

SMART Balkans Financial Academy

A Professional, Accredited Capacity-Building Program for Strengthening Civil Society's Financial Management and Sustainability in the Western Balkans

What is the SMART Balkans Financial Academy?

The SMART Balkans Financial Academy is a structured, professionally designed, and accredited adult education program developed by the **Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM)** to strengthen financial management practices of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Western Balkans and improve their sustainability. The Academy equips organizations with advanced **financial, administrative, and organizational management skills**, helping them meet international donor standards, improve governance, and achieve long-term sustainability.

The Academy was accredited by the Adult Education Center-Skopje. This ensures that its curriculum, expert trainers, learning environment, and methodologies meet national quality standards. In North Macedonia, this is the first accredited program for adult education for non-for-profit organizations.

Why the Academy Matters?

CSOs in the Western Balkans often face challenges such as:

- Limited financial capacities
- Compliance gaps with donor's requirements
- Weak internal systems of financial management and reporting

These challenges affect their ability to absorb grants, retain staff, and deliver impactful results.

Participants Voices:

"This certified Academy strengthens and deepens skills in financial and project management for CSOs. By learning structured approaches, participants gain confidence, enhance accountability, and build networks, ultimately increasing trust with donors and the wider public."

The Academy directly addresses these needs by offering:

- Accreditation-level training in **financial and administrative management**
- **Expert-led instruction** from certified professionals in law, economics, and organizational development
- **Hands-on exercises, simulations, and mentoring** tailored to real CSO challenges
- Improved **internal governance, transparency, and donor compliance**
- Strengthened credibility for **national, regional, and international funding**
- Alignment with **EU, UN, and bilateral donor standards** for financial integrity and risk management.

For donors, supporting the Academy means investing in a more capable, resilient, and accountable civil society ecosystem.

What Participants Receive

1. High-Level Expert Training delivered by experienced trainers:

- **Blagorodna Ampova – Financial Management & Analysis Expert** with over 25 years of experience in accounting, taxation, and finance. A certified court expert in economics since 2011 and a member of the first generation of accredited professionals, she specializes in financial management, project finance, and capacity building for CSOs. Blagorodna has contributed to over 1000 court cases, prepared 200+ projects and strategic plans, and supported the implementation, monitoring, and reporting of more than 60 projects.
- **Emilija Bumbaroska – Financial Management & Grants Expert** with extensive expertise in financial management, grants administration, budgeting, and reporting. She has over 15 years of professional experience in NGOs, schools, banking, and international organizations. Emilija holds multiple master's degrees in economics, European studies, and international relations, and is certified in controlling and corporate management. She combines technical expertise with strong organizational and analytical skills to support CSOs in effective financial management and capacity building.
- **Liljana Tanevska Arsova – Senior Expert & Trainer** in Local and Regional Development, Gender, and Sustainable Green Growth, with over 25 years of international experience. Holding a European Master in Comparative Local Development, she specializes in fiscal decentralization, sustainability, and social inclusion. Liljana has designed and managed development programs and projects across North Macedonia, the Western Balkans, and beyond. As a recognized trainer, lecturer, and evaluator, she brings extensive expertise in policy analysis, project management, and capacity-building to support results-oriented learning for CSOs.

2. Fully Equipped Learning Environment

Trainings take place at CRPM's office in Skopje, a modern and fully equipped facility featuring:

- Advanced audiovisual technology and high-speed internet
- Computers with MS Teams capabilities
- Flipcharts, cameras, and other media equipment
- Reception and catering areas, kitchenette, and sanitary facilities

The venue meets all hygiene, technical, and instructional standards, providing an ideal environment for professional and interactive training sessions.

3. Professional Training Materials

Participants receive:

- Ready-to-use **templates, policies, and manuals**
- **Practical exercises and workbooks**
- Access to **online learning modules for self-paced learning**
- **Completion certification**

4. Tailored Technical Assistance & Mentoring

Each organization receives **personalized support** to update internal systems, procedures, and donor compliance documents and if needed a sustainability plan.

5. Regional Community of Practice

The Academy connects CSOs across North Macedonia, fostering **knowledge exchange, partnerships, and joint advocacy**, facilitated through the CRPM's schools' online platform for learning.

Program Structure

• Hybrid delivery:

In-person modules in Belgrade, Skopje, and other hubs; online sessions for wider regional access.

• Two-month cycle:

Three main modules, monthly learning sessions, mentoring, and final certification.

• Flexible format:

Can be expanded or condensed based on donor needs.

Participants Voices:

"The Academy offers an excellent opportunity to enhance financial and project management skills. With expert mentorship and engaging, constructive discussions, participants gain practical knowledge and confidence, empowering them to excel in managing real-world projects effectively."

Why Become Part of the SMART Balkans Financial Academy?

Including CSOs that you support in the Academy helps partners that finance CSOs work to:

- Reduce **financial and compliance risks** in CSOs they work with
- Improve CSO capacity to **absorb and manage grants**
- Enable **transparent and credible operations**
- Contribute to **long-term sustainability** of local partners



CRPM Track Record

- **School of Public Policy “Mother Teresa”** – 375+ participants
- **Regional Political Studies Project – Green Parliamentary Group** – 90 participants
- **GBWN Academy for Gender-Responsive Budgeting** – 183 participants
- **SMART Balkans Academy** – 120 participants in 2025

With infrastructure, expertise, and accreditation in place, the SMART Balkans Financial Academy is ready for rollout outside of SMART Balkans Program beneficiaries.

The SMART Balkans Financial Management Academy for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is a regional educational initiative developed within the SMART Balkans project, jointly implemented by the:

- Centar za promociju civilnog društva (CPCD)
- Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)
- Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM)

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