**Training on Monitoring of Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) Contracts for Implementers from Western Balkan and Türkiye**

**ONLINE, 12 – 13 October 2023**

**EVENT REPORT**

## Introduction

This capacity-building activity refers to the CSOs' organisational and operational capacity development area of the EU TACSO 3 project.

The monitoring process of the grant contracts is a critical step in grant management. The capacities of the CSOs in the Western Balkan region and Türkiye vary from experienced to less experienced and newcomers, with room for improvement and learning in the different areas.

This training was organised by the EU TACSO 3 team to develop further and build the capacities for monitoring FSTP grant contracts based on practical examples, case studies, and peer-to-peer learning. The agenda was developed based on the feedback received from the applicants regarding their capacities for monitoring and expectations thus including topics related to phases of the monitoring process, site visits as monitoring tools, issues and challenges and interpretation of data collection and reporting.

FSTP is a tool to enhance outreach to a wider range of local beneficiaries, notably in good governance, gender equality, human rights, media and civil society support. With this, the European Commission has significantly increased the number of CSOs benefitting from EU support. FSTP allows for more tailor-made support of grassroots organisations and informal groups with smaller grants and more accessible application and selection procedures which are offered in local languages. It also provides the flexibility to define eligibility and reporting requirements adapted to the capacities of target beneficiaries within the difficult political contexts in which civil society actors often operate.

A total of 30 participants attended the training of which 21 were female and 9 male participants. In total 5 participants were from Serbia, 6 from North Macedonia, 5 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 4 from Kosovo, 2 from Montenegro and 5 from Türkiye representing CSOs – FSTP implementers from the WBT region and a representative from ERGO Network.

The training was delivered by the Capacity Building Expert Ms. Andreja Tonč supported by Ms Ozge Konuralp, Country Coordinator for Türkiye.

This report is prepared by Ms. Marija Armenski, Country Coordinator for North Macedonia.

## Day 1 – Overview and key points

**Introduction**

At the beginning of the training, the trainer Ms Andreja Tonč, a Capacity Building Expert, welcomed participants and provided opening remarks presenting the key objectives of the training and the agenda. Ms. Tonč explained that the agenda was developed by the information received in the

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application forms of trainees for the training and provided elaboration on how the selection process of the selected trainees was done.

Following the opening remarks, participants introduced themselves and their role in the organizations regarding the FSTP process as well as their experience in monitoring.

The team leader of TACSO 3, Mr Richard Allen, explained the importance of the FSTP instrument in reaching CSOs that cannot directly apply for Civil Society Facility Grants and the importance of monitoring as important learning expertise even though sometimes perceived as a bureaucratic activity.

**What do we consider when talking about monitoring in one word?**
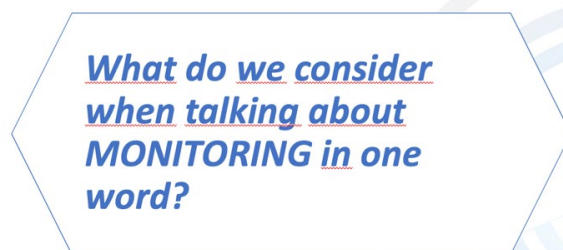


The first session started with a discussion and group work about the **meaning of the word monitoring**. The results from the group work are presented in **Annex 4** of the report.

Most of the results showed that participants understand monitoring mainly as controlling and verification. The trainer elaborated that **monitoring is not a control, but rather a learning and observing process**.

However, in the context of EU projects, monitoring has a controlling component with verification control.

The training expert explained that **learning is the key point of monitoring** because, with the monitoring sufficient information regarding the project, organisations, target groups and impact are collected. Monitoring is primarily a learning process because the differences between what has been foreseen and what has been implemented are identified with why certain approaches are being undertaken and decisions made. Consequently, an important skill and **significant component of monitoring is listening**.

In addition, the training expert addressed **monitoring as an observing process** and how is made on different levels within the organization. With the observation, monitoring experts observe how environmental factors impose various challenges and risks on the project implementation. In this context, observation of the project documentation and the reporting is part of the information that monitoring experts can collect regarding the organization and process of project implementation.

Lastly, based on participants' expectations, it was elaborated, that the monitoring process starts, at the very early of the project cycle management i.e. when signing the contract. The information collected from the very first phase of the process is later used for evaluation and monitoring purposes. Finally, **the results from the monitoring process are lessons learned for future plans** and future project implementations that need to help not to repeat the mistakes.

**What are the key grant phases of the monitoring process? (Small group work – Annex 5)**

The second session started with a small group work where participants discussed what are the key phases of the monitoring process. See **Annex 5** for the work group's results.



Some of the results from the group work noted:

- ✓ monitoring plan and data collection upon signing the grant agreement;
- ✓ risk assessment of the sub-grantees;
- ✓ developing a guidebook with work procedures, templates, training and mentoring and expectation
- ✓ monitoring tools (visits, on-the-spot checks, visibility, frequency of reporting)
- ✓ Follow-up, lessons learned and sustainability

In this context, Ms Jelena Velojić from Jelena Šantic Foundation asserted that they do have **zero phase monitoring** before the contract is signed since they are working with informal groups. This is an approach that many CSOs have but it raises a question about the transparency of the selection process in situations when the grant organization is in contact with the potential grantees' prior selection process.
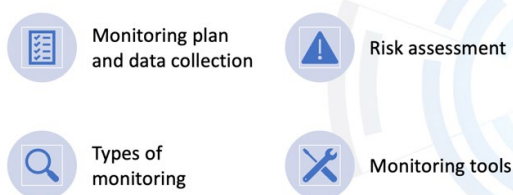


Ms Tonč presented what is part of the monitoring process starting from the monitoring plan and data collection, and how is related to measuring whether the project is progressing well and how specific challenges can be improved. The challenges that arise are not just delivering key outputs but the quality of the key outputs. In this context, Mr Carmen Tanasie from ERGO Network asserted that they experience this challenge especially when collaborating with grassroots organizations and when English is not their native language.

Still, in order to mitigate this issue, they have developed guidelines but still this issue remains a challenge.

The discussion continued that **some grant organizations evaluate the organization's capacities and use this information when designing/updating their future calls as a learning experience**. Moreover,

**significantly important during the process of data collection is how notes/data are collected and stored and whether there is a central base** related to all relevant data for the specific sub-grantee.

In terms of the type of data collected, quantitative and qualitative, **it is important how the data are analysed** and whether there are appropriate capacities within the grant organization for managing such FSTPs. This is especially important when analysing the quality of the outputs, for example, the quality of service and being able to find means and tools to measure it.

All participants agreed that a **strong capacity-building component is crucial** and needed to ensure that the FSTP project has been implemented well.

Further, the discussion continued with the selection of the personnel who will do the monitoring and analysis when external experts are hired and when an in-house team is dedicated to doing the monitoring, in accordance with the size and scope of the FSTP.

## Monitoring and data collection plan

| What/monitoring area | Which data/indicators | How/monitoring method | When/how often/dates | Who/responsible person |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Progress in project implementation/efficiency | Activities completed, activities started, activities delayed. | Monthly reports, quarterly monitoring visits | Monthly | Grant Manager/Name |
| Results achieved/effectiveness | Proofs of effects of the activities implemented or in the last phase of implementation. | Monitoring visits | Quarterly | Grant Manager/Name |
| Project management | Project team formed, management system in place (planning, procurement, reporting). | First monitoring visit; progress reports | First month of the project; Quarterly | Grant Manager/Name |
| Visibility | Visibility rules followed; number of events, promo actions. | First monitoring visit; progress reports | First month of the project; Quarterly | Grant Manager/Name |

The session was wrapped up and the training continued with case-study analysis.

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**Case studies analysis (Small group work)**



Case studies for small group work

**Group no. 1:**

- *You assessed that project activities are delayed. What are you going to do now?*

**Group no. 2:**

- *Grant beneficiary reported that elderly people (target group) are very satisfied with the in-house social service they receive. How they should prove that?*

**Group no. 3:**

- *You are visiting the grant beneficiary for the first time. How you will check whether their project management system is in place?*

**Group no. 4:**

- *You are attending the opening event of the project. What are you going to observe?*

The results from the case studies analysis showed that delays could happen during project implementation but it is important to understand the reason for it thus all challenges and issues can be solved if there is an open communication process. As for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the service (case study 2), an approach for collecting secondary sources of data was proposed, however monitoring experts must be aware of the capacities of the organization and be realistic about the plan in order to avoiding searching for data that are not part of the project scope. As for the third case study, the group provided valuable suggestions (how the team is made, how the decisions are reached, and mobilization of resources and policies in place) to ensure the project management system is in place. The last group focused on observation as a method when networking with participants and checking informal comments regarding the organization of an event.

With this workgroup, the first day was summed up and evaluation forms were provided to collect the feedback from the participants.

**Evaluation of Day 1**



If you had to sum up day 1 in one word...
33 responses

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## My general comment for day 1...
19 responses

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I like tacso) | Glad I am a part of this training group! | Helpful and insightful |
| High level of sharing experience | We can see the power of the CSO network | ways how to make sure asses objectively |
| I liked the way we shared experiences and had opportunity to learn from each other | It was very useful and interesting, especially the practical examples. Thank you | The training and the discussion are really useful for our work. |

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## My general comment for day 1...
19 responses

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Useful revision of common practices and helpful insights! | Looking forward to network more with colleagues | Looking forward to learn more through practical examples |
| I enjoyed the training very much to get to hear from other collogues in different phase of implementation of the FSTP | Very interesting approach, | It was interesting and engaging. Great opportunity for sharing/hearing experience and practices |
| | Great discussion | |
| learned a lot from the experience of colleagues and lecturers | | Usuful interesing approach |

## Day 2 – Overview and key points

**Welcome and presentation of the programme**

The second day started with welcoming words and a presentation of the agenda for day 2.
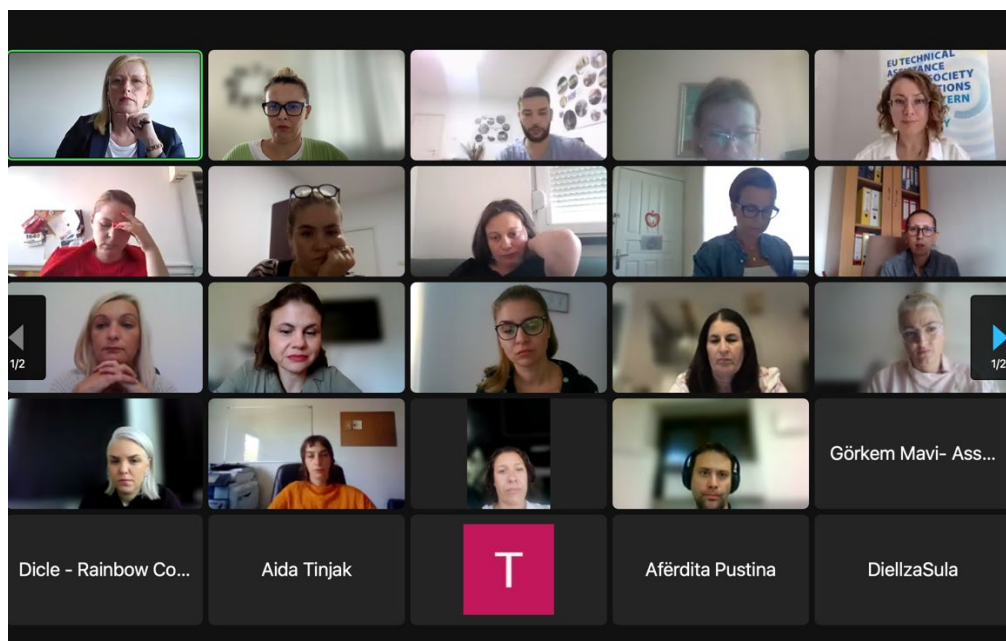


A discussion was opened by Ms Aida Tinjak from BIRN Hub regarding in-kind grants and how to monitor such grants. Ms Andreja Tonč, a Capacity Building Expert exploited practical suggestions for solving this challenge including collecting information on the decisions made for the procurement process, transfer of the service/product to beneficiaries including whether the equipment will be kept and how will be used by a particular beneficiary.

The training continued by further elaborating the monitoring process and discussion about the risk assessment, when it is done and what indicators are considered when making the assessment. Practical examples were shared for risk assessment and how specific mechanisms are developed for mitigating risks during the project implementation.

The monitoring process was summed up by the discussion on the type of monitoring and monitoring tools. Various types of monitoring were elaborated such as desk work, capacity building and site visits depending on the needs and capacities of the grant organization.

In this context, interesting examples of using online platforms for grant management including monitoring were shared by Mr Marija Todorovic from Belgarde Open School, Mr Uroš Čitaković from Western Balkan Fund and Mr Görkem Mavi from the Association of Journalists.

**Monitoring site visits**

The training continued with the next topic on the agenda, monitoring site visits. The importance, advantages and disadvantages of side visits were discussed and examples of unpleasant experiences from site visits were shared by the participants. The type of site visits and site visit phases were discussed, prior to the participants and the training expert continuing with small workgroup works to create a site visit agenda.

**Let's analyse one site visit agenda. (Small group work – Annex 6**

Site visit agenda

- Coffee, **welcoming**, getting acquainted
- Presentation of the **agenda and methodology** of work  (i.e., first meeting then other visits)
- Tell us a bit about **your organisation** and the project (ice-breaker, appreciation)
- Semi-structured **interview based on our questionnaire** (make notes, check whether you asked all relevant questions, ask for documentation/proof docs immediately, provide clarifications immediately/if possible)
- **Conclusions** and follow-up actions
- **Other visits** to the community, target group, municipality etc.
- Do not forget to have a **break** if needed!

In this group work, participants exploited various activities that should be part of the site visit agenda starting from planning to implementation and closure phase. Their group work discussion was supported by the training experts' practical examples and identification of possible challenges that could arise during the site visit.

In this context, the importance of **time management** during site visits was noted due to the time limitations and the need for parallel work among the monitoring experts.

Here are some interesting suggestions for the site visit agenda from the group work:

- ✓ Sending the agenda and time plan in advance
- ✓ Visibility checks
- ✓ Discussing the sustainability of the project
- ✓ Follow-up feedback and recommendations as a learning

Lastly, it was asserted that the **site visit should not end up as a critique** but rather as a learning activity for the grant organization.

Following up on the site visit agenda, the group continued with the practical work of analysing a template for a questionnaire for site visit monitoring and evaluation reports.

**Let's analyse one site visit questionnaire – Small Group Work – Annex 7**

Following the small group discussion, participants share their ideas, and experiences with the trainer. The main points of the workgroup discussions regarding the template analysed are:

- ✓ The length and comprehensiveness of the questionnaire need to be by the size of the grant and the organization
- ✓ Log frame can be replaced with a time frame for smaller-scale grants
- ✓ Visibility is to be monitored by using secondary sources of data (social media channels of the sub-grantee, asking the beneficiaries and target group)
- ✓ Cross-cutting issues addressed
- ✓ Monitoring sustainability by assessing the involvement of local stakeholders and local ownership
- ✓ Risk and mitigation measures taking into account change in the local context
- ✓ For the qualitative indicator to be included more questions for assessment

The trainer wrapped up the session by noting that the questionnaire for the site visit is important as a reminder and serves as a basis for further reporting.

## Proof documents

The training continued with a discussion about the proof documents and how the monitoring experts ensure the successful collection of them.



The trainer provided insight regarding the proof documents and what is considered a proof document.

The discussion continued with how to manage proof documents and manage complainants from the sub-grantee.

Lastly, but most importantly as part of the capacity-building activity, the sub-grantee must understand the importance of proof document and use it as a lesson learned for future projects.

Following the session on the proof documents, the trainer expert presented the main challenges associated with site visits and how to overcome them, by sharing examples from practical experience. The training was finalized by the reporting and follow-up actions of the monitoring visit discussing examples regarding process and group discussion on how the Contracting authority is informed about FSTP activities. The recommendation was to have regular communication on FSTP components, invite them to events and always keep them updated by sending regular reports on the status.

After this last session of the training, the trainer continued wrapping up the discussion by asking questions and recommendations for future FSTP events or Community of Practice on monitoring. Also, a link for the Community of Practice LinkedIn Group was shared with all the participants for potential membership and contribution in the area in the group and the materials from the last training on Gender Mainstreaming in FSTP were shared as well.

## Evaluation of the training

In total 16 participants filled the evaluation form for overall evaluation of the training.

All of them strongly agree and agree that the training has met their expectations, that the content of the training was highly relevant to the interests and work of their organization, that the event provide good practices and lessons learned as well as that they understand and are better informed on the topics covered by the training.

In terms of the timeliness and completeness of information related to the organisation and logistics before the training as well as the organisational assistance during the event, they all agree that it was very good and good.

All participants provided feedback on how the gained knowledge will help them in their work within the organizations.

The group work and sharing of practical experiences were addressed as the most useful and valuable parts of the training.

The participants proposed longer training in terms of length and training with a physical presence as well as more templates for the specific parts of the monitoring process.

They all agree that they will share the gained knowledge with their supervisors and colleagues as well as include it in the guidelines for their sub-grantees.

Some of the participants' comments:

"Thank you all for organizing the event! The training was very useful and we enrolled as proposed by the EUD Task Manager and we wish we could have joined last year before publishing the guidelines for sub-grantees. No matter how far we are in process, we still learn new things especially when discussing among each other." – Mr Merita Bytyci Kelmendi from CARE.

"Thank you, it was really insightful talking to people from FSTP and looking forward to the future events!" – Ms Marija Todorovic from Belgrade Open School

## Conclusions and recommendations:

- ✓ Monitoring is not a control, but rather a learning and observing process
- ✓ Learning is a key point of monitoring
- ✓ The results from the monitoring process are lessons learned for future plans
- ✓ Zero-phase monitoring as an approach raises up transparency questions even though frequently used for informal groups and grassroots organizations
- ✓ During data collection, it is important which data are collected, how they are collected, stored and analysed
- ✓ Quality indicators remain a challenge for the assessment
- ✓ Capacity building component is crucial for successful FSTP implementation
- ✓ Good time management is significantly important for a successful site visit
- ✓ Site visits are learning activities rather than a critique towards the sub-grantee

## Recommendation for EU TACSO 3 project:

- ✓ To address VAT exemption and challenges that countries from WBT experience as part of future FSTP events
- ✓ To organize a meeting for the Community of Practice group or some future FSTP event for sharing experiences of projects that are output-based reporting rather than standard financial requirements and reporting
- ✓ Promoting the group work as a worksheet in the Community of Practice group
- ✓ To address Mentoring and Capacity Building of FSTP in some future FSTP events

**Annexes**

**Annex 1: Agenda**

**Annex 2: Training presentation**

**Annex 3: What do we consider when talking about monitoring (Results from group work)**

**Annex 4: What are the key grant phases of the monitoring process (Results from the group work)**

**Annex 5: What would you consider in a particular monitoring situation? (Results from the group work)**

**Annex 6: Let's create one site visit agenda (Results from the group work)**

**Annex 7: Site visit monitoring and reporting form example**