Western Balkans Call
Support Area 1 – Conflict Sensitivity (CS)

Concept Note & Frequently Asked Questions

If you are interested in applying for our conflict sensitivity (CS) support, please make sure to consult the following resources in addition to this concept note:

- Our call overview for applicants
- Our conflict sensitivity application form
- The overview of our conflict sensitivity work

WHY WE SUPPORT CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

What is conflict sensitivity...

Conflict sensitivity is typically defined as the ability of an organisation to:

- Understand the context in which it operates
- Understand the interactions between its actions and the context
- Act upon this understanding to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict

The notion of conflict sensitivity emerged in the early 2000s as a way to prevent humanitarian actors from inadvertently causing harm through their programmes – as unfortunately happened in Rwanda when genocidaires used aid to consolidate their power.

Despite its humanitarian origin, the concept is actually applicable across a wide range of contexts, including in societies that have moved away from violent conflict but remain affected by underlying lines of tension and polarisation. It is based on the idea that any organisation operating in a divided environment has an impact on the context. Beyond intended goals, there can be unintended effects – both negative and positive – on conflict dynamics. Contrary to some misconceptions, working in a conflict sensitive manner is not about avoiding conflict. In fact, it is about acknowledging that conflict is an inherent part of human and social interactions. The challenge is how to manage conflict peacefully and constructively rather than resort to divisiveness and violence. Conflict sensitivity helps recognise the risks, dilemmas and opportunities that arise in complex contexts and make informed choices on how to respond to this context

... and why it is relevant in the Western Balkans?

We believe that Western Balkans organisations often face context-sensitivity challenges and have untapped potential for contributing to greater social cohesion, regardless of whether they work on reconciliation directly, or have a different mandate focused for example on journalism, democratic

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¹ In this concept note, the word “conflict” is used having the following definition in mind. “Conflict is the pursuit of contrary or seemingly incompatible interests –whether between individuals, groups or countries. Conflict exists in all societies at all times and need not necessarily be negative or destructive”. DFID, Preventing Violent Conflict, 2008
engagement, education or cultural heritage. This is the potential that we aim to help realise through this call.

Indeed, Western Balkans organisations that are not context- and conflict sensitive risk doing harm, for example by unintentionally:

- Reinforcing existing prejudices between different groups
- Endorsing divisive narratives about the region’s past
- Entrenching existing power relationships (i.e. maintaining the status quo)
- Perpetuating the exclusion (e.g. from project design and activities) of marginalized individuals and groups

On the flipside, organisations whose internal systems and programmes are conflict-sensitive are better positioned to act as agents of social cohesion, and:

- Enable meaningful interactions around sensitive issues
- Connect different stakeholders across boundaries
- Develop higher quality projects
- Embed diversity in their staffing, membership and decision-making structures
- Develop more inclusive and effective outreach strategies
- Develop new programmes and partnerships to support direct work for social cohesion?

**WHAT OUR SUPPORT TO CONFLICT SENSITIVITY ENTAILS**

The integration of conflict sensitivity principles can be relevant both for organisations that focus on reconciliation and peacebuilding AND for organisation which don’t focus on these themes but want to contribute to greater social cohesion through their existing mission.

The support we are ready to offer can therefore take place in a broad range of situations. Our support is geared towards:
• Helping an organisation adapt how it works so as to minimise the risks of its actions doing harm. For example, a media organisation may decide to turn to conflict sensitive journalism principles to ensure its reporting is countering revisionism and hate speech.
• Enable an organisation to boost its contribution to social cohesion within its current mandate. For example, a grant-making organisation may decide to review its selection procedures to ensure its portfolio will support and connect actors able to make a positive change in their community.
• Help an organisation scale up the portion of their work directly focused on social cohesion. For example, a community organisation previously focused on service delivery may want to develop a direct social cohesion programme and develop new capacities and approaches accordingly.

What you can do with our support

Our support always entails giving organisations the space to think through HOW they work and to develop organisational strategies to improve the quality of their work accordingly. In practice, with our support, you can:

• Assess where your organisation is at on conflict sensitivity and social cohesion and prioritise areas for internal strengthening
• Develop mechanisms for regular context and conflict analysis
• Build staff capacity to conduct and make use of context analysis for programme design and implementation
• Adapt grant-making mechanisms to ensure they incentivise conflict-sensitive practice
• Adapt monitoring and evaluation systems to better track changes in the context and unintended impacts of the work
• Adapt programming tools and processes to make them more conducive to on-going learning and adaptation
• Develop strategies to increase direct programming for social cohesion, including via mobilising new types of resources and partnerships

“PeaceNexus has been supporting RYCO since our very first organizational steps in taking an adequate conflict sensitivity lens in several aspects of our work. One of the aspects in which this type of support was the most needed is related to our internal functioning as an intercultural team coming from societies with strong post-war trauma, in the phase of rapid growth, in an unstable political environment.

The other aspect is related to our core programmatic instrument - grant making, which targets high schools and CSOs from WB6 with various levels of experience in intercultural learning, peacebuilding and remembrance and reconciliation. Design of our Calls for project proposals and capacity building of our beneficiaries requires careful reflection and frequent adaptations to minimize negative and maximize positive impact of their work.”

Bojana Bulatović - RYCO Program Manager

** This list is not exhaustive. Other examples and testimonials are available on our website**

Putting conflict sensitivity into practice: our accompaniment

PN recognizes that working on conflict sensitivity is demanding since it requires organisations to carefully examine HOW they work and to adapt accordingly. Therefore, we strive to provide our
partners with responsive and tailored accompaniment. Our support includes: (See also in the Overview: What does PeaceNexus support entail):

- **Direct process accompaniment from PeaceNexus**
  - We strongly believe in participatory approaches, as our experience is that change can only be successful if those expected to make it happen are actively involved in shaping it. At the start of our engagement, we will visit you to assess in a participatory way how your organisation is impacted by context challenges and what needs to happen internally for you to be able to respond appropriately to these, building on existing strengths and opportunities. On that basis we will support you in prioritising and sequencing objectives for change, and designing a roadmap for our support.
  - As the process unfolds, which typically involves the recruitment of external expertise, our role includes monitoring progress, providing feedback and assisting you where needed to help you achieve your objectives.
  - To this end, two PN staff members will be available to you and your process throughout our partnership from the first steps of process design to the final steps of implementation.

- **Financial contribution to cover costs directly associated with the process:**
  - The budget allocated to each partner is determined by the roadmap which we jointly establish after the initial kick-off visit, taking into account your particular needs, scale of operations and absorption capacity.
  - Our financial envelope covers the costs of external consultants and possibly additional thematic or technical expertise, as well as expenses directly related to the process such as meeting and travel costs. (see also in the Overview: What is outside of the scope of PeaceNexus OD support and cannot be funded.)

- **Support in identifying and managing required external consultancies**
  - In our experience, working with an experienced consultant and having her/him facilitate key moments is an efficient way of enabling reflection, working through difficulties, and moving to action. PeaceNexus staff will assist you in finding the consultant(s) best suited to your needs and identifying required deliverables.
  - The consultants accompanying your process will report and be accountable to you, while PN staff will help you engage effectively with and provide feedback to consultants.

In addition, we approach all partnerships in line with the following **core principles**:

- **Honesty and confidentiality:** We commit to always acting with strict confidentiality and maintain open and transparent communication throughout our partnership.

- **Starting from where our partners are at:** we do not prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach but rather tailor our support to each partner’s mandate, challenges, needs and ambitions. We aim to apply a pragmatic and gradual approach to improving systems and practices for conflict sensitivity.
and greater contributions to social cohesion, taking into account the vision, absorption capacity and internal constraints that are specific to each organisation.

- **Using an organisational development approach to conflict sensitivity**: our intention is to provide our partners with longer-term support that integrates organisational change tools and approaches. This means offering support that takes into account both the links between operations and their context (programmatic level) as well as the organisational policies, systems and processes shaping these operations (organisational level).

- **Commitment over time**: if you are making progress but achieving your change objectives requires more time and effort than anticipated, we may extend our commitment to a follow-on phase of support, pending our Board approval. Until now, our support to partners on conflict sensitivity typically lasted between 18 months and four years.

**INTENDED AUDIENCE**

We welcome applications from all organisations that fulfil the eligibility criteria and want to maximise the positive impact of their work on social cohesion by better adapting to their context. Organisations working on reconciliation and Dealing with the Past who face challenges in applying conflict sensitivity can apply. However, as explained above, you do not need to focus on peacebuilding to be eligible for this support. Organisations that work for example on journalism, cultural heritage or education can apply too.

More specifically:

- We intend to pursue and expand our support to **organisations/networks that work regionally and/or connect diverse stakeholders within and across divided communities at the local level**. We believe these organisations face particular context challenges in view of unresolved regional and bilateral disputes. We seek to support actors who are looking to use their mandate to bridge divides and provide people with opportunities for meaningful interactions – regardless of their mandate.
- We’re also keen to work with **grant-making organisations and foundations** aiming to develop conflict-sensitive funding & partnership practices and/or who aspire to become investors in peacebuilding work.

**ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

In order to be eligible, the applicant needs to fulfil ALL of the following criteria:

- Be a legal entity established in one of the following countries: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and
- Be a civil society organisation, or an organisation from one of the following categories,
  - A local or regional public entity
  - A foundation
  - A multilateral organisation
  - A network
➢ And be directly responsible for the preparation of the application and management of the process if selected (not acting as intermediary), and
➢ Have a bank account, and
➢ Confirm that their activities that will not violate the USA PATRIOT Act (18 U. S. C. §2339B)

**SELECTION CRITERIA**  (see also in the Overview: What is the application and selection process)

When selecting our conflict sensitivity partners in the Western Balkans, we pay attention to the following criteria:

➢ **Relevance of the applicant and potential to positively contribute to social cohesion**
We achieve our impact through the work of our partners. Therefore, we need to understand through concrete examples what you are working on and how your work positively influences your environment. It is also important for us to understand where you see opportunities to contribute to social cohesion.

➢ **Readiness to take up conflict sensitivity at an organisational level**
Since an honest self-assessment and open acknowledgment of difficulties is key to the processes we support, we encourage you to be upfront about your starting point and the challenges that you face in adapting to your context. Through your application, we want to understand why you want to invest your time and energy in this process. To this end, we’re particularly keen to know what makes you think that greater conflict sensitivity would make a positive difference inside your organisation and on your impact on the ground.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

➢ **The following general questions about PeaceNexus support and partnership approach are addressed in the Overview and are relevant for all three support areas:**
  • What can be supported under this call?
  • What does PeaceNexus support entail?
  • What is outside the scope of PeaceNexus support and cannot be funded?
  • What is the application and selection process?
  • If we are selected, what will be the reporting requirements of PeaceNexus?

➢ **In addition, please read the following frequently asked questions about conflict sensitivity:**

*We are not very familiar with conflict sensitivity. Where can we find more information about the concept?*

If you want to learn more about conflict sensitivity, you may find the following resources useful:
  • [Conflict sensitivity topic guide](GSDRC)
  • [How to guide to conflict sensitivity](conflict sensitivity consortium)
  • [Factsheet on conflict sensitivity](KOFF/Swisspeace)

In addition, if you face any difficulties to understand the requirements of our application form, feel free to approach our Western Balkans team ([deborah.reymond@peacenexus.org](mailto:deborah.reymond@peacenexus.org)) until 29 May 2020.
Can we apply if we do not want to do peacebuilding work?
Yes, our conflict sensitivity support is suitable for organisations that aim to better understand and adapt to their context, and minimise negative effects of their work. We believe that different actors have different roles to play and our conflict sensitivity support does not mean that an organisation should start doing peacebuilding work.

We are not sure whether we are interested in support to become more conflict sensitive, or to do more peacebuilding work. How should we describe our vision in the application form?
Our support will always start with a participatory assessment, precisely to help you define your objectives in terms of conflict sensitivity and/or peacebuilding integration. In that sense it is fine if you are not yet clear on the exact vision of what you want to achieve with our support and how. Most important for us is that you explain the concrete challenges you face in relation to conflict sensitivity.

What is the difference between OD and CS and what should we do if we’re not sure which support area is most suitable for us?
As we’ve noted above, our support on conflict sensitivity includes an organisational development approach so there is overlap between these two categories of support. Both OD and CS support aim at strengthening your organisation and entail an internal change process. The differences relates to your organisational mandate and priorities and/or to the lens you’d like to take for your change process:
- If you work directly on addressing drivers of conflict and have a track record in peacebuilding and/or pushing for democratic reforms, then you are particularly welcome to apply for OD support.
  If your ambitions to contribute to social cohesion are lower or new, then CS support might be a better fit.
- Regardless of your mandate, we encourage you to apply for CS support if your internal challenges relate mostly to how to adapt to your context and develop your organisational capacities in relation to social cohesion.

In the end all applications are carefully assessed by the WB team that also work with both OD and CS, therefore applications will not be eliminated merely because of choosing one or other category. If you are selected, we will anyway start with an assessment and jointly determine what kind of process is most adequate for you.

We are the country/regional office of an international organisation or network. Can we apply?
As long as you are working in the Western Balkans and are legally established in the region, you are eligible to apply. If this is your case, we will need to understand the broader organisational set-up you are a part of. However, our support will then only focus on your needs and will have to be fully driven by your country/regional team.

In case you:
- would prefer to be supported at your overall organisational level
- are interested in CS support but are ineligible under this call,

please kindly get in touch with our Conflict Sensitivity Lead & International Partnerships Manager (heloise.heyer@peacenexus.org).