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The right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs is one of the basic democratic principles and can be most directly exercised at a local level where local governments are able to work more closely with citizens and their organizations, tackling problems which directly affect their lives.

By considering citizens' opinions and needs and involving them in the work of the local government, local authorities can attract support for proposed policies. Through cooperating with citizens and their organizations in deliveries of programs and services, local governments can gain resources, knowledge and commitment in the implementation of the activities which are of direct concern to the community. This can result in mutual trust, feeling of ownership and wider legitimacy for their decisions.

The aim of the paper is to introduce the existing models that promote cooperation and inclusion, and highlight how they can contribute to a better cross-sectoral partnership and an effective collaboration and involvement of citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the local

decision-making processes and activities of local governments.

Initially, the paper provides an overview of the main European documents on CSO-local government cooperation as a compass for national legislations. Secondly, the paper reviews the current state of cooperation in five countries – two European Union (EU) countries and three countries in the Balkans. As examples of the two EU countries, the research presents the situation in England and Hungary.

England, as an old democracy, is a champion of good practices and cooperation between the government and CSOs. Namely, England's example shows remarkable realization of true partnership between the local government and CSOs –its mechanisms have seen successful implementation as a result of commitment and dedication of all parties. Hungary, a relatively new member of the EU has a similar system to the Macedonian one. It is a perfect example for an in-between status where a lot of democratic tools were adopted in the past 20 years but there is still lot to do to implement them in practice and change the mindset. . The three countries in the Balkans are Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (with focus on the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Serbia. Of those, Croatia and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina show proliferation of efforts to create models for cooperation and multiply them across the country. Serbia has begun a tendency to develop more mechanisms for cooperation; however, they are not on the same level as the other two countries. Although these countries may face issues with implementation of the models, some of the examples are worth reviewing and considering for adoption in other contexts and countries.

In the course of the research the authors relied mainly on desktop research and materials available in English and local languages. Where possible, interviews were conducted with officials leading the models or experts working in the countries. The authors also relied on the existing studies, comparative analyses, guidelines, models, toolkits and cases studies to decide on the models that should be presented in this paper. It should be noted that there is very little information on the models and their implementation in practice available on the internet and the various research documents already produced on this topic. Therefore the implementation aspect has not been fully explored for all models.

The analysis makes an effort to introduce such models which may be successfully adopted in the practice of the local governments. To ensure effective cooperation, there is a need to undertake steps on both a national and local level. However, the examples of the countries show that while the national legislation should substantiate the rules and provide guidance to local governments, the autonomy of the local authorities and their ability to enter into creative and innovative partnerships with the local communities must be respected above all.

