

SCS Balkans: Balkan Media Assistance Program (BMAP)

Overview

The Balkans Media Assistance Program (BMAP) (2017 – 2021, \$8 million) is a USAID funded initiative focused on making media more competitive in local and regional marketplaces and strengthening the sustainability of the independent media sector across the Balkans, particularly in the digital space.

Balkans Context

Media outlets in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia face a hostile environment for freedom of expression and are increasingly vulnerable to political and financial pressures. Across the region, political capture of the media and advertising markets within already weak economies has left independent media, particularly online outlets, unable to compete with the imbalanced yet entertaining pro-government news outlets that pull in the most advertising revenue.

Major Program Components

Provide outlets and media partners with solutions for more substantial and stable resources to operate as viable enterprises through:

- Coaching and mentoring for media partners and outlets to improve their business practices
- Awarding of Technology Investment Grants to assist media partners with improving their production and distribution platforms
- Establishment of a comprehensive online learning and information exchange platform
- Support to help identify sales- and revenue-generation opportunities
- Training media partners on how to create and develop strategies to analyze audiences for expansion and engagement and monetizing traffic for advertisements

Strengthen the ability of content producers to engage wider audiences and expand reach across the region by:

- Providing technical assistance to media partners to help improve their digital content production capabilities

- Awarding grants through an annual competition to promote production of engaging digital content for local and regional audiences
- Promoting regional content sharing between media partners

Foster stronger partnerships to advance solutions on common challenges in the digital space:

- Providing consultancies to promote and embed convergent media principles
- Organizing an annual Balkans Media Innovation Lab event for journalists, activists, artists, and software developers to share ideas and develop pilot concepts
- Hosting an annual regional Media Forum to bring together professionals from independent media in the region to share learnings and promote collaboration

Achievements

- Expanded audiences of 12 Key Partner outlets by 43% on average through targeted consultations and grants for website redesigns, improved social media strategies, more diverse content formats, new approaches to audience engagement, and strengthened efforts by legacy media to create unique content for digital audiences
- Facilitated over 1,100 training days for journalists, editors, media management and sales personnel
- Helped some of the region's most influential outlets reinvent themselves for the digital age, like Oslobodjenje (BiH), Koha (Kosovo), and Vijesti (Montenegro)
- Helped partners launch new forms of content that catch the attention of digital audiences, including mobile videos, livestreamed coverage, thematic feeds, podcasts, solutions journalism, and more
- Diversified funding sources for partners for a more resilient financial future
- Facilitated cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange between partners

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