

**Guidelines for Applicants for the Call for Sub-Grants for Media and  
CSOs in the Western Balkans**

***“Empowering Journalism in the Digital Age - Enhancing Digital Safety  
and Capacities of Media and CSOs in the Western Balkans”***

**Project supported by the European Union**

Deadline for submission of applications:

September 19, 2024 at 23:59 CET



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## 1. BACKGROUND DESCRIPTION

We live in a world of profound societal change and disruption particularly due to the rapid development of [digital] technology, expansion of digital communication infrastructure and means. In this digital era boundaries and definitions of fundamental human rights — such as right to privacy, right to information and freedom of expression, gender rights, press freedom, intellectual property rights — has expanded. New technologies have changed traditional ways of communication and ended the monopoly of information as well as have provided wider space and easier ways for disinformation, misinformation, and fake news dissemination. According to the Article 19's Right to Blog [report](#), traditional media outlets in order to remain operable had to restructure and include technology, internet and social media platforms as vital for information sharing, audience reach and engagement.

The Western Balkans region (WB) is no different. In the region the framework — be it legal/policy, technical or practical — of internet governance and subsequently human rights, freedoms and violations in the digital space, is rather lagging behind both global and European Union developments. Having in mind the *specificum* of the WB region is in terms of having highly polarised societies where, for e.g. [denial of court determined war crimes and other war-time human rights violations are still widespread](#) — unregulated digital space in the region offers safe space for [hate speech](#) and [disinformation](#), including larger possibilities when it comes to spread of foreign malign influence which directly influences people's safety and security.

Governments around WB are increasingly becoming aware of the power of free access to the internet and freedom and safety online. The consequences are two-fold — an increasing number of [new laws or amendments](#) to the existing ones and an increasing number of [attacks on activists, journalists](#), citizens at large as well as censorship or other human rights violations online.

For this, it is important to join forces and empower media and CSOs in the region to counteract — research and expose the misuse of technology by any actor, to raise awareness on digital rights and its violations such as surveillance, censorship, hate speech, tech-driven violence against women and minorities, etc., and strengthen resilience of journalists, human rights defenders, CSOs as well as citizens at large.

As the latest [SHARE publication notes](#), the *WB faces the task of comprehensively improving existing regulations and paving the appropriate institutional path for systematically addressing the challenges of the digital environment, opening the digital market towards the EU while respecting the criteria of transparency, accountability, fair competition, and full protection of human rights.*

Given the important role that the media — especially independent and investigative media — play in democratic societies and the pivotal importance of the rights to be informed to the



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realization of other [human] human rights, the issue of digital rights and violations is of strong concern. Media and CSOs monitoring and reporting on digital rights and its violations in the Western Balkans region is not sufficient. These two internet governance stakeholders lack both financial and in-depth knowledge capacities — and in this ever changing technology and policy-related landscape these need to be bolstered.

The sub-grants activity is part of the Reporting Digital Rights and Freedoms project funded by the European Union, pertaining to Cluster 5 aimed at enhancing digital safety and increasing capacities of media and civil society to respond to digital threats through training, workshops and grants.

The award consists of providing financial assistance in the form of grant to about fifteen (15) media outlets and/or cross to research and report on digital rights and freedoms in the Western Balkans region as well as technical assistance and mentoring support throughout, consisting of BIRN regional editors, lawyers and researchers (BIRN Digital Rights Support Team - DRST).

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES OF THE CALL

BIRN Kosovo expects to award fifteen (15) sub-grants in the amount of EU 15,000 for fifteen (15) grantees — media outlets and CSOs from the Western Balkans namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

The proposals for sub-grants are expected to contribute to the overall objective of the project "Reporting on Digital Rights and Freedoms", namely to enhancing knowledge and skills of media and civil society to methodically decipher intersections between digital rights violations and disinformation, assert the right to information and respond to abuses in the digital sphere.

The proposal for sub-grants should further contribute to specific objectives of the project:

- Better informed societies on current digital freedom violations and awareness raised on critical threats in digital ecosystems;
- Enhanced digital safety and increased media and civil society capacities to respond to digital threats through training, workshops and grants

**Fifteen (15) sub-grants will be awarded through the given Call for Grants.**

## 3. ELIGIBILITY OF APPLICANTS

In order to be eligible to participate in this Call for Grants, registered media and CSO's must:

- be a legal entity registered with authorities in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia) at least one year before this call is launched;

- be a non-profit-making organization, media-oriented NGO, media association, media council, public broadcaster or registered business that produces/publishes media content/journalistic work and/or conducts research and other public raising awareness activities.
  - be able to provide registration documents of the organization/media (certificate of registration, fiscal number certificate, business registry document) and proof they have completed all obligations towards their respective authorities, including registration with the Tax Administration/authorities, bank account information, and previous experience in implementing projects related to the journalistic work proposed (samples/examples of journalistic stories produced/published, including current outreach data/viewership data if applicable);
  - Membership in self-regulatory bodies will be considered an added value for online or print media which may provide an additional document proving membership within the Press Councils\*;
  - List of successful projects implemented and at least two relevant references to be contacted by the BIRN during the selection process.
2. **NOTE:** *Evidence of membership within the respective Press Council is not mandatory, but it will be considered an added value for prospective applicants, considering that they have committed to functioning under a self-regulatory system that aims to uphold ethical standards and comply with the code of ethics. It is also necessary to be a media outlet that has respected respective Press Council decisions related to code of ethics and has respected court orders.*

The following evaluation grid will be used to assess each of the individual applications received:

	Criteria	Definition	Max. coefficient
1.	Relevance of the action with the priorities of the Call for Proposals	This criterion evaluates the <b>relevance</b> of the <b>content of the action</b> , vis-a-vis the <b>objectives</b> of the call for proposals of the project. The evaluation committee will review the <b>impact</b> of the proposals on the selected target groups and the beneficiaries of the project.	40
2.	Creative strength of the content and activities	This criterion assesses the <b>overall impact</b> of the proposal in terms of investigative reporting, analytical reporting, awareness raising activities, new and innovative topics that have not been investigated/analyses before on the national/regional level in respective WB countries.	20



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3.	Quality of the financial offer	This criterion evaluates the <b>budget</b> and the <b>balance</b> between the estimated costs of the proposed action and the real costs in line with current market prices.	20
4.	Project team potential	This criterion assesses the potential of the project by evaluating the <b>quality and the structure of the project team</b> in the media/CSO organization.	10
5.	Previous experience	This criterion evaluates the expertise of the applicant in both media and/or CSO reporting and activities in the field of digital rights and freedoms.	10
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>			<b>100</b>

#### 4. ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES: DESIRED ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

This section will provide information on the duration, amount, and scope of the projects to be financed under this sub-granting scheme, and the types of eligible activities for which the potential applicants may seek financial and technical support under this Call for sub-grants.

##### 4.1 Duration and Amount of the Projects:

###### 4.1.1. Size of the grants

Amount: between **EUR 12,000** (minimum) to **EUR 15,000** (maximum)

Duration of work to produce media content/implement activity: between **6 months** (minimum) **up to one (1) year** (maximum)

The tentative time frame for the implementation of the supported projects is **September 2024 to September 2025**.

##### 4.2 Scope:

All activities and/or journalistic stories to be produced in the scope of this sub-granting program must be implemented in applicants respective WB countries; they may be focused on one or more local territories or over the entire territory of the country.



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### 4.3 Eligible Activities:

- Supporting production of new content through media reporting (written analysis, investigative pieces) and/or CSOs research and other public awareness raising and/or advocacy activities (production of unique research papers, campaigns, visuals, public events with inclusive and multi stakeholder approach etc.) on topics concerning digital rights & freedoms;
- Production and broadcasting of multimedia-content (documentaries, films, quality podcasts, TV and/or radio shows, explainers...) on topics concerning digital rights & freedoms;
- Activities aiming to raise public knowledge and awareness about human rights and freedoms in the digital space as well as violations of rights and freedoms;
- Organization of public advocacy and/or raising awareness campaigns through various activities that may include conferences, roundtables, engaging internet governance stakeholders from relevant spheres and institutions (regulatory bodies, academia, civil society, academia, technical community, private sector, media)
- Content can be produced in local languages; while the vital impactful content — or its summary — may be republished in English

### 4.4 Non-Eligible Activities:

- Activities concerning individual participation in workshops, seminars, conferences, congresses, including travel and accommodation outside of the country of the applicant/awardee
- Activities undertaken before signature of the contract;
- Activities undertaken after the implementation period of the contract;
- Activities aimed at profit making activities;
- Activities that are directly or indirectly affiliated with or supportive of political parties

### 4.5 Expenditure Verification

Expenditure verification must be conducted by an auditor licensed in the country, who is experienced in EU projects. The beneficiary is responsible for hiring the auditors and conducting the expenditure verification after the project's implementation. The costs for this verification should be included in the budget proposal, ensuring that the total project costs, including the expenditure verification, do not exceed EUR 15,000. Further details will be provided to the beneficiary once they are selected.

## 5. ELIGIBILITY OF COSTS: COSTS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION FOR THE GRANT

We encourage all media and CSOs to propose realistic and cost-effective budgets in line with price markets. Note that the eligible costs must be based on real costs based on supporting documents.

All budget costs have to be eligible costs, and only the costs presented in the budget will be considered for financing. Recommendations for the award of a grant are always subject to the condition that the checking process preceding the signing of the contract does not reveal any problems requiring changes to the budget (for instance arithmetical errors, inaccuracies or unrealistic costs and other ineligible costs). The checks may give rise to requests for clarification and lead the Contracting Authority to impose modifications or reductions to address such mistakes or inaccuracies. The amount of the grant as a result of these corrections may not be increased. It is therefore in the applicant's interest to provide a realistic and cost-effective budget.

*Eligible costs/costs that we can support* are actual costs incurred by the Beneficiary(ies), which meet all the following criteria:

- a) they are incurred during the implementation of the Activity, as specified under 4.1.2.;
- b) they are indicated in the estimated overall budget for the Activity;
- c) they are well-justified for the implementation of the Activity;
- d) they are identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the Beneficiary(ies) and determined according to the accounting standards and the usual cost accounting practices applicable to the Beneficiary(ies);
- e) they are in full compliance with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- f) they are reasonable, justified and comply with the requirements of sound financial management, particularly in regards to economy and efficiency.

*Types of Eligible Costs/Types of expenses that we can support:*

- the cost of staff assigned to the Activity, including cost of staff performing financial and administrative tasks related to the Activity, corresponding to actual gross salaries including social security charges and other remuneration-related costs; salaries and costs shall not exceed those normally borne by the Beneficiary(ies), unless it is justified by showing that it is essential to carry out the Activity;
- travel and subsistence costs for staff and other persons taking part in the Activity — within the respective applicant/awardee country, provided they do not exceed those normally borne by the Beneficiary(ies) according to its rules and regulations, or the rates published by the European Commission at the time of such mission if reimbursed on the basis of simplified cost options;
- costs of consumables;
- bank charge costs;



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- costs entailed by contracts awarded by the Beneficiary(ies) for the purposes of the Activity;
- costs deriving directly from the requirements of the Contract (dissemination of information, evaluation specific to the Activity, accounting, audits, translation, reproduction, insurance, etc.)

### **Ineligible costs/Costs that we will NOT support**

#### **The following costs are not eligible:**

- taxes, including value added taxes (VAT) - (excluding Personal Income tax such as tax on Salary, tax on Taxable Contractor)
- customs and import duties, or any other charges;
- purchase, rent or leasing of land and existing buildings;
- fines, financial penalties and expenses of litigation;
- indirect operating costs, costs of guarantees and similar charges;
- conversion costs, charges and exchange losses with any of the component specific euro accounts, as well as purely financial expenses;
- contributions in kind;
- any leasing costs;
- depreciation costs;
- debts and debt charges;
- provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- interest owed;
- costs declared by the beneficiary and covered by another activity or work programme;
- credits to third parties
- technical or otherwise equipment.

## **6. APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

The Application Package has to be submitted **by email to [euproposals@birn.eu.com](mailto:euproposals@birn.eu.com)** by the Applicant, and must include the following *three* documents:

1. **Grant Application form** (available for download [HERE](#));
2. **Budget proposal form** (available for download [HERE](#));
3. **Supporting documents**: certificate of registration, fiscal number certificate, business registry document, registration with the tax administration, bank account information, membership within press council if applicable or list of relevant reference for implemented projects (attached in the email in ZIP format)

**The applications MUST be sent by email to [euproposals@birn.eu.com](mailto:euproposals@birn.eu.com) by August 13, 2024 at 23:59 CET.**

**All applications must be prepared and submitted in English language.**



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## 7. EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS

All activities submitted by applicants will be assessed according to the above steps and criteria.

If the review of the Application shows that the proposed activity does not meet the eligibility criteria, the Application shall be rejected solely on this basis.

### NOTIFICATION OF THE CONTRACTING AUTHORITY'S

Successful applicants will be informed in writing about the further steps. Other applicants will be informed with overall justification according to the evaluation table.

#### INDICATIVE TIMETABLE\*

	DATE	TIME
Public announcement of the Call for proposals	August 28, 2024	
Deadline to request any clarifications from BIRN Kosovo	September 9, 2024	16:00 CET
Last date on which clarifications are issued by BIRN Kosovo	September 13, 2024	N/A
Deadline for submission of Application Form	September 19, 2024	23:59 CET
Applicants to be available by phone and email for clarification and additional documents during the Evaluation Procedure	September 19 to 27, 2024	
Information to applicants on the evaluation of the Application Form	September 30, 2024	
Contract preparation and provision of supporting documentation if and when requested	October 1 to 11, 2024	
Contract signature	By October 15, 2024	

*\*Please note that this is an indicative plan only, exact dates are not presently available.*

**Questions for clarification** can be sent to [euproposals@birn.eu.com](mailto:euproposals@birn.eu.com) before September 9, 2024.