montenegro and partners in Serbia and Albania, developed detailed research on vulnerable species, recommending to policy-makers important changes. Similar recommendations derived two separate projects, one with FLAG, EYCD and the Agency for Management of Protected Areas of Podgorica as partners. The other project combined forces of Park Piva, Demir Kapija and Valamara protected areas.

Reconciliation and enhanced cooperation

The quest of dozens of young musicians to fame and Reconciliation has been supported by WBF/EU joint action. Camerata Balcanica orchestra, composed of 35 young musicians, promoted WB talent and values in seven separate venues. Jazz orchestra, consisting of dozens of musicians, operated in Podgorica, Tirana and Banja Luka.

700.000+ followers in 2022

On numerous occasions, the result or the implementation of our projects gained remarkable coverage in national and regional media outlets in the Western Balkan Region. Regarding its channels, the WBF shared 278 posts on Facebook, with a reach of 666.763. Compared to 2021, the growth amounted to 192%. On Instagram, the reach was 81.772. Compared to the same timeframe in 2021, growth amounted to an astonishing 913%. Significant increases arose on Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube and, most importantly, the WBF webpage. In the official webpage, we received more than 29k visitors. The majority of the posts and the absolute majority of the pageviews are related with the implementation of the many projects of 1 Call for Proposals.

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