**PUBLIC CALL
FOR THE SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS
WITHIN THE PROJECT "SafeJournalists Network"**

[SafeJournalists Network](https://safejournalists.net/), focused on improving the safety of journalists and media freedom in the Western Balkans since 2015, announces a call for awarding financial support (small grants) to civil society organizations and media organizations in **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo**\*[[1]](#footnote-1).

SafeJournalists Network gathers journalists’ associations and trade unions in the Western Balkans:

* **Serbia:** Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia (IJAS) - network coordinator
* **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Association of BH Journalists (BHJA)
* **Croatia:** Croatian Journalists’ Association (CJA)
* **Kosovo\*:** Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK)
* **North Macedonia:** Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM)
* **Montenegro:** Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (TUMM)
* **Albania:** an independent researcher performs the activities

The call is open within the current EU-funded project ‘SafeJournalists Network’.

**1. About the ‘SafeJournalists Network’ Project**

The project is funded by the European Commission from 1 April 2023 to 31 July 2026 under the budget line 15.020101.01 and reference EuropeAid/174154/DH/ACT/Multi[[2]](#footnote-2).

The project’s **overall objective** isto contribute to creating an enabling environment in which freedom of expression is fully exercised while violence, threats and pressures against journalists are promptly and accurately followed up by law enforcement and the judicial authorities, as well as publicly condemned by government officials.

The project’s **specific objective** within which this call is issued aims to empower local journalists in the Western Balkan region to claim their rights as a result of enhanced engagement of the SafeJournalists Network with local initiatives.

The activities foreseen to realise this **specific objective** include:

1. capacity building and financial support provided to local CSOs and media organisations,
2. production of local baseline reports by local CSOs and media organisations with the support by SafeJournalists,
3. info sessions for journalists,
4. social media campaigns targeting journalists.

**2. About the Support Program**

The main rationale of the financial support to third parties is to raise capacities of local CSOs and media organisations so that they can become SafeJournalists Network’s (SJN) **focal points** for monitoring and reporting violations of journalists’ safety at local level.

SJN members will provide **continuous support** to winning applicants to strengthen their knowledge, monitoring and reporting skills regarding media freedom and journalists’ safety, but also to strengthen their internal governance capacities. This **training, mentoring and partnership approach** has several benefits:

* local grassroots organizations (CSOs and media organisations) will be able to detect and report

journalists' rights violations and become local focal points for reporting these to SJN,

* SJN members will get one more source of verification of the data at the local level,
* local journalists will be better informed about their rights, how to report violations and where to get help to protect their rights.

**3. Program Objectives**

The call’s **overall objective** is to improve access to rights for journalists (with the focus on local journalists and women) by enhancing competencies of local grassroots organisations to detect and report journalists' rights violations.

The call’s **specific objective** is to inform and educate local journalists about their rights and mechanisms to claim them.

**4. Program Structure**

The sub-granting program envisages three components:

**Component 1 – Two-step application phase**

After the launch of the public call, CSOs and media organisations will be selected based on submitted simple form questionnaires desiged to assess the capacities of applicant organisations to carry out project activities with expected results. The five national evaluation committees will select at least 35 organisations for the next step of the application. Selected organisations will be asked to fill in the full application forms designed specifically for this call by SJN partners.

**Component 2 – Grant awarding**

Financial support (grant component) for CSOs and media organisations promoting and advocating for journalists’ safety and media freedom in the Western Balkans will be awarded to 25 – 30 projects out of 35 projects selected after Component 1.

**Component 3 – Training, mentoring, and monitoring (for sub-grantees selected to implement projects)**

Combination of mentoring and monitoring visits to all grantees is envisaged, with additional days for online mentoring and monitoring. Grantees will have on their disposal an additional expert day for design and implementation of the social media campaigns which they will be required to have as part of their projects.

Two types of capacity building will be provided to all of the selected sub-grantees:

1. **Raising internal governance capacities**

Based on the SJN member organizations’ previous experience, this will most likely include one-on-one mentoring of project managers with the aim to raise the sub-grantees’ capacities to implement the project in line with the best practice, including development of monitoring tools, financial management, reporting, as well as the application of EU-funded actions’ visibility rules.

1. **Raising capacities for monitoring and reporting cases of journalists’ rights violations**

At the start of the implementation of small grants, the SJN member organisations will hold workshops with successful applicants in order to share with them knowledge about the legal framework for the protection of journalists, mechanisms for reporting cases of attacks on journalists, methods of monitoring and tracking cases, and data verification.

In addition, the SJN member organisations will create templates for baseline reports and the sub-grantees will be familiarised with the methodology and steps to produce the reports.

The SJN member organisations will be available to grantees for participation in info sessions (that grantees will be required to conduct) aimed at local journalists to learn about their rights and protection mechanisms, mechanisms for reporting cases of attacks on journalists and how to recognise different pressures, among them SLAPPs.

**5. Expected Results**

The main expected results of the sub-granting scheme are:

**RESULT 1:** Enhanced competences of CSOs and media organisations and initiatives targeted by sub-granting scheme to detect and report journalists’ rights violations.

**RESULT 2:** Local journalists are informed about their rights and mechanisms to claim them by local organisations and SafeJournalists members.

**RESULT 3:** Local journalists report violations of their rights using local focal points in local CSOs and media organisations supported by the Project.

**Results of this call also include increased capacities and advanced internal governance of sub-grantees.**

With the driving principle to focus on a select number of local organisations, the sub-granting program is designed to strengthen their capacities for monitoring, research, and at a managerial level.

**6. Activities**

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

The activities must be implemented with the aim of meeting the sub-granting program’s goals and results.

The following activities are **mandatory**:

* Attendance of several meetings and trainings by SJN and / or appointed trainers aimed at raising capacities for monitoring and reporting cases of journalists’ rights violations;
* Production of reports evidencing the number of violations of journalists’ rights and number of journalists that report them;
* Holding info-sessions for journalists and media professionals at the local level informing them about their rights and mechanisms to claim them;
* Producing and implementing advocacy and awareness raising social media campaigns;
* Various other activities aimed at motivating local journalists and media professionals to regularly report breaches/abuses of their rights via local focal points in sub-granteed organisations (examples: organisation of workshops, bilateral meetings with media organisations, public events, advocacy and awareness raising campaigns);
* Participation in mentoring and monitoring visits and online sessions of this kind with the aim of raising internal project management capacities of the sub-grantees.

The following activities are **acceptable** (the list is not exhaustive):

* Production and distribution of media content on the project-related topics and media freedom in general;
* Consultations, round table events and meetings with local stakeholders;
* Facilitating dialogue on various aspects of media freedom in the sub-grantee’s country and public policies with stakeholders (e.g. local officials, the expert community, media);
* Conducting mini-research using, for example, surveys, web applications, working groups, focus groups, etc.

Other activities that contribute to achieving the expected results and reaching the program goals, and are not in conflict with this call, are considered **acceptable activities**.

The following activities are **not allowed** and **cannot be supported**:

* 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.

The funded projects shall last **no less than 9 months and no more than 12 months**.

**7. Conditions to be met by the applicants**

**7.1. General conditions to be met by the applicants** - **civil society organizations focused on human rights and media freedoms[[3]](#footnote-3), and media publishers**

Support is intended for civil society organisations and media publishers that meet the following technical criteria:

* Must be a legal entity registered with the Business Registers Agency in accordance with applicable laws;
* Must have adequate management and professional capacities necessary for the successful implementation of the proposed activities;
* Must have submitted annual financial reports for 2022 and 2023 to the Business Registers Agency;
* The organisation's bank account must not be blocked, nor have been blocked due to outstanding obligations for a period exceeding 30 days during 2023 and 2024;
* Must be directly responsible for the preparation and implementation of the project.

**Partnerships are not envisaged under this call.**

**7.2. Specific conditions to be met by the applicant**

The competition is open to civil society organisations or media founders / publishers that meet the following additional conditions:

* The organisation or media founder / publisher is not a beneficiary of funds from the European Commission under the Program[[4]](#footnote-4) with the reference EuropeAid/174154/DH/ACT/Multi and budget line 15.020101.01.
* The organisation or media founder/publisher may submit only one project proposal under this Program involving only one of its media outlets [in case it has more than one media outlets].

Regarding media outlets and their founders/publishers, registered as legal entities, it is envisaged that a founder/publisher shall be the official applicant whose information is required in the Phase 1 application form and with whom the contract for the donation is signed. Although it is the formal recipient of the grant, a media founder/publisher shall designate its media outlet as the entity responsible for implementing the project in cooperation with the SafeJournalists Network.

**8. Allocation of Financial Resources**

The total available funds for financial support amount to 230,000 EUR, which will be distributed to at least 25 and at most 30 selected CSOs and media founders/publishers and their media outlets from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo\*.

**8.1. Amount of Individual Financial Support**

* The minimum amount of financial support granted under the program is 8,000.00 EUR;
* The maximum amount of financial support granted under the program is 10,000.00 EUR.

Funds for approved support programs will be disbursed to the recipient of financial support as follows:

* 80% of the approved amount upon signing the contract;
* 20% of the approved amount upon receipt and approval of the narrative and financial report.

**8.2 Eligible Costs**

Allowable costs are all direct costs related to the implementation of project activities that are specified in the proposed project budget and approved during the selection process. These include, among others:

* Costs for employees/engaged individuals implementing project activities, corresponding to actual gross salaries, including social security contributions and other costs related to compensation (excluding performance-based bonuses);
* Fees for external collaborators required for the project;
* Program costs - costs for services and work contracts required for the project (production, prepress, printing of materials, translation, organisation of events, meetings, public actions, etc.);
* Visibility costs;
* Costs of consumable/office materials;
* Travel expenses and per diems for employees and other individuals participating in the project, provided they do not exceed the limits in the beneficiary’s internal rules and procedures;
* Indirect costs related to all accompanying expenses for the implementation of planned project activities, such as office maintenance, rental, internet, telephone, banking costs, up to a maximum of 7% of direct costs.

**Note:** VAT costs are not eligible.

All costs must be presented without value-added tax (VAT) where it is calculated in accordance with the VAT Law. Under this program, VAT exemption is allowed.

VAT paid can be recognised as an eligible cost only if it cannot be reimbursed or exempted. In such cases, it must be documented in written form by the competent tax authority of the beneficiary's country. In all other cases, VAT will not be considered an eligible cost.

All costs not subject to VAT but to other types of taxes and contributions must be presented in gross amounts (e.g., salaries, fees, services, and other costs). Costs subject to VAT must be presented in net amounts.

**8.3. Ineligible Costs**

The following costs will not be allowed under this program:

* Debts and debt service charges (interest);
* Provisions for losses, debts, or potential future liabilities;
* Customs duties and import taxes, or any other charges;
* Fines and litigation costs;
* All leasing and depreciation costs;
* Costs reported by the beneficiary that are financed by other European Union funds (including through the European Development Fund);
* Purchase of land or buildings, purchase of vehicles or real estate, financing of construction works on real estate owned by the project holder or leased by the project holder;
* Losses due to currency exchange rate fluctuations;
* Loans to third parties unless otherwise specified in special conditions;
* Contributions in kind;
* Salaries of staff of national administrations and public officials, unless otherwise specified in the special conditions and only to the extent that they relate to the costs of activities that the relevant public authorities would not have carried out if the action had not been undertaken;
* Performance-based bonuses included in staff costs;
* Financial support provided by program partners to other civil society organisations in the form of grants, which are not listed in the application.

**9. The application process consists of two phases:**

**Phase 1:** **Submission of a completed questionnaire for organisations and media founders / publishers.**

A selection will be made from all submitted applications, choosing at least 35 top-ranked applicants based on specified criteria while ensuring territorial distribution. The criteria and more information about the selection process can be found in Section 11 of this Call.

**Phase 2:** **Submission of the project proposal.**

Selected organisations will submit a project proposal by completing the project narrative proposal form and the project budget form, which will be provided later to those selected after the first phase of the process.

**9.1. Mandatory Application Documentation for Phase 1**

The program/project applicant is required to submit the following documentation:

* Completed form (Word document);
* Scanned copy of the applicant's registration document from the Business Registers Agency;
* Scanned copy of the media's registration document from the Media Business Registers Agency;
* Financial reports for 2023 and 2022.

**Note:** The Program Support Organiser may request supplementary documentation no later than eight (8) days from the receipt of the information required for Phase 1.

**10. Application Method and Deadlines**

**10.1. Method of Application and Deadline for Phase 1:**

The form for submitting information for Phase 1 can be downloaded here.

The mandatory application documentation (see point 9.1 of the Call) must be submitted in electronic form (Word and PDF format) to the email address **info@safejournalists.net** with the subject line: “Name of the organisation/media\_ Support Program ‘SafeJournalists Network’.”

The deadline for submitting the application form in the local language and the documentation for Phase 1 is **20 December 2024** by **23:59 CET**.

Documentation in printed form will not be considered.

The evaluation and ranking list of applications from Phase 1, determined by the selection committee, will be published on the project website **safejournalists.net** and on the websites of the member organisations of the SafeJournalists network by **31 December 2024** and sent to all competition participants electronically.

Funds are awarded for projects with a final implementation deadline of **28 February 2026**.

The earliest start date for project implementation is **1 March 2025**.

The duration of project activities is between **9 and 12 months**.

Questions related to the call can be sent to **tamara.filipovic@nuns.rs** (for program-related questions) and **marko.lazic@nuns.rs** (for financial questions) no later than **10 December 2024**.

**11. Criteria for Selecting Project Proposals Funded Under the Program**

**11.1. Administrative Criteria**

Evaluation and ranking of applications received in Phase 1 will be conducted in accordance with the following administrative criteria:

* The application and accompanying documentation were submitted on time, in line with the deadline specified in the call;
* The project applicant meets the general and specific conditions of the call;
* The documentation was submitted in the required format and according to the instructions in the call.

**11.2. Qualitative Criteria for Evaluation in Phase 1:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Criteria** | **Definition**  | **Max. No. of points**  |
| **1.** | Project teampotential | This criterion assesses the potential of theproject by evaluating the quality and thestructure of the project team in themedia/CSO organisation. | **20** |
| **2.** | Previous experience | This criterion evaluates the expertise of theapplicant on previous work in the field of media freedom, journalist safety, but also project management. | **25** |
| **3.** | Operational capacity to independently undertake assigned activities – level of organisational and management capacities | This criterion includes the organisation's ability to effectively plan, implement, and manage projects, as well as its capacity to adapt to changes and challenges in the environment in which it operates. | **25** |
| **4.** | Degree of commitment to ethical standards | This criterion represents an assessment of how civil society organisations and media direct their actions and decision-making in accordance with recognised ethical principles and norms, consistently applying ethical guidelines in all aspects of their work, including transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights. | **10** |
| **5.** | Financial capacity  | The ability of the organisation or media outlet to plan and manage the budget is evaluated, including the efficient use of resources for the implementation of activities and projects. This also includes the capacity to secure stable sources of funding, such as donations, grants, or income from media operations. | **20** |
| **6.** | **Total no. of points (out of 100)**  |  | **Max. no. of points: 100**  |

# 12. Visibility and Copyright

The SafeJournalists Network reserves the right to publish the products resulting from this program, either in parts, in full, or as a reference on its website or in its publications, while respecting copyright rules. The contracts with grant recipients will include specific conditions regarding copyrights and donor acknowledgment.

Successful applicants who are awarded financial support will be required to adhere to the [visibility rules defined by the European Commission](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/communicating_and_raising_eu_visibility_-_guidance_for_external_actions_-_july_2022.pdf).

**Note 1:** The evaluation of project proposals will be carried out by a selection committee composed of independent experts in the fields of media and civil society and representatives of member organisations of the SafeJournalists network.

**Note 2:** The organiser of the call reserves the right to announce a second round for the submission of project proposals if the selection committee determines that there are not enough applications meeting the above-mentioned qualitative criteria. The organiser of the call reserves the discretionary right not to allocate all available funds in the case of an insufficient number of high-quality applications or to territorially distribute financial support limits.

**INDICATIVE TIMETABLE**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **DATE**  | **TIME** |
| Public announcement of the Call for proposals | **2 December 2024** | 23.59 CET |
| Deadline to request any clarifications from SJN member organisation in each country  | **10 December 2024** | 23.59 CET |
| Deadline for issuing clarifications  | **15 December 2024** | 23.59 CET |
| Phase 1: Deadline for the submission of the application form and accompanying documents  | **20 December 2024** | 23.59 CET |
| Applicants to be available (email and phone) for clarifications and potential submission of additional documents during theevaluation procedure | **20-25 December 2024** | 23.59 CET |
| Information to applicants on the evaluation of theapplication form within Phase 1 | **31 December 2024** | 23.59 CET |
| Phase 2: Deadline for the submission of the application form and accompanying documents | **01 February 2025** | 23.59 CET |
| Applicants to be available (email and phone) forclarifications and potential submission of additional documents during theevaluation procedure | **5-15 February 2025** | 23.59 CET |
| Information to applicants on the evaluation of theapplications within Phase 2 | **25 February 2025** | 23.59 CET |
| Contract signing | **1 March 2025** | 23.59 CET |

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

1. *\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on Kosovo Declaration of Independence.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Title of the Project: ‘Support to Regional thematic networks of Civil Society Organisations; Small scale projects in support of good neighbourly relations between Serbia and Kosovo\*; Regional CSOs networks promoting media freedom and freedom of expression; and Quality Journalism initiative’* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *This is determined by the applicant's project history and the activities as defined in the official registration documents.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Title of the Project: ‘Support to Regional thematic networks of Civil Society Organisations; Small scale projects in support of good neighbourly relations between Serbia and Kosovo\*; Regional CSOs networks promoting media freedom and freedom of expression; and Quality Journalism initiative’* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)