

## **1<sup>st</sup> Call for Project Proposals: Promotion of Media and Information Literacy**

### **Introduction**

SEE Check is a network of six fact-checking organizations from five countries in South-Eastern Europe that work on promoting media accountability, improving media literacy, and fighting misinformation and disinformation.

The fact-checking web portals within the SeeCheck Network include Raskrinkavanje.ba (BiH), Raskrinkavanje.me (Montenegro), Raskrikavanje.rs (Serbia), Razkrinkavanje.si (Slovenia), Faktograf.hr (Croatia), and Fakenews.rs (Serbia).

This call for proposals is part of the regional project "SEECheck Network – Fighting Disinformation and Misinformation through a Network of Fact-checkers", which the SeeCheck network is conducting in partnership with "Faktoje" from Albania and "Open Data Kosovo", with the support of the European Commission.

The project includes the disbursement of short-term grants aimed at strengthening the capacities of civil society organizations (CSO) and media outlets to counter disinformation in their respective public spaces.

### **Background**

Addressing disinformation and effectively engaging audiences pose significant challenges for fact-checkers. The recent surge in disinformation, particularly during global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the aggression against Ukraine, has contributed to heightened negative attitudes toward fact-checking, driven by aggressive groups like conspiracy theorists and their followers.

The primary objective of this sub-granting program is to enhance the capacities of local media and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the SEE region to combat information disorder, improve the integrity of local media, and bolster community resilience to disinformation, with a focus on initiatives that target local audiences.

The SEE Check Network together with its partners will distribute 20 grants across the region to help organizations and local media outlets raise media literacy among their audiences, produce more credible reporting, and counter-narratives to disinformation.

## **Grants**

The SEE Check Network together with its partners is offering short-term grants for projects lasting between three and nine months. Grant amounts vary from €5,000 to €12,000. A total of 20 grants will be awarded across two rounds of calls in the total amount of €207,000.

The application for the first round of the Open Call for grants in 2024 is now open, with 10 grants to be awarded in the total amount of €103,500. A second Open Call for grants will be launched in January 2025, during which another 10 grants will be distributed in the total amount of €103,500.

Local media and CSOs are invited to apply for the SEE Check Granting Scheme under one of the following lots:

### **LOT 1:**

Support for local media initiatives to enhance fact-checking and credible reporting capacities. These grants are intended for local media entities seeking to engage in fact-checking activities or produce credible content, including debunking disinformation or creating credible fact-based narratives. Projects should result in the production and promotion of such content, alongside enhanced capacities among journalistic and editorial staff. A long-term commitment to producing specialized content and the developing internal procedures to ensure content accuracy and credibility will be advantageous in the selection process. Grants may also support the production of specialized engaging content tailored to specific audiences.

### **LOT 2:**

Support for local CSOs to enhance capacities in combating disinformation, promoting media literacy, or building resilience. These grants aim to empower local CSOs in the SEE region to conduct activities that strengthen their ability to combat disinformation. Projects can include community initiatives, online campaigns, multimedia content production and promotion, research, advocacy, policy actions, trainings, or other activities that align with the objectives of the lot. Preference will be given to initiatives ensuring sustained CSO engagement in the above-mentioned fields.

## **Eligibility**

Eligible entities must:

- Be legal persons.
- Be non-profit organizations or registered as media outlets in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, or Kosovo.
- Be civil society organizations or media entities.
- Assume direct responsibility for the preparation and management of the project.
- Possess a minimum of one year of CSO/media work experience.
- The scope of activities must focus on one of the Balkan countries or the Western Balkans region.

## **List of Specific Criteria for the selection of project(s):**

- Proposed activities have a minimum duration of three and maximum duration of nine months.
- Activities aim to produce credible content, improve media credibility, increase media literacy and/or resilience to disinformation, and combat disinformation and misinformation.
- Proposed activities have the potential for longer-lasting impact in communities or target audiences.
- Proposed activities must include a visibility and promotion plans. Networking with other stakeholders (CSOs, government authorities, and media) is a substantial part of the activity plan. topics.,
- Proposed activities have potential for visibility and promotion.
- Proposed activities do not discriminate against or offend any group of citizens.
- Clear link exists between set objectives and project activities.
- Budget is realistic and aligned with project activities.

## **Types of Eligible Activities**

Activities eligible for support include:

- Media content production.
- Online and offline promotional campaigns.



- Trainings, conferences, and public events.
- Research and studies.
- Policy and advocacy activities.
- Community initiatives and public presentations.
- Development of online tools and websites.
- Investigative journalism.

### **Ineligible Actions**

The following actions are ineligible:

- Individual sponsorships for workshops, seminars, or conferences.
- Scholarships for studies or training programs.
- Study visits or participation in international forums.
- Projects focused primarily on infrastructure or equipment.
- Purchase or renovation of buildings/offices.
- Activities initiated prior to the signing of the contract.
- Profit-making endeavors.
- Charitable donations.
- Discriminatory actions.
- Support for individual political parties.
- Projects already funded by other EU programs.

### **General criteria**

In addition to meeting eligibility requirements, the applicants must meet the following general criteria:

- Activities must focus on the actions described in the call
- Applications must be fully completed (administrative and technical part) and written in English. Applications partially written in another language are not eligible.
- Applicants must submit their application via the provided email address using the templates provided. Applications submitted by other means will not be evaluated.
- It is not possible to submit multiple applications under the same call.
- Applicants must declare that the same project hasn't received funding under another call.
- The funds requested under this Call must amount to between a minimum of €5,000 and a maximum of €12,000.
- The project duration must be between 3 and 9 months.

### **Co-financing Principle**

The total grant amount will cover between 80% and 100% of the proposed action costs. The proposed budget and financial reports must clearly outline the co-financing component. Co-funding of the project by the applicant (or a partner) is not mandatory.

### **Training and mentoring**

SEE Check Network and its partners will organize training and mentoring sessions for CSOs and media outlets in the region.

These sessions will address the capacity needs of local CSOs and media, providing them with additional tools, skills, and contacts to more efficiently implement their projects and continue combating disinformation in their work.

Additionally, this initiative will benefit different CSOs that protect marginalized groups, as much of the disinformation debunking and fact-checking is oriented toward countering disinformation targeting marginalized communities.

Entities awarded a grant from the SEECheck Network sub-granting scheme are obliged to participate in the training and mentoring sessions.

The grantees must take part in developing an implementation plan for the training and mentoring sessions

As the designated representative of the SEE Check Network and its project partners, the Association "Why not" will oversee the financial and programmatic implementation of the grants awarded under the Call.

Each grant recipient will be matched with a mentor from one of the SEE Check member-partner organizations, either from their native country or with expertise in the specific project theme awarded.

### **FINANCIAL PROVISIONS**

Eligible costs are actual costs incurred by the beneficiary(ies) that meet all the following criteria:

- a) They are incurred during the implementation of the action as specified in Article 2 of the special conditions. Specifically:
  - i. Costs relating to services and works must pertain to activities performed during the implementation period. Costs relating to supplies must involve the delivery and installation of items during the implementation period. The signing of a contract, placing of an order, or entering into any commitment for expenditure within the implementation period for future delivery of services, works or supplies after expiry of the implementation period do not meet this requirement. Cash transfers between the coordinator and/or the other beneficiary(ies) and/or affiliated entity(ies) may not be considered as costs incurred;
  - ii. Costs incurred must be paid before the submission of the final reports.
- b) They are indicated in the estimated overall budget for the action;

- c) They are necessary for the implementation of the action;
- d) They are identifiable and verifiable, in particular being recorded in the accounting records of the beneficiary(ies) and determined according to accounting standards and the usual cost accounting practices applicable to the beneficiary(ies);
- e) They comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation;
- f) They are reasonable, justified, and comply with the principles of sound financial management, in particular regarding economy and efficiency.

### **Eligible costs**

- 1. The cost of staff assigned to the action, corresponding to actual gross salaries including social security charges and other remuneration-related costs (excluding bonuses). 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 action;
- 2. Travel and subsistence costs for staff and other persons taking part in the action, provided they do not exceed those normally borne by the beneficiary(ies) according to its rules and regulations. In addition, the rates published by the European Commission at the time of contract signature must not be exceeded;
- 3. Costs of consumables specifically dedicated to the action;
- 4. Costs of service, supply and work contracts awarded by the beneficiary(ies) for the purposes of the action;
- 5. Costs deriving directly from the requirements of the contract (dissemination of information, evaluation specific to the action, audits, translation, reproduction, insurance, etc.) including financial service costs (in particular the cost of transfers and financial guarantees where required according to the contract);
- 6. Duties, taxes, and charges related to the purposes of the action, paid and not recoverable by the beneficiary(ies), unless otherwise provided in the special conditions;
- 7. Project office costs: Costs actually incurred in relation to a project office used for the action or a portion of these costs may be accepted as eligible direct costs if:
  - I. The need for setting up or using a project office is recognised by the Contracting Authority
  - II. The description of the project office, the services or resources it makes available, its overall capacity and (where applicable) the distribution key are provided in the Description of the Action and the Budget;
  - III. (Where applicable) the distribution key reasonably reflects the portion of the resources or services needed by and actually used for the Action;
  - IV. They fall within one of the following categories:
    - a) Costs of staff directly assigned to the operations of the project office;
    - b) Rental costs;
    - c) Costs of maintenance and repair contracts;

- d) Costs of consumables and supplies specifically dedicated to the action;
- e) Costs of IT and telecommunication services;

### **Non-eligible costs**

1. Debts and debt service charges (interest);
2. Provisions for losses, debts or potential future liabilities;
3. Costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed by another action or work programme receiving a European Union grant (including through the European Development Fund);
4. Currency exchange losses;
5. Credits to third parties, unless otherwise specified in the special conditions;
6. In-kind contributions (except for volunteers' work);
7. Salary costs of the personnel of national administrations for activities which the relevant public authority would not carry out if the action were not undertaken;
8. Bonuses included in staff costs;
9. Negative interest charged by banks or other financial institutions;
10. VAT costs.

### **Where to apply?**

All proposals must be submitted electronically to email address [info@zastone.ba](mailto:info@zastone.ba) with the email subject: '**[Name of the Applicant] - SEE Check Network Project Application.**'

Proposals must be received by **15 October 2024**. Late proposals, or proposals submitted by any means other than indicated will not be considered.

All proposals and related data, knowledge, and documents will be treated in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016).

All project related inquiries and questions can be forwarded to email address [info@zastone.ba](mailto:info@zastone.ba) no later than 08 October.

### **Grant(s) implementation phases include the following:**

- The call for proposals remains open until 15 October, 2024.
- A committee comprising representatives from all SEE Check network members will evaluate proposals that meet the criteria and provide the required documentation.
- All applicants will receive notification on the status of their application in the first half of November 2024.
- During the implementation of the grants awarded under this Call, training and mentoring sessions will be conducted.

## **EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS**

The evaluation and ranking of applications will be based on a set of criteria in addition to the above-mentioned eligibility conditions. The evaluation process is structured as follows:

### **1. Eligibility check and formal requirements**

The SEE Check and partners consortium, and namely CA WHY NOT (CAWN) as the contracting entity, will review each proposal for formal requirements, including:

- Compliance with eligibility criteria
- Completeness of the requested administrative, financial, and technical information.
- Language of the application (English is mandatory).
- Compliance with the submission process and deadline.

Applications that do not meet one or more mandatory requirements will be excluded from the selection phase. All applicants eliminated from the process after the eligibility check will be notified by email.

### **2. Preliminary assessment by CAWN**

If the proposals are eligible and complete, the CAWN team will proceed with an initial assessment. The preliminary quality criteria will focus on the compliance of the proposals with the call objectives.

All applicants eliminated from the process after the preliminary assessment will be notified by email at the end of the call evaluation process.

### **3. Final evaluation**

Each proposal that passes the preliminary assessment will be evaluated by the SEECheck and project partners consortium, which includes representatives from each SEECheck member organization as well as representatives of the project partners, according to the awarding criteria listed below.

The evaluation process will begin with an individual assessment, carried out independently by each consortium member of the evaluation panel.

The proposals receiving the highest rankings after the final evaluation will be selected. All applicants undergoing the final evaluation will be informed of their evaluation ranking and results via email, including an evaluation summary.



### Evaluation criteria

The proposals selected for funding must demonstrate high quality in the context and meet the specific criteria set out for the call. Evaluation criteria, assessed by the SEECheck and project partners consortium panelists, will consider all three sections described. The evaluation criteria are outlined in the table below.

Section	Evaluation criteria
Objectives, needs and approach [Excellence]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Clarity of the project’s objectives.</li> <li>➤ Pertinence of the project’s objectives to the call requirements.</li> </ul>
Changes to be achieved [Impact]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Expected changes benefitting the organization(s) involved, the territory, and society at large</li> </ul>
Activities [Implementation]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Quality and consistency of the actions in relation to the project objectives.</li> </ul>

### Scoring system

For the evaluation, each section will be scored from 0 to 5 as follows:

- 0 Not acceptable;
- 1 Poor: The criteria in the section are addressed inadequately, or there are serious inherent weaknesses;
- 2 Fair: The proposal broadly addresses the criteria in the section, but there are significant weaknesses;
- 3 Good: The proposal addresses the criteria in the section well, although improvements are necessary;
- 4 Very good: The proposal addresses the criteria in the section very well, although certain improvements are still possible;

- 5 Excellent: The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the section. Any shortcomings are minor.

The average score for each section will be calculated from all reviewer evaluations. The average score for any section must be at least 3. If a criterion is rated below an average of 3, the application will be immediately excluded from funding. The sum of these averaged scores results in the total evaluation score for each project. The highest achievable total evaluation score is 15, and the minimum score for a project to be funded is 9.

Proposals obtaining a score of 9 or more will be ranked, and the highest-ranking proposals will be selected until the funds for the call are exhausted.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion will be considered as ranking criteria for proposals with equal scores. In some cases, diversity may be the leading principle driving the selection of projects, aiming to achieve a balanced list of selected projects in terms of geography, types of stakeholders involved, issues addressed, and gender.

### **Disclaimer on the selection process**

All submitted proposals will be treated equally and evaluated impartially based on their merits, regardless of their origin or the identity of the applicants. The evaluation procedure will be clear and transparent for applicants; the evaluation ranking and results will be made available to each applicant through an Evaluation Summary Report.

### **Contractual arrangements and general payment terms**

Once the evaluation process is concluded, each selected proposal will be invited to sign the SEECheck Sub-Grant Agreement with the Consortium (represented by CAWN for the purposes of signature). The funds awarded under the SEECheck Sub-Grant Agreement come directly from the European Commission-funded project and are, therefore, owned by the European Commission.

Management of the SEECheck project funds has been transferred to the project partners via Grant Agreement Number IPA/2022/440-985, signed with the European Commission. All beneficiaries of SEECheck project financial support must comply with contractual obligations including:

- **Avoiding conflicts of interest:** The beneficiaries must take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the Sub-Grant Agreement could be compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect interest ('conflict of interests').
- **Confidentiality obligations:** The parties must keep confidential any data, documents, or other material (in any form) that is identified as sensitive in writing ('sensitive information') during the implementation of the action and for at least five years after the final payment. If a beneficiary requests, the SEE Check Network may agree to keep such information confidential for a longer period. Unless otherwise agreed between the parties,

sensitive information may only be used to implement the Sub-Grant Agreement. The SEE Check Network may disclose sensitive information to its staff and to other EU institutions and bodies. It may also disclose sensitive information, if:

- a) This is necessary to implement the Sub-Grant Agreement or safeguard the EU's financial interests.
- b) The recipients of the information are bound by an obligation of confidentiality

The confidentiality obligations no longer apply if:

- a) The disclosing party agrees to release the other party.
- b) The information becomes publicly available without breaching any confidentiality obligation.
- c) The disclosure of the sensitive information is required by EU, international, or national law.

### **Important:**

- **Ethics:** The granted action must be carried out in line with the highest ethical standards and the applicable EU, international, and national laws on ethical principles.
- **Ensuring gender equality:** Applicants are encouraged to take all measures to promote equal opportunities between genders in the implementation of the action. They must aim for gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action, including supervisory and managerial levels, to the extent possible.
- **Give visibility to the EU funding:** Unless otherwise agreed with the contracting entity, all communication activities related to the action by the beneficiaries (including media relations, conferences, seminars, information materials such as brochures, leaflets, posters, and presentations, in electronic form, traditional media, or social media) must acknowledge EU support. This includes dissemination activities and any infrastructure, equipment, vehicles, supplies, or major results funded by the grant. All materials and activities must display the European flag (emblem) and include the funding statement, translated into local languages where appropriate:
- The emblem must remain distinct and separate and cannot be modified by adding other visual marks, brands, or text. When displayed alongside other logos (e.g., those of beneficiaries or sponsors), the emblem must be at least as prominent and visible as the other logos. Additionally, for dissemination and use of results generated through financial support from the SEECheck Network, recipients must credit the SEE Check project by including the SEE Check logo and the EU logo, along with proper citation.
- **Ensuring Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):** Ownership of IPR created by beneficiaries using SEE Check project funding will remain with the beneficiaries, who will be the sole owners of any IP resulting from their funded projects. Beneficiaries are advised to establish internal agreements concerning IPR and the use and dissemination of results generated through funding from the SEE Check project.
- **Providing additional information** without any delays: Beneficiaries must promptly provide any additional information requested during or after the action to verify the eligibility of declared costs or contributions, ensure proper implementation, and comply



with other obligations under the Sub-Grant Agreement. The information provided must be accurate, precise, complete, and in the requested format, including electronic format.

- **Keeping the data updated:** Beneficiaries must ensure that their information stored by the SEECheck Network is kept up to date at all times, both during and after the action. This includes maintaining current details such as their name, address, legal representatives, legal form, and organization type.
- **Communicating information about events and circumstances which impact the action:** The beneficiaries must immediately inform the contracting entity (and the other beneficiaries) of any of the following:
  - Events likely to affect or delay the implementation of the action or impact the EU's financial interests, particularly changes in their legal, financial, technical, organizational, or ownership situation (including changes related to the exclusion grounds listed in the declaration of honor signed before the grant signature).
  - Circumstances that affect the decision to award the grant or compliance with the requirements under the Agreement.
- **Record-keeping and supporting documents:** Beneficiaries must retain records and supporting documents for at least three years after the final payment to demonstrate proper implementation of the action in accordance with accepted standards in the respective field (if any). Additionally, beneficiaries must maintain adequate records to show that their cost accounting practices are applied consistently based on objective criteria, regardless of the funding source, and comply with eligibility conditions.
- **Consequences of non-compliance**

If a beneficiary fails to meet any obligations related to the action, the grant may be reduced or terminated.

## **Reporting and payment of the funds**

Each grantee will be asked to complete a Progress Report, detailing justifications of expenses, precise descriptions of the actions implemented, the problems encountered, and the solutions adopted. These reports will allow monitoring of the grants, ensuring that funds are being used according to the plan and, at the same time, collecting information on the impact of SEE Check project grants. A template will be provided and made available to all beneficiaries. Two progress reports are required for each grant: a mid-term and a final report, due to the project duration. Funds will be disbursed in two installments: 50% at the project's start and 50% upon validation of Progress Reports. This payment structure aims to prevent misuse of funds.

## **Submission of final reports**

The subgrantee must submit the final report to the contracting authority no later than 30 days after the implementation period ends.

For any information not addressed in this call, the rules outlined in the document "ANNEX II, General conditions applicable to European Union-financed grant contracts for external actions" will apply.



**SEECheck network – fighting disinformation and misinformation through a network of fact-**



Funded by the EU



The regional project "SEECheck Network – Fighting Disinformation and Misinformation through a Network of Fact-checkers" is implemented by SEECheck Network with the support of the European Union.