Western Balkans Call

Support Area 1 - Conflict Sensitivity (CS)

Concept note & Frequently Asked Questions
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 conflict-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 engagement, environment, 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 one-sided/denialist 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 ethnic and ideological lines
- Develop higher quality projects based on stronger feedback from those they serve
- 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

*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
The integration of conflict sensitivity principles can be relevant both for organisations that focus on reconciliation and peacebuilding and for organisations which don’t focus on these themes but want to contribute to greater social cohesion through their existing mission. In brief, conflict sensitivity ambitions can be located on different points of the spectrum below.

![Diagram showing different points of the spectrum](image)

Do No Harm
Limit risks to fuel tensions and violence

Contribute to social cohesion and peace
Within the existing mandate and priorities

Directly address drivers of conflict
Focus on conflict transformation and peacebuilding

Therefore, 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.
- Helping 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 is balanced and will support actors able to make a positive change in their community.
- Helping 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 make use of context analysis for programme design and implementation
- Adapt grant-making mechanisms to ensure selection criteria and outcomes do no harm and maximise contributions to social cohesion between groups that are often divided
- Adapt monitoring and evaluation systems to better track changes in the context and unintended impacts of the work
- Develop stronger stakeholder engagement, notably through more effective feedback mechanisms that enable learning and adaptation
- Develop strategies to increase direct programming for social cohesion, including via mobilising new types of resources and partnerships

"As a result of our work with PeaceNexus, Aktiv gained a better understanding of its position and impact on the overall socio-political ecosystem in which it operates.

We are now better able to develop more effective and concise strategies for strengthening our relationships with external stakeholders. We also gained a better understanding in terms of the risks that the organisation faces and the steps we can take to mitigate those risks.”

Caleb Waugh,
Head of NGO Aktiv's Policy Office
Putting conflict sensitivity into practice: our accompaniment

PN recognises 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:

- **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. The average budget per phase of support is around 25'000 CHF.
  - 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.

- **Support in identifying and managing required external consultancies**
  - In our experience, working with an experienced consultant and having them 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 to 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: The duration of one phase of support phase is approximately one year. However, in our experience, securing sustainable gains in terms of conflict sensitive practice requires sustained effort. If we see that you are making progress but achieving your change objectives requires more time and effort, we may extend our commitment through up to three phases of support. Most PN partnerships in the Western Balkans extend beyond one phase of support.

Recognise the risks and dilemmas inherent to working in conflict-affected contexts. Since conflict sensitivity is not about conflict avoidance, we work to ensure that conflict sensitivity enables work in highly polarised contexts and does not lead to simply avoiding all conflict-related/contested issues.

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 reconciliation to be eligible for CS support. For example, local grant-makers as well as organisations that work for example on journalism, cultural heritage, and education apply too. More specifically:

- We intend to pursue and expand our support to actors which 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 trust-based relationships – 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 to invest more strongly in social cohesion and peacebuilding work.

- We recognize that in the region, peacebuilding and democratic development are intrinsically linked. We’re also aware that organisations working on reconciliation are increasingly affected by the shrinking civic space. Therefore, we’re open to supporting organizations that are effective at protecting essential liberties and activists under threat.

- This can include media organisations that want to ensure conflict-sensitive reporting and/or counter polarisation
In order to be eligible, the applicant needs to fulfil ALL of the following criteria:

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

**SELECTION CRITERIA**

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 how you are impacted by underlying lines of tension and 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 about the internal 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 internal strengthening 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 both support areas:

? We are interested in internal development but have very limited time to engage; should we still apply?

? If we are selected, how will the partnership start?

? 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 (vladica.jovanovic@peacenexus.org) by 5 June.

? We do not work in an active conflict setting. Can conflict sensitivity still apply to us?

Yes. As mentioned in this concept note, conflict sensitivity is not limited to environments where there are physical outbreaks of violence. It applies to all contexts where underlying lines of tension are present. For example, if you notice strong trends to polarisation in your context (or even hate speech) and want to make sure that your work does not unintentionally reinforce division and prejudice between different groups, conflict sensitivity can be a very relevant support area for you.

? 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 ensure we do no harm, 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. What is 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 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 regarding peacebuilding, 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.

We do ask you to apply to only one support area which you feel is a better fit for you. However, all applications are carefully assessed by the WB team that works with both OD and CS. If you are selected, we will anyway start with an assessment and jointly determine what kind of process is most adequate for you. Some of our partnerships combine OD and CS elements.

We are the country/regional office of an international organisation or network. Can we apply?

As long as you are (partly) based in the Western Balkans, 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 OR 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).