



**Social Leader Forum – Social
Entrepreneurship and cross sector
cooperation and inclusion of
vulnerable groups in labor market.**

Problem statement

Youth unemployment, brain drain, labor migration and the exclusion of disadvantaged youth are one of the major challenges that many countries in Europe are facing, especially in the Caucasus region and its rural areas.

Those challenges can only be met through joint initiatives between civil society, public institutions (e.g. city departments, universities, centers at the ministries, etc.) and the business sector (especially here social enterprises. Cross-sector and cross-border cooperation in order to prepare young people for entering the labor market as well as developing innovative approaches beyond traditional ways in all sectors are needed more than ever to guarantee the stability of the democratic, welfare-orientated and prosperous development of this region.

At the same time, stakeholders from different sectors act often isolated and do not combine their competences and strategies in order to effect-fully target these challenges or they lack tools of innovative approaches.

Civil society organizations for instance are often struggling to overcome boundaries and meet these challenges. One major problem here is that they not very linked to their populations and that they have limited possibilities to be included into political decision-making process. Furthermore, sometimes NGOs in the region tend to adjust their programs more to the demands of Western donors than to the need of their societies.

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Contact
Florian Dunkel
Director
Teona Dalakishvili
Local coordinator Caucasus

Email
dunkel@crisp-berlin.org
teonadalak@gmail.com

CRISP
Weisestraße 27
12049 Berlin
Germany

Kontakt
Tel: +49 (0)30 63 41 33 76
Email: hello@crisp-berlin.org
Web: crisp-berlin.org

Amtsgericht Charlottenburg
Vereinsregisternr.: VR 27568 B

Finanzamt Körperschaften I
Steuernr. 27 / 662 / 55626

Bankverbindung
DKB - Deutsche Kreditbank
IBAN:
DE63 1203 0000 1001 1758 66
BIC/SWIFT: BYLADEM1001

Although the countries share a lot of common challenges and are quite interdependent, there is little exchange between actors from different countries as well.

All countries struggle with internal challenge and although these challenges differ in their scope, they are nevertheless evident everywhere: A rather weak civil society, poor rural development, deficient integration of refugees, IDPs and minorities, economical problems and unemployment, lack of education, and poor political leadership combined with a low level of accountability of the ruling elite and, especially in Azerbaijan and Russia, a lack of freedom of media and expression, rule of law and of a general democratic political culture.

Often an exchange is further complicated by the presence of several often violent but frozen conflicts between two or more countries in the region.

In such an environment it is of utter importance to provide young people with perspectives how to be part and shape their societies. Especially the inclusion of disadvantaged groups represents one of the biggest challenges for all countries in the region.

SLF 2016 – Social Entrepreneurship

The main focus of Social Leader Forum 2016 is Social Entrepreneurship, as an innovative approach for employment and employability, career development and skill advancement of young people as well as development of innovative tools to address integration of vulnerable groups. The Forum offers young professionals dealing with these topics from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey, a unique communication, learning and exchange platform on topics of social innovations and cross-sectorial collaboration concerning the issue of employability, social entrepreneurship and social innovation. This includes questions of special trainings for youth (for example vocational trainings, skill-trainings, exchange with practitioners, youth entrepreneurship trainings) reaching disadvantage youth groups and be aware of their specific needs and challenges, prevent brain drain, dealing with the social challenges of labor migration, etc.

With the combined experiences from all participating countries enriched by inputs and discussions with guest speakers, new ways of tackling these issues should be discussed, evaluated and transferred.

We want to promote by this interdisciplinary, cross-sector and cross-border dialogue and sharing of best practice of how to develop key competences for young people, (social)

entrepreneurship skills and to tackle the described challenges with innovative approaches. As a tool for this exchange we have chosen start-up project initiatives funding. Therefore, Social Leader Forum 2016 will become an incubator for collaborative project ideas.

Special focus will be given here to the chances and challenges of collaboration of civil society actors with public institutions and the business sector, with a special focus on social entrepreneurship.

Main objectives

1. To promote cross-sectorial cooperation in the region

Special focus will be given here to the chances and challenges of collaboration of civil society actors with public institutions and the business sector, with a special focus on social entrepreneurship. Here, we also want to improve the sustainability of civil society activities by adapting working models from other sectors (like it is done in social entrepreneurship) and a general exchange of approaches to the topic. Also, cross-sector cooperation helps to bring civil society actors closer to the political decision-making process.

2. To promote cross-border cooperation and building trust between the targeted countries

The Caucasus region is still an area with various conflicts. Besides the recent violent outbreaks at the line of contact in Nagorno Karabakh, and the general tensional atmosphere between the USA and the European Union on the one and Russia on the other side has an effect of the Caucasian states and even Turkey (e.g. through the formation of the Russian-led Custom Union). Meeting and working with each other becomes more and more difficult especially with countries like Russia and Azerbaijan. With this project we want here also to increase trust between representatives from different countries and offer especially through the cooperative projects a tool to gain new personal experiences with each other and establish sustainable ties. This is especially promoted by us in the Georgian-Russian and Armenian-Azerbaijani context.

3. To exchange and develop together innovative tools, approaches and projects of how best to address the problem of youth employability and related fields

The issue of employability, social entrepreneurship and social innovation should be approached by discussing questions of special trainings for youth (for example vocational trainings, skill-trainings, exchange with practitioners, youth entrepreneurship trainings)

reaching disadvantage youth groups and be aware of their specific needs and challenges, prevent brain drain, dealing with the social challenges of labour migration, etc. With the combined experiences from all participating countries enriched by inputs and discussions with guest speakers, new ways of tackling these issues should be discussed, evaluated and transferred.

4. To develop a sustainable exchange platform for young professionals and high potentials from all sectors who are interested in meeting social challenges in the region together.

This project is not meant to be a one-time activity with no follow-ups. We are interested in the further development of our participants and therefore encourage them to continue cooperation ideas developed at the meetings. The success of the project therefore will be also measurable through these continuations beyond the actual project time.

The program foresees following activities

- ❖ Recruitment Forum – Team of SLF coordinators together with local alumni groups will meet important stakeholders in the area of social entrepreneurship, cross sectorial cooperation and employability issues. Those meetings will help our team to develop clear and reality based narrative of future stages as well as meeting topics of the project.
- ❖ Kick off meeting in Georgia - participants from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey meet to exchange on expertise as well as develop networks for future cooperation. Participants get input on building cross-sector/cross-border cooperation and plan next level, which is implementation of local initiatives in the region. Meeting is visited by representatives of public as well as business sector.
- ❖ Local activities: Participants develop and submit project ideas that are either cross border or cross sector. Project ideas should include further plan for sustainable development of cooperation. They get seed funding from the program and should be implemented before the Forum.
- ❖ Forum in Turkey - evaluation meeting, where participants present their projects, evaluate their local activities and meet representatives of other sectors. This meeting is mainly focused on presenting local actions, for their further development and building partnerships. We foresee to invite important actors from business, CSO and public sectors, who are potential supporters of such initiatives. Besides, the final meeting will include meetings with formed alumni, in order to connect new fellows with alumni of previous years!