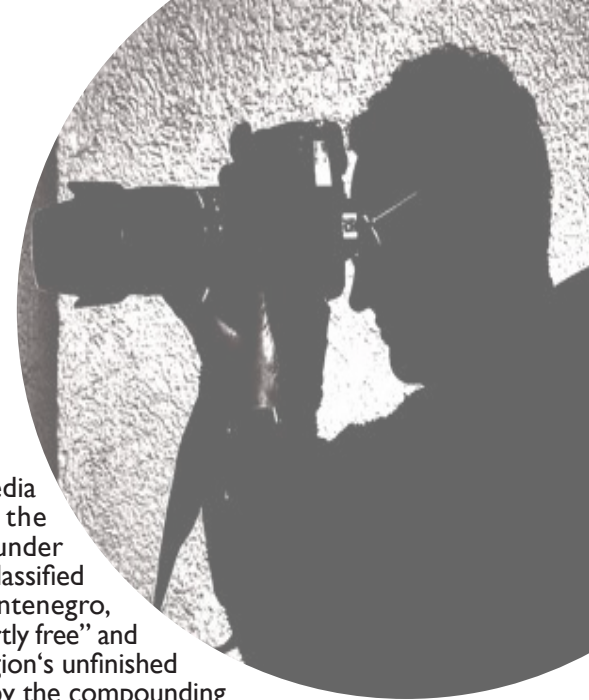




USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

REGIONAL ACTIVITY

BALKAN MEDIA ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FORWARD



Goals

Strengthen the competitiveness of independent media in local and regional marketplaces in the Western Balkans

Improve the sustainability of the media sector across the region through creative partnerships and collaboration

Duration

Feb 2022 – Feb 2027

USAID Funding

\$10 million for activities in North Macedonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia

Implementing Partner

Freedom House, Inc

in collaboration with Internews

15 Key Media Partners

(Media Outlets TBD)

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BACKGROUND

Despite progress in some areas of media development, the media sector in the Western Balkans remains fragile and under threat. Freedom House's 2021 report classified Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia as only "partly free" and "transitional or hybrid regimes." The region's unfinished political crises have been exacerbated by the compounding impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn, as well as propaganda and disinformation campaigns from several governments, most notably the Kremlin and the PRC. USAID contributes to North Macedonia's efforts to increase the accountability of government institutions and of citizens, as well as their ability to counter corruption, by strengthening independent media.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This activity builds upon the efforts, successes, and lessons learnt from the regional Balkan Media Assistance Program (BMAP) that was implemented from 2017 to 2022. BMAP's expertise and grant support helped eleven partner media outlets across the five target countries to clarify their strategic vision, expand their audiences, streamline and strengthen managerial processes, and make significant strides in applying new business and editorial strategies and techniques.

USAID's assistance through BMAP FORWARD will include:

- Targeted training, mentoring, and funding for a select group of media outlets to help them improve business management in key areas, such as audience measurement, using data analytics to inform editorial decisions, and increasing revenue from local businesses and markets.
- Tailored training and in-depth technical support for a wider set of media partners to help them expand and improve the quality of their online and digital content. The technical assistance will be supplemented by a funding for experimental, data-driven digital content initiatives to broaden reach, attract new audiences, or increase audience loyalty.
- Funding of events to facilitate cross-sectoral partnerships and networks among media, civil society, the arts, academia, IT, and the private sector. These partners will work together to develop innovative digital tools and approaches to support media viability and transition to convergent platforms or digital-only and virtual newsrooms. Support for joint advocacy work and cross-border content production will raise awareness of strategic topics throughout the region as well as directly engage citizens in the reporting process.

EXPECTED RESULTS

Key Media Partners (KMPs) will have:

- Better internal governance and strategic business planning in key areas, including media convergence, platform integration, and newsroom management
- Greater ability to analyze audience and market trends using market assessments and data for editorial policies and business planning.

- Expanded online audiences
- Increased use of innovative and multimedia formats and tools in producing, presenting, and disseminating more high-quality, socially impactful/civically relevant media content.
- Improved digital safety.
- Increased revenue from new services and products they develop, and decreased dependency on international donors.

Across the region:

- KMPs will expand their content exchange, cross-regional news coverage, joint content production, and co-reporting with non-governmental organizations.
- The use of the Balkansmedia.org site will increase.
- The number of established links between media entities and non-traditional partners, including those from the private business sector, will increase.

