Funded by the European Union

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL MACEDONIA

Contracting authority:

Transparency International -Macedonia

Guidelines for applicants

Open call for sub-grants for CSOs in North Macedonia

"Integrity Watch in the Western Balkans and Turkey: civil society combating corruption with political integrity data"

Deadline for submission of applications:

16 July 2025

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION 3
2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE CALL 3
3. OBJECTIVE, ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTED IMPACT 4
4. BUDGET AND AMOUNT OF GRANTS 5
5. ELIGIBILITY OF APPLICANTS 5
6. TIMELINE 6
7. HOW TO APPLY 6
   7.1. Application documents 6
8. REQUIREMENTS OF THE CALL 7
9. SELECTION PROCESS AND CRITERIA 10
   9.1. Initial Review of Applications 10
   9.2. Evaluation and selection 11
   9.3. Notification of Applicants 11
10. MENTORING AND REPORTING 12

1. INTRODUCTION

The action "Integrity Watch in the Western Balkans and Turkey: civil society combating corruption with political integrity data" (henceforth IW WBT) is funded under the EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favor of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023 (IPA III) within the lot "Good Governance, Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption". It is a three-year action funded by the European Commission from March 2023 to February 2026 (IPA/2022/440-922).

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE CALL

This open call is launched in the framework of Integrity Watch project, implemented in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye. It is a regional initiative in the field of political integrity led by the Kosovo Democratic Institute – Transparency International Kosova in partnership with the Transparency International Secretariat based in Germany, Transparency International in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Transparency International Macedonia, Transparency Serbia and Transparency International Türkiye which compose the Integrity Watch Consortium.

Anti-corruption regional initiatives led by civil society have identified political integrity vulnerabilities as a key corruption challenge across the region in the Western Balkans and Türkiye. The main vulnerabilities allow vested interests (organized crime, corrupt business or corrupt politicians) opportunities to co-opt mechanisms to (i) access power (elections and appointments), (ii) decision making ('tailored laws' and public contracting) and (iii) the judiciary. Lack of data or insufficient use of information on who funds politics, who influences law-making and how public resources are allocated, combined with scarce cooperation between reform-minded actors domestically and across the region, prevents accountability, leaves cases of abuse undetected and directly contributes to high levels of political corruption. Corruption in politics leads to the erosion of citizen trust in decision-making processes, lack of adequate mechanisms to hold politicians accountable for political integrity.

With the goal to empower citizens and civil society actors in Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Türkiye to hold political office holders to account, IW WBT is focused on the three most relevant areas for anti-corruption and political integrity in the region: the opacity of political finance, the undue influence of vested interests in law-making, and favoritism in public contracting. By using open data on transparency and accountability, the program seeks to strengthen integrity in political financing, legislative decision-making, and public resource allocation, fight political corruption by engaging key civil society actors and oversight institutions and promote democratic governance and citizen engagement. It directly promotes engagement between civil society actors and key oversight, law enforcement and decision-making bodies to i) improve the ability of state authorities, civil society, and media to detect and prevent political corruption risks using open data and to ii) increase domestic and cross-border exchanges among relevant stakeholders in state authorities, civil society, and media to detect, prevent and counter political corruption.

Through this call for applications, prospect applicants are expected to propose creative initiatives that foster use of public data to detect and expose political corruption risks, while advocating for transparency, accountability and integrity in North Macedonia.

3. OBJECTIVE, ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTED IMPACT

Objective of the call

This open call aims to leverage available public data related to public integrity in North Macedonia, project research reports (including data scoping report and country assessment report on political integrity regulations in North Macedonia) and partnerships with public institutions and media to detect and address corruption risks in political finance, law-making, and public procurement.

The research reports already published by Transparency International-Macedonia in relation to political integrity related matters in North Macedonia can be found at the following links:

- The report *"Political Integrity Data Scoping in North Macedonia"*: https://transparency.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/political.integrity.data_.nm-report-2023.pdf
- The report *"Political Integrity Rules Assesment in North Macedonia"*: https://transparency.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/political_integrity_rules_assesment_in_north_macedonia_eng.pdf

Activities and expected impact

Applicants are expected to propose initiatives that produce measurable outcomes, including advocacy actions, citizen awareness, research and stakeholder engagement.

Applicants are expected to demonstrate concrete results in at least one of the following areas: political finance, law-making, and public procurement:

- **Advocacy Activities:** Organizing public meetings, consultations, and events that engage citizens, institutions and media and promote transparency and accountability.
- **Community Impact:** Improving awareness and citizen involvement on political integrity, especially among underrepresented groups such as women, youth, and minorities.
- **Research:** Reports, articles, and other content that identify, expose and propose solutions for political integrity risks
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Building effective cooperation with public institutions and decision-makers to strengthen accountability standards and good governance.

The implementation period for the proposed actions may be between four (4) and maximum six (6) months. The implementation of the grants must begin no earlier than 15 August 2025 and must be completed by no later than 15 February 2026.

Eligible activities are categorized as follows:

(a) Knowledge Generation and Dissemination

Activities aimed at producing and sharing evidence-based insights to support advocacy for political integrity, including but not limited to:

- *Preparing and drafting reports, policy briefs, analyses, op-eds, etc. based on relevant political integrity open data in North Macedonia;*
- *Developing and publishing awareness materials such as infographics and digital content based on relevant political integrity data and research;*

- *Identifying new political integrity datasets and proposing cross-referencing of political integrity datasets to detect and expose corruption risks*

(b) Advocacy and Visibility Actions

Activities designed to leverage political integrity data generated or published under the action to promote accountability, raise public awareness, and strengthen integrity standards. Examples include:

- *Organizing public events, such as debates, forums, and panel discussions with stakeholders*
- *Facilitating networking and consultations with relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society, media and citizens for advocacy activities focused on improving political integrity*
- *Implementing citizen engagement initiatives to foster data driven dialogue and participation;*
- *Publishing advocacy stories, producing social media content, and other visibility efforts to amplify the impact of political integrity advocacy*
- *Organizing cross-sector workshops to strengthen collaboration between CSOs, media, and institutions.*

4. BUDGET AND AMOUNT OF GRANTS

The overall amount available under the call for proposals in North Macedonia is EUR 44.000. At least 5 subgrants will be awarded and the size of the grant may fall between minimum EUR 4.000 and maximum EUR 12.000, depending on the duration and proposed scope of the initiatives.

An applicant may not submit more than one application in the framework of this call.

**** The overall subgrating amount available through this call in five target countries (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye) is EUR 220.000 for at least 25 subgrants.*

5. ELIGIBILITY OF APPLICANTS

Eligible entities for financial support under this call are domestic non-profit-making and non-governmental civil society organizations (NGOs) registered in North Macedonia.

The applicants must meet the following criteria for being eligible for a grant:

- Be a legal entity registered at least three (3) years prior to the date of the launch of this call.
- Be established in North Macedonia.

Eligible applicants are expected to demonstrate their capacity to manage projects responsibly and to contribute meaningfully to the program's goals through well-designed and aligned proposals.

We encourage applications from grassroots organizations and those working with underrepresented groups such as youth, women, LGBTI+ or ethnic minorities.

To qualify for an award, applications have to meet the following criteria:

- **Location:** Proposed activities need to be conducted in North Macedonia.

- **Alignment with project objectives:** Proposals must directly contribute to the objectives of the IW WBT project, focusing on transparency, accountability, anti-corruption, and promoting good governance.
- **Capacity requirements:** Applicants must demonstrate their organizational capacity to manage the sub-grant effectively, including financial management, project implementation, and reporting.
- **Direct responsibility:** The applicant must be directly responsible for the preparation and management of the project, and not act as an intermediary.

6. TIMELINE

- Publication of the call: **17 June 2025**
- Information session: **25 June 2025 at 12:00 h**
- Application deadline: **16 July 2025**
- Evaluation process: **17 July - 7 August 2025**
- Results announcement: **8 August 2025**
- Project start and end dates: **15 August 2025 - 15 February 2026**

Note: This indicative timeline may be subject to potential changes.

7. HOW TO APPLY

CSOs applying for sub-grants must meet the eligibility criteria, the objectives of the call, and carefully follow the application process.

Deadline for submission of applications is **16 July 2025 at 23:59, North Macedonia local time.** Application documents must be submitted only in electronic version in English language at the following email: konkurs@transparency.mk

Application received after the deadline will not be reviewed and will be rejected.

To ensure clarity, consistency, and comparability in the evaluation process of proposals, all applying organizations must use the standard templates provided. These documents help applicants describe their ideas and needs in a structured way and facilitate review by evaluators.

The use of these standard templates ensures a transparent and equal process for all applicants. Applicants must complete provided templates without making changes to their structure or content. The completed documents must be submitted within the specified deadlines, according to the call instructions.

7.1. Application documents

Applicants must submit the following application documents:
- Annex A: Application Form.
- Annex B: Budget Form.
- Registration Certificate of the NGO.

i. Annex A: Application Form

Content: This form includes detailed sections to describe, at least the following components:

- Project objective.
- Expected results
- Key activities, timeline and approach
- Alignment with the call objectives.

Importance: It ensures that the information is organized and easy for the evaluation committee to review.

ii. Annex B: Budget Form

Content: This form requires applicants to provide a detailed calculation of the proposed costs, including:

- Expenses for specific activities.
- Administrative and operational costs.
- Co-financing (if applicable).

The budget form (Annex B) must be prepared and divided as follows:

- **Applicants are required to allocate at least 60% of the total proposed budget to direct project activities (activity cost), including the project implementation, events, materials, travel and other related costs.**
- **Up to 40% of the total budget may be allocated to human resource expenses (e.g., salaries, per diems) and administrative costs essential for effective project management and administration.**

Importance: It helps assess the financial sustainability and the appropriateness of the budget in relation to the objectives and expected results of the project.

8. REQUIREMENTS OF THE CALL

The following interventions and activities will be supported under this program:

- **Relevance to Project Objectives:** Activities and expenses must align directly with the overall goals and objectives of the project. They should contribute to achieving the intended results and outcomes of the intervention.
- **Project outcomes:** Activities must be essential for the implementation of the project and the achievement of its outcomes. All expenses must be directly linked to the execution of the approved activities.
- **Cost-Effectiveness and Justification:** Expenses should be reasonable, justified, and proportionate to the results expected. Cost-effective management practices should be applied to ensure that funds are used efficiently.
- **Compliance with Legal and Regulatory Requirements:** All activities and expenses must comply with the applicable laws, regulations, and fiscal requirements in force, including tax legislation, and must be supported by proper documentation.
- **Conformity with the Approved Budget:** Activities and expenses must be foreseen and approved in the project's budget, as validated by the relevant authorities.
- **Traceability and Transparency:** All activities and expenses must be traceable through proper documentation, including invoices, contracts, and financial reports, to ensure transparency and accountability.

The following interventions and activities will not be supported under this program:

- **Activities directly related to political parties:** Activities aimed at supporting political parties or directly linked to their electoral activities will not be considered for funding.
- **Support for candidates and electoral campaigns:** Interventions that support candidates for political elections or are directly linked to electoral campaigns are unacceptable.
- **Activities contrary to the fundamental values of the EU:** Activities that contradict the fundamental values of the European Union, such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, will not be supported.
- **Capital investments:** Support for capital investments, such as the construction of infrastructure and essential tools for the organization, will be excluded from this program.
- **Activities solely focused on preparatory work and studies:** Grants that consist primarily or exclusively of preparatory work and/or preliminary studies will not be supported.

Eligible costs:

Eligible costs represent those expenses that directly contribute to the successful implementation of the project and align with the goals and objectives set forth. While understanding non-eligible costs are equally important, as it prevents mismanagement or misuse of funds that could result in penalties or the rejection of reimbursement claims. By clearly identifying both categories, applicants can ensure compliance with financial guidelines, avoid unnecessary complications, and maintain the integrity of the project.

To be eligible, expenses must meet the following criteria:

- **Necessity for Implementation and Achievement of Results:** Expenses must be essential for the implementation and achievement of the expected results in the project. This means they should be directly related to the project activities and its objectives.
- **Reasonableness and Justification of Expenses:** Expenses must be reasonable and justifiable in relation to the project's objectives. This includes sound financial management, using best market practices, and ensuring cost efficiency, meaning that expenses should be appropriate and balanced relative to the intended outcome.
- **Compliance with Tax Legislation:** Expenses must comply with the tax law of North Macedonia and grant beneficiaries must adhere to the relevant tax obligations, including registration and payment of taxes for any activity that has fiscal implications.
- **Expenses Incurred During the Grant Implementation Period:** Costs must occur during the grant implementation period and be linked to the activities included in the grant.
- **Inclusion in the Approved Budget:** Expenses must be presented and approved in the project's budget by the relevant authorities of the program.
- **Identifiability and Traceability:** Expenses must be identifiable and traceable through supporting documents, such as invoices, contracts, and other financial reports that can be verified by auditors or the relevant authorities.

Non-eligible costs:

- **Service-type activities, such as Technical Assistance:** Activities offering only service-type support, such as technical assistance, without a clear implementation component or citizen benefit, are not eligible.

- **Awareness campaigns without follow-up actions:** Awareness campaigns that do not include clear follow-up steps for implementation or changing attitudes and behaviors will be excluded.
- **Activities dependent on approval at multiple levels from third parties:** Interventions that depend on approval or authorization from third parties and pose a high risk of failure or inability to achieve concrete results will not be supported.
- **Sub-grants for third parties:** Financial support in the form of sub-grants for third parties will not be accepted, except when all associated costs are covered by the implementing organization.
- **Scholarships:** Scholarships for individuals will not be supported under this program.
- **Profit-Generating Activities:** Projects primarily aimed at generating profit for the applicant or third parties are ineligible.
- **Debt Repayment:** Using funds to repay existing debts or cover interest payments is not permitted.
- **Religious or Faith-Based Activities:** Projects promoting specific religious beliefs or practices are excluded.
- **Retroactive Funding:** Activities that have already been completed or expenses incurred before the grant agreement are not eligible for funding.
- **Administrative Penalties:** Costs related to fines, penalties, or legal disputes are generally ineligible.
- **Entertainment Expenses:** Costs for entertainment, hospitality, or gifts are not covered.
- **Land Acquisition:** Purchasing land or real estate is excluded from eligible activities.
- **Activities Outside the Program Scope:** Projects that do not align with the specific objectives and priorities of the funding program are ineligible.
- **Salaries and Fees for Individuals and Unregistered Initiatives:** Expenses for salaries and fees for individuals or organizations and initiatives that are not officially registered or recognized as legal entities will be deemed ineligible.
- **Customs and Import Taxes:** Customs and import taxes for goods and services related to project activities will be considered ineligible expenses.
- **Debt or Loss Payments:** Expenses for debt or loss payments that are unjustified or not directly related to project activities will be excluded.
- **Value Added Tax (VAT):** VAT expenses are not eligible, except in cases where VAT is covered by another donor or is refundable by tax authorities.
- **Loan and Interest Payments:** Payments for loans and interest, except those directly related to project activities, will not be supported.
- **Currency Exchange Fees:** Expenses for currency exchange fees will be considered ineligible, unless they are directly linked to project activities.
- **Depreciation of Equipment:** Depreciation of equipment and other assets will be excluded from eligible expenses.
- **Purchase of Land or Real Estate:** The purchase of land or real estate, unless directly related to the project objectives and approved as an eligible cost, will be deemed ineligible.
- **Purchase of Vehicles or Generators:** The purchase of vehicles and generators will be excluded from eligible expenses, unless they are essential and justified for the implementation of project activities.
- **Costs Covered by Other Donors:** Expenses that are covered by other donors or other activities will be excluded from financial support.
- **Loans to Third Parties:** The provision of loans to third parties is not eligible, unless they are directly linked to project activities and have been approved as eligible costs by the relevant authorities.

9. SELECTION PROCESS AND CRITERIA

This section outlines the structured process for selecting potential sub-beneficiaries, ensuring transparency and inclusivity. This phase aims to ensure a transparent and inclusive process, encouraging broad participation and high-quality application preparation. This structured approach ensures that the applications are complete, aligned with the objectives of the call, and meet the required legal and financial criteria.

After the official announcement, an information session will be held to address the questions and needs of applying organizations. The information session will be held online on **25 June 2025 at 12:00 h**. All questions and answers during this session will be published on Transparency International-Macedonia website.

Selection will be done in accordance with the following principles:

i. Equal treatment and non-discrimination:

- All applicants will be treated equally and without discrimination. The evaluation criteria will be applied consistently to ensure fair treatment and a level playing field for all applicants.

ii. Transparency:

- The selection criteria and decisions will be documented and communicated clearly to applicants. This ensures that applicants are fully informed about the selection process and the reasons behind the acceptance or rejection of proposals.

iii. Sound financial management and cost limits:

- It is crucial that all projects are managed with sound financial practices and comply with the budget cap of EUR 12,000 per project. This budget limit ensures that project costs are justified and reasonable in relation to the objectives and expected outcomes.

iv. Prevention of the conflict of interest:

- All evaluators will sign conflict of interest declarations to ensure impartial decision-making based solely on merit, without influence from personal or external interests.

9.1. Initial Review of Applications

During this phase all applications will be reviewed to verify that the following criteria have been met and submitted:

- All administrative and technical requirements outlined in Annex A: Application Form (check the points from 1-4 in the application form).
- Mandatory documents (Annex A: Application Form, Annex B: Budget Form and Registration Certificate of NGO).
- Requested amount (size of the grant may fall between minimum EUR 4.000 and maximum EUR 12.000).
- Grant duration (The implementation period may be between four (4) and maximum six (6) months. The implementation of the grants must begin no earlier than 15 August 2025 and must be completed by no later than 15 February 2026.

Applications that do not meet the specified criteria will be automatically rejected. The results regarding compliance with administrative criteria will be communicated to each applicant in writing.

9.2. Evaluation and selection

After the initial review, a structured evaluation process will begin. The evaluation and selection process will be conducted by a selection committee, composed of representatives from the project implementing partners, with clearly defined roles based on their expertise. Proposals will be evaluated based on their alignment with the IW WBT program's strategic objectives.

Evaluation criteria and weighting:

i. **Relevance to the objectives of the call (40%)**:
   - This criterion assesses how well the proposal aligns with the goals set in the call for applications. Proposals will be evaluated based on their relevance to the priorities outlined in the call and their potential to contribute to achieving the objectives.

ii. **Organizational capacity for project implementation (30%)**:
   - This criterion evaluates the technical and financial capabilities of the applicants. Consideration will be given to the organization's experience in implementing similar projects and the resources available to ensure successful project delivery. Applicants with a proven track record of successful project implementation and management will be rated favorably.

iii. **Sustainability of the intervention (10%)**:
   - This criterion evaluates the sustainability of the project's results after its completion. Projects should have a long-term impact and deliver results that will remain sustainable beyond the end of the funding period, including the ongoing management and monitoring of project activities.

iv. **Budget efficiency (20%):**
   - This criterion assesses whether the proposed costs are reasonable and justified in relation to the project objectives. The evaluation includes a detailed analysis of the proposed expenses and whether they are necessary and appropriate for achieving the desired outcomes. Efficient use of resources is a key factor for a successful project.

To qualify for funding, applicants must achieve a minimum of 81 points out of a possible 100, with at least 50% in each of the four main evaluation categories.

The final number of selected applications will depend on the availability of funds and may vary based on the competitiveness and quality of the submitted applications.

9.3. Notification of Applicants

The results of the evaluation and final selection will be communicated to all applicants. This information will include the evaluation scores for each category and notify applicants of the final selection decisions. The final selection decision is conclusive and cannot be appealed by the applicants.

Summary: This evaluation and selection process provides an important opportunity for organizations seeking financial support and is designed to ensure that only the most robust and sustainable proposals are selected for funding. The process is fair, transparent, and based on clear and measurable criteria to ensure that funds are used efficiently and equitably.

10. MENTORING AND REPORTING

Integrity Watch Consortium will engage in mentoring, specifically in the project and financial management, visibility and monitoring requirements during the implementation of selected projects. The consortium will organize site visits, interviews or joint meetings with sub-grantees during the implementation to support their activities and to monitor the impact of sub-grants in the broader context of the action implementation.

Each sub-grantee is required to submit narrative and financial reports on monthly basis. Final report on the implementation of project will be submitted not later than one month after the project completion. Exact dates of the reporting periods will be adjusted in the contract.