

# 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 has obtained **official adult education provider status (JPOA) in Serbia** through the Serbian Qualifications Agency. This ensures that its curriculum, expert trainers, learning environment, and methodologies meet national quality standards. The program is the first accredited adult education program for CSO development in Serbia.

## 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:

*"My desire to learn and acquire new knowledge motivated me to apply. The Academy helped me structure and organize my existing knowledge in a clear, practical way. The exchange of experiences with other participants was invaluable."*

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:

- **Dr. Uroš Čemalović is a senior EU Law and Public Administration Expert** with over 20 years of international experience in EU acquis harmonization, legal reform, intellectual property, environmental law, and digital transformation. He has served as a legal expert for UNDP, OSCE, SEECP, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and multiple EU-funded initiatives, including IPA twinning projects. A published author and lecturer at leading European universities, he brings deep legal, academic, and policy expertise that elevates the quality and credibility of the SMART Balkans CSO Academy.
- **Snežana-Andreja Arambašić is a Senior Financial Management and Compliance Expert** with over 25 years of experience supporting civil society organizations, foundations, and international programs across Serbia. She has led financial strategy, budgeting, donor reporting, audits, and administrative systems for major USAID and EU-funded initiatives, and has trained both financial and program staff in best-practice financial governance. Her deep expertise in institutional financial systems, internal controls, and organizational sustainability significantly strengthens the SMART Balkans CSO Academy's credibility and quality.
- **Dragana Soćanin is an Organizational Development & Strategic Planning Expert** with over 18 years of experience strengthening civil society across the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region. She has supported more than 50 organizations through strategic planning, capacity building, and advocacy development, and is recognized for her effective training, mentoring, and facilitation. Her expertise ensures high-quality, impactful delivery of the SMART Balkans CSO Academy.

## 2. Fully Equipped Learning Environment

Trainings are held at NALED LAB – Dialogue Laboratory, Belgrade, a modern facility with:

- Advanced AV technology and high-speed internet
- Computers and MS Teams environment
- Flipcharts, cameras, and media equipment
- Reception and catering spaces, kitchenette, sanitation facilities

The venue meets all hygiene, technical, and instructional standards set by the Serbian Qualifications Agency.

## 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 Serbia, fostering **knowledge exchange, partnerships, and joint advocacy**.

# 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:

*"I would highly recommend the Academy to anyone working in CSO finance. It provides practical knowledge that strengthens both professional capacity and organizational impact."*

# 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:

- Center for Civil Society Promotion (CPCD)
- Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)
- Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM)

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