

# CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

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#### STATE FUNDING OF CSOS IS AN INVESTMENT

"There has been no progress in the comprehensive reform of the framework for state funding of CSOs." This is the old-new conclusion of the 2023 Enabling Environment Report published last month. Of course, this is not the only element of enabling environment, but it is certainly one of those most often debated by the institutions and CSOs, unfortunately, as the Report states, without any advancements.

Is this kind of stagnation, when state funding is at issue, a reflection of the institutions' lack of trust in CSOs? If so, then why did the Government Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society (2022-2024), in which one of the recommendations is "to increase the share of state funding from the central budget and the budgets of local governance units, so as to reach a share of 30% (about 2 billion Denars) in the total revenues of CSOs by 2024," "pass"?

A few years ago, at one of the conferences organized by MCIC with representatives of the Government, the former Minister of Public Administration and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia (2014-2018), Boris Koprivnikar, while sharing the Slovenian state funding model, answered one of the most common and probably most difficult questions: why should CSOs be funded from the state budget? "These organizations increase social contribution, support public services and act as correctors of political decisions. This means that funding is not perceived as donation, but as payment for the good services that the CSOs perform," Koprivnikar said.

It was probably owing to this attitude that the colleagues from the civil society sector in Slovenia received Euro 539.3 million worth public funds in 2022. Of these, Euro 513.22 million were received from direct and indirect budget beneficiaries (ministries, municipalities, the Financial Administration of the Republic of Slovenia, public sector agencies and institutes).

In 2022, 53.86% of all active NGOs in Slovenia

received public funds (that year, Slovenia had over 27,000 CSOs). The total revenues of CSOs in that year exceeded one billion Euros, which means that state funding was somewhat above 51%.

In contrast, in 2023, CSOs in North Macedonia could count on around Euro 10.3 million from the central and the municipal budgets. The total revenues of CSOs in 2023 were Euro 147.6 million, which meant that the share of state funding was 6.7%.

It would be quite valid to note that Slovenia is a richer country and can, therefore, afford to allocate more funds to CSOs, but let us objectify this comparison as well: state support to CSOs in Slovenia in 2022 amounted to 3.5% of the country's budget, whereas, in North Macedonia, in 2023, that support was nearly 0.2% of the budget.

Finances aside, the activities of CSOs in the country are aimed at improving citizens' lives, be it through informal education, awareness raising, supporting vulnerable groups or strengthening democracy, etc. In that sense, institutions and CSOs strive for the same goal. How much longer will it take to understand that financing the civil society sector is an investment and not a mere waste of money?

Have a pleasant reading!

Gonce Jakovleska
Civica Mobilitas National Coordinator for ICO

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# The environment is enabling, yet the challenges are rather big – states the newly published MCIC report for 2023







# ИЗВЕШТАЈ ЗА ОВОЗМОЖУВАЧКАТА ОКОЛИНА ЗА РАЗВОЈ НА ГРАЃАНСКОТО ОПШТЕСТВО ЗА 2023 ГОДИНА

2024

The Macedonian Center for International Cooperation has been preparing and publishing the annual reports on enabling environment for civil society development for 11 years already. The latest one, published recently, covers the state of play in 2023. It analyzes enabling environment for CSOs focusing on the fundamental legal guarantees of freedoms, explores the financial sustainability framework and the CSOs' sustainability, as well as the relationship between the Government and CSOs.

Based on the findings, this Report concludes that CSOs in North Macedonia continue to operate in an enabling environment, however, there are certain areas that need improvement. Freedom of association is guaranteed for all by the legislation and is being implemented in practice without any restrictions.

Unfortunately, in the year analyzed there was no progress in the comprehensive reform of the framework for state funding of CSOs. State funding continues to be a virtually unrecognisable source of income for CSOs and amounts to merely 3% of these organizations' total income, or in absolute terms, around five million Euros. The analysis shows that even these few funds are available only to a limited number of organizations. Both now and in the future, the lack of available funds is and shall continue to pose a serious challenge for the CSOs.

There has not been any progress with regard to the Law on Donations and Sponsorships in Public Activities either, despite the initial plans to amend this law in cooperation with the CSOs. Despite the existence of an active working group within the Ministry of Justice dedicated to this task, there was no significant progress throughout the year. The boycott by the members of the Council continues to be in force and corroborates the authorities' failure to reinstate the standard state funding allocations into the annual programme for cooperation with the civil society sector. This highlights the challenges of maintaining effective cooperation between the government and the civil society and stresses the need for improvements in the CSO support mechanisms. One of the key challenges is, certainly, the fact that the institutions do not perceive CSOs as their real partners and do not include them sufficiently in the decision-making processes.

All findings can be found in the published Report on the Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development.

The preparation of this Report was part of the project titled "Western Balkans for Civil Society Development," supported by Sida — the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, through the Regional Civil Society Development Hub.

# Financing CSOs from municipal budgets is mostly focused on sports associations



In 2023, CSOs' revenues from the municipal budgets amounted to MKD 290,577,941, i.e. about 4.7 million Euros. This was shown by the analysis of the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, made on the basis of information obtained from 78 municipalities and the City of Skopje. The data were collected through requests for access to public information that had been sent to all 80 municipalities and the City of Skopje. The latter were asked to inform about the amount of funds transferred to them under Budget Item No. 463 – Transfers to Nongovernmental Organizations and/or under another budget item for 2023. The Municipalities of Ohrid and Dolneni did not send their replies.

According to the data obtained, the largest amount of funds allocated to CSOs came from the municipalities in the Southeast Region. Namely, the Municipalities of Bogdanci,

Bosilovo, Valandovo, Vasilevo, Dojran, Konche, Novo Selo, Radovish, Strumica and Gevgelija had singled out a total of MKD 88,825,290 for the activities carried out by CSOs. Most of the funds in this Region had been allocated by the Municipality of Strumica (MKD 42,068,457), whereas the least – by the Municipality of Novo Selo (MKD 260,000). Of the total funds allocated by the Municipality of Strumica, about 11.9 million Denars had been allocated to sports associations and organizations, while about 15 million Denars – to associations in the music and cinematographic sphere.

The municipalities of the East Region (Berovo, Vinica, Delchevo, Zrnovci, Karbinci, Kochani, Makedonska Kamenica, Pehchevo, Probishtip, Cheshinovo-Obleshevo and Shtip) had allocated MKD 40,587,940 for the activities of CSOs. The Municipality of Shtip had extended the



largest financial support to CSOs, in the amount of MKD 16,260,100, of which about 14 million Denars went to sports associations and organizations. The municipality to allocate least funds in this Region was the Municipality of Pehchevo (MKD 17,000), while the Municipality of Zrnovci did not report if they had allocated any funds to CSOs.

The municipalities of the Northeast Region (Kratovo, Kriva Palanka, Kumanovo, Lipkovo, Rankovce and Staro Nagorichane) had managed to allocate MKD 34,979,605 for the activities of CSOs. The Municipality of Kumanovo had allocated MKD 26,080,000 from its 2023 Budget, of which 19.5 million Denars went for activities related to sports associations and organizations. In this region, the least funds had been allocated by the Municipality of Staro Nagorichane (MKD 110,000).

The municipalities in the Vardar Region had allocated MKD 49,374,060 for the activities of CSOs, which ranked this region in the second place by the amount of allocated funds. Of the nine municipalities that make up the Vardar Region (Veles, Gradsko, Demir Kapija, Kavadarci, Lozovo, Negotino, Rosoman, Sveti Nikole and Chashka), Kavadarci Municipality had allocated the most funds for CSOs – MKD 34,382,700 – whereas Lozovo Municipality had allocated the least (MKD 180,000). Of the total funds allocated by the Municipality of Kavadarci, about 30 million Denars went to sports associations and organizations. Rosoman Municipality reported that it had not allocated any funds to CSOs.

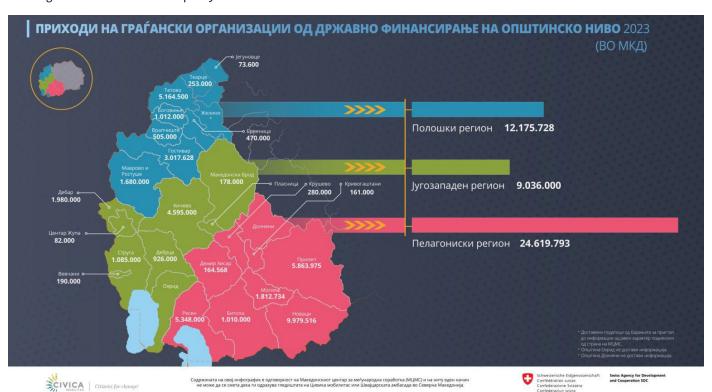
The Skopje Region (Aerodrom, Arachinovo, Butel, Gazi Baba, Cjorche Petrov, Zelenikovo, Ilinden, Karposh, Kisela Voda, Petrovec, Saraj, Skopje, Sopishte, Studenichani, Centar, Chair, Chucher-Sandevo and Shuto Orizari) is in third place by the amount of funds allocated to CSOs (MKD 41,979,517). Centar Municipality had allocated the largest amount of funds to civil organizations – MKD 15,210,000 – of which 11.6 million Denars went to sports associations and organizations. The Municipality of Studenichani had

allocated the least funds to civil associations (MKD 35,938). The Municipalities of Kisela Voda, Petrovec, Sopishte, Chair and Shuto Orizari replied that, in 2023, they had not allocated any funds for CSOs. The situation was the same with the City of Skopje, as they informed us that they had not provided any funds to support the activities of CSOs in the previous year.

The municipalities of Pelagonia Region (Bitola, Demir Hisar, Dolneni, Krivogashtani, Krushevo, Mogila, Novaci, Prilep and Resen) had managed to allocate MKD 24,619,793 for the activities of CSOs. The largest amount of funds had been allocated by the Municipality of Novaci – MKD 9,979,516 – of which about 9 million for sports associations and organizations. In this region, the Municipality of Krivogashtani was the one that had allocated the least funds (MKD 161,000).

The municipalities in the Polog Region (Bogovinje, Brvenica, Vrapchiste, Gostivar, Zhelino, Jegunovce, Mavrovo and Rostushe, Tearce and Tetovo) had managed to allocate MKD 12,175,728 for the activities of CSOs last year. The Municipality of Tetovo had allocated the most funds — MKD 5,164,500 — whereas the Municipality of Jegunovce had allocated the least (MKD 73,600). In this region, too, organizations dealing with sports and cultural activities had received the most funds.

According to the obtained data, the municipalities in the Southwest Region had allocated the least amount of funds for the activities of CSOs (MKD 9,036,000). The data for this region are incomplete, though, as the Municipality of Ohrid did not provide the requested information, although it usually sets aside significant amounts under Budget Item 463 – Transfers to Non-governmental Organizations. In this region, the Kichevo Municipality had allocated the most funds – MKD 4,595,000 – whereas the Centar Zhupa Municipality had allocated the smallest amount (MKD 73,600).



## SLAPP Lawsuits in North Macedonia have an upward trend: how to protect ourselves?

The Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) has published a new report on the strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) in North Macedonia. The Report, titled "From Silence to Power: A Regional Response to SLAPPs in the Western Balkans," reveals a disturbing upward trend in the number of these lawsuits, which are used to intimidate journalists and activists.

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) have increased significantly in the Western Balkans, with North Macedonia being among the top ten European countries by the number of such cases. The simplest way to describe SLAPPs is a court drama with high stakes, where powerful plaintiffs – privately owned entities, state institutions or influential individuals – clash with activists, journalists, civil society representatives and ordinary citizens who have criticized them.

The closed court system (as it is called in the western evaluations of the Macedonian judiciary) in the Republic of North Macedonia creates favourable conditions for the implementation and processing of court proceedings that target journalists and activists and stifle the freedom of speech and investigative journalism.

Such conditions in the Macedonian judiciary give powerful persons an opportunity to invent ways to attack all those who will have mentioned them in their columns or surveys. Therefore, there is a need to recommend the formation of a special department that will be working on SLAPP cases, engaging well-trained judges and staff who are able to respond to the SLAPP challenges.

In the past, SLAPP was not a regular measure or a means of silencing and pressure, but if we take into account the latest developments in the Macedonian judiciary and the verdicts against the journalists of the Investigative Reporting Laboratory (IRL), the Pandora's box has been opened and a grave precedent is being set against free speech and investigations against powerful individuals.

Below, we highlight several key findings from the Report:

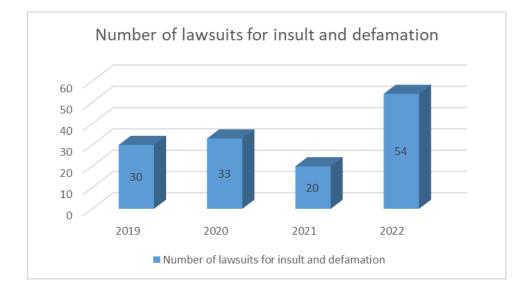
- North Macedonia has 0.29 SLAPP cases per 100,000 inhabitants, which places it in the group of 10 countries with the highest rate in Europe.
- In its survey and analysis of the court cases against journalists and activists, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) noted twice as many defamation and libel lawsuits in 2022 (54 lawsuits), compared to 2021 (20 lawsuits).
- The most common targets of SLAPP suits are journalists, media outlets, editors, activists, and NGOs.

The current legal frameworks are insufficient for a timely and efficient protection against SLAPPs. SLAPPs exploit the existing legal systems, leading to self-censorship and an intimidating public discourse.

The Report highlights that there is no specific anti-SLAPP regulation in North Macedonia, which leaves defendants without any adequate protection, and calls for greater support for the SLAPP victims, including legal and financial assistance, as well as psychological support. It also emphasizes the need for greater transparency and for introducing a public registry of SLAPP cases.

The comprehensive efforts outlined in this Report by BCSDN and its member organizations are key steps towards empowering the stakeholders in the Western Balkans to recognize and counter the attempts at silencing dissent and restricting civic engagement.

This work was produced with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).





#### Join in the 2024 days of donation campaign!

"Konekt" launched the Days of Donation campaign, aimed at connecting the useful initiatives across the country with individual and corporate donors so that they can join their efforts towards achieving the changes they want to see in their respective communities. Philanthropy and joint giving have such power.

#### What are the Days of Donation?

" Days of Donation" is a campaign that is slowly but surely growing into a traditional celebration of philanthropy, and its aim is sustainable development. During these Days, citizens, families and companies experience the joy of joint giving by supporting the initiatives of CSOs and groups. With this campaign, "Konekt" is creating a movement that will not wait for the problems' solutions to come from



others, but will take them into its own hands. This year, the Days of Donation campaign is scheduled to start on 12th October, and a series of activities will be implemented by the end of November. "We will promote and support your activities to collect donations and we will create a special pool of the donors' topics of interest for which "Konekt" will be carrying out activities," stress "Konekt" representatives.

#### How to join?

The campaign's focus is on CSOs (associations and foundations), social enterprises, civic initiatives and community groups (both formal and informal) and on the creation of funds for their support. "Konekt" invites you to plan out and implement your fundraising activities and use the Days of Donation so that, together, we can help you collect as many donations as possible for your initiatives. You decide whether it will be a special event, an outdoor donor party, a volunteer action, an online campaign or something unique to you.

"We are here to support you to collect more donations and to do good deeds that will be a positive example for others", "Konekt" underlined in its call to CSOs and groups.

By filling in a simple questionnaire in which they will tell about their idea for collecting donations, those interested will be able to become part of the " Days of Donation".

The event is organized as part of USAID's "Partnerships for Donation" project, implemented by the "Konekt" Association, in partnership with the European Centre for Non-Profit Law, the Chamber of Commerce of North-West Macedonia and "Indigo".

#### KRIK organized another successful inclusive summer camp

The KRIK Centre for Youth Activism organized an inclusive summer camp, making it possible for young people with disabilities to make new friendships with their peers. The summer camp, which took place from 10th to 14th August at the Scout Camp in Ohrid, offered a unique experience full of active adventures, learning and fun.

The participants socialized, learned Spanish through interactive games, and engaged in water games and kayaking. The organizers took care to create an inclusive atmosphere, inviting all persons, with and without disabilities, to take part in various activities. "In the mornings, we did yoga and stretching exercises, and in the evenings, we played basketball, we danced, sang and watched movies under the stars," shared the participants.



KRIK expressed its gratitude to the Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain in the Republic of North Macedonia and H.E. Ambassador José Luis Lozano Garcia for their genuine support to the "Make Summer Holiday a Reality" initiative. "With the help of their donation, we not only achieved our goal, but we also provided an unforgettable summer vacation for all, "the organizers pointed out.

At the same time, KRIK thanked Komercijalna Banka AD Skopje for its support. "They helped us get closer to our goal – providing vacations for everyone!"

The inclusive youth summer camps were not only filled with fun, but also created new connections and opportunities for all participants. "We wish to thank all the participants, facilitators, caregivers, and donors who made this summer unforgettable for all of us," added KRIK.

The camps will continue to be an example of inclusivity and togetherness, inspiring the community to make positive changes.

#### Halkbank donated to the Womens's intervention fund



For the second year in a row, Halkbank has made an impressive donation of MKD 118,600 to the Women's Intervention Fund, in order to help strengthen women's independence. These funds were collected through sales exhibition and the "Dresses with Pockets 2.0" online initiative, which was held via the digital edition of the "Portrait" magazine.

The support was intended for women who had faced some kind of domestic violence or violence against women. The donations came from the sale of creations by the famous Macedonian designers Jovana Filipovic, Irina Tosheva and Natalija Terzija, as well as the designer Marjan Bebekoski.

"As we announced last year, we are continuing our dedicated support, this year, too, to all women who need help. We wholeheartedly thank everyone who has set aside time and funds to join in the Dresses with Pockets' new humanitarian action, to which we are contributing together by extending financial support to those who need it the most.

This donation is another small victory in our fight to increase the financial freedom, education and power of women in the country," said Maja Naumovska Saveska, Halkbank Corporate and Marketing Communications Director. "The fund is financed exclusively through donations from individuals and legal entities who recognize its significance. We are especially grateful to Halkbank for recognizing, this year again, the vital importance of this assistance for women facing violence. This is the second year that we have received their support, which allows us to successfully continue our mission – providing full assistance and support to women and children victims of domestic violence.

The partnership with Halkbank is of crucial importance to us, as it allows us to not only continue, but to also expand our activities, ensuring long-term stability and greater security for those most vulnerable. Thanks to this cooperation, these women get a chance for a fresh start and a better future," she underlined. This donation rounds off Halkbank's activities as part of the "Dresses with Pockets 2.0" platform for this year, highlighting the importance of women's independence and financial equality.

## **CIVIC PARTICIPATION**

## The "GAP" between university programmes and the labour market

The major changes in the labour market, driven by the rapid technological development, create challenges for the university education programmes. Experts emphasize that aligning the study programmes with the dynamic market needs is essential for graduates' productivity.

The academician Abdulmenaf Bexheti, Rector of the South East European University (SEEU), stresses out that academic freedom plays a key role in the programmes' adaptation. "It must be defined ahead that no more than 50 percent of the curricula may be standardized.

The rest should be left to the Universities themselves, to their own academic freedom," Bexheti says. In his view, the current rigidity of the curricula does not allow for effective adaptation to the changing market needs, which may lead to diplomas that are not valid in practice.

The Rector of Tetovo University (TU), Jusuf Zeneli, emphasizes the need for greater inclusion of the practical aspect in education. He suggests that students should actively participate in projects and collaborations with the business entities, in order to gain a realistic idea of the the industry's needs. This will not only allow students to acquire practical skills, but will also help the companies to learn about their capabilities.

In general, experts assess that a balance between the theoretical aspectand practice in certain study programmes can create much more favourable preconditions for harmonization with the labour market.

In their view, effective harmonization of education with the labour market implies constant monitoring of the changes and the new needs.

According to the President of the Forum for Reasonable Policies (FRP), Gordan Georgiev, there should be a body that will monitor the labour market dynamics. This body should, in his view, be professional, non-partisan, and resistant to influences by a party or a minister or anybody else, as a managing body. "This body must monitor these variations in the labour m

arket and be able to assess, in the short term, from two to ten years, when to implement educational reforms. To locate the shortcomings. For instance, Slovenia does this perfectly. I will give you an example. Slovenia produces 16 to 20 dentists per year, at the diploma level, whereas Macedonia has more than 200 per year. So, Slovenia has estimated that this is how many [dentists] it needs annually so as not to burden the market.

Macedonia has not made such assessment and keeps producing diplomas and creating dentists, who then remain lost in the labour market, open private practices and cannot produce quality," Georgiev says. This type of analysis, according to Georgiev, is crucial for perceiving the extent of the deficit in certain areas, instead of "producing diplomas" at all costs that do not match the labour market.

#### Read the full text here.

The text was prepared as part of the "Advocacy for Inclusive Development" project, supported financially by the Government of Switzerland through the Civica Mobilitas programme.

## We cannot prevent natural disasters, but we do little to prevent their consequences

Natural disasters, such as fires, floods, landslides and earthquakes, pose serious threats to our country. Although we cannot avoid these occurrences, we should work on mitigating their consequences. According to Professor Ivica Milevski of the Institute of Geography, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (PMF), the phenomena themselves may not be preventable, but the consequences of such catastrophic events can be prevented to a certain extent. He emphasizes the importance of maintaining clean drainage channels, and of carefully constructed roads and facilities in the risk areas.

Historical data shows that the largest natural disasters in our country, including the earthquakes in Valandovo (1931), Skopje (1963) and Debar (1967), as well as the floods in Shipkovica (2015) and Skopje (2016), left behind massive human fatalities. These events show how necessary it is to improve the protection and rescue system.

And while all human fatalities taken away by natural disasters are counted, the protection and rescue system is still facing problems. Resources are dwindling, while strategies remain on paper only. This game between lives and resources puts the system to a challenge. This was

also demonstrated by the July examples – the fires, for the exitinguishing of which international assistance was sought only after our services had treaded water for several days, and the breakdown of the power supply system after a short but strong storm, which left a large part of Skopje without electricity for more than 12 hours.

According to Bojana Stanojevska Pecurovska from the Climate Change Centre, municipalities allocate very few funds, first, for the prevention, and then for response in the event of natural disasters. The municipalities, which should be the first to react, often fail to cope with the crisis and call on the next instance for help, i.e. the Protection and Rescue Directorate (PRD).

"The first minutes of an accident are very important. They are the decisive factor in how events will develop further," PRD Director Bekim Maksuti points out. With a budget of only Euro 4.5 million, 65% of which go for salaries, they do not have enough resources to provide adequate equipment.

According to Dragi Tarchugovski of the Crisis Management Centre, the system is "ripe for complete restructuring." Changes are necessary, as the climate change challenges will continue to rise. Professor Milevski underlines the need for "much greater cooperation among the institutions" related to climate change and natural disasters.



These challenges cannot be solved by reaction alone; it is necessary to also include prevention and adaptation measures.

Every citizen plays an important role in prevention. From our daily habits to energy consumption, we all need to get involved in creating a safer environment. The coming years bring about challenges, however, through collective efforts and the right strategies, we can minimize the consequences of natural disasters.

The original content was prepared by the Institute of Communication Studies.

#### Youth propose initiatives and solutions for clean air



During September, the Climate Change Centre organized youth forums in Gostivar, Kavadarci, Skopje and Kumanovo. The aim of these events was to hear the voice of young people regarding air pollution and to integrate their proposals into the local policies.

At the forum in Gostivar, the young participants sent out a strong appeal to the local authorities to improve the greenery in their city. They pointed out that the lack of plants in certain parts of the city created desert-like conditions, which had a negative impact on the air quality. They proposed measures to expand the green areas, new traffic solutions, and to improve the cycling infrastructure in order to encourage the use of bicycles as a sustainable means of transport.

Similar conclusions were adopted at the forum in Kavadarci. Kavadarci – a cycling city, air purifiers in the schools, ecological heating in the kindergartens instead of using oil, placing vending machines, subsidies for the purchase of ecological heating units...

In Skopje, the participants focused on the traffic problems and the lack of cycling infrastructure. They proposed to construct roundabouts and expand the bicycle paths. These measures will ease the traffic flow, and thus contribute to reducing air pollution.

The young people from Kumanovo insisted that the Municipality must work intensively on taking steps to reduce air pollution in order to improve the situation in their city. Expanding the bicycle infrastructure, enlarging the green areas, installing vending machines and gasification subsidies were the demands they submitted.

The municipal representatives in all cities confirmed the importance of these forums and expressed their support for the measures proposed. They emphasized that young people should not only be heard, but should also be actively involved in the process of creating policies that affect their future.

The participants concluded that the forums were an excellent opportunity to bring the institutions and young people together, to exchange views and standpoints, ideas and needs, as well as to raise both sides' awareness.

The youth forums were held as part of the "Youth Action for Clean Air" project, which the Climate Change Centre is implementing in cooperation with UNICEF.

### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

#### Female journalists face discrimination due to pregnancy

Female journalists in North Macedonia face discrimination, especially when it comes to pregnancy. Although they report on the problems of others, many of them do not report their own cases of discrimination, such as nonrenewal of their employment contracts. The Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination and the Journalists' Trade Union underline that without reporting and speaking out, they cannot act.

Prosecutor Lenche Ristoska, who has managed to win some legal battles against discrimination, emphasizes the importance of improving the living standard of women. Her victory serves as an encouragement for female journalists to fight for their rights.

"If women's quality of life improves, then everyone's quality of life shall improve" was Prosecutor Ristoska's message. It is simple, yet in its essence it hides the solution to all the obstacles and problems that society and the system impose on women in Macedonia who struggle "like hell" to be both mothers and professionals who will advance their careers.

The case of Elizabeta Damjanoska Spasenovska is one of the many examples of discrimination. After three and a half years of working for the same employer, in her sixth month of pregnancy, the latter did not renew her contract, citing staff cuts. The Commission established there was discrimination and Spasenovska was reinstated, but was dismissed again after giving birth.

Some journalists face uncomfortable questions about their family plans during interviews. Teuta Buchi shared such an experience, but said she had not reported it to either the Journalists' Association or the Trade Union, convinced that nothing would change.

"These are the problems that female journalists face every day and yet, so far, media organizations have not done anything to defend their rights. I think their role should be crucial in improving the labour rights of media workers in general," Buchi explains.

The Trade Union confirms that it does not receive many complaints, and the Commission has not received a single formal complaint about discrimination from a woman journalist. Prosecutor Ristoska encourages women to report discrimination and fight for their rights, as this is key to improving society standards. "My message is that every woman who faces discrimination should report it and fight for her rights, as apart from realizing their own rights, we all, as individuals, have a responsibility to raise the standards of the society we live in," Ristoska says.

The key problem lies with the Law on Labour Relations, which gives employers an advantage. Ristoska and Spasenovska agree that amendments are necessary to the Law on the Protection of Workers' Rights. Greater cooperation is needed between the Commission and the State Labour Inspectorate in identifying cases of discrimination.

Considering this situation, female journalists in North Macedonia still face challenges, however, the examples as those of Ristoska and Spasenovska give hope for the future and for women's rights in the media.

Frosina Fakova-Serafinovic

The text was prepared as part of the PINA Women Journalists Programme.



#### Roma women defy societal pressures



Doctor Dzemile Berat, a specialist in neuropsychiatry, emphasizes in her autobiography titled "My Dream" that hard work, studying and self-confidence always bring about success. She is the first Roma female doctor and the first female specialist in neuropsychiatry in Macedonia. With her work, she wants to be a motivation to young, intelligent but poor children, by proving that with studying, hard work and self-belief, success is possible.

Dr. Berat underlines that to have a successful life, apart from wanting it, one also needs the support of their family and the institutions. "We need scholarships, trainings and specializations," she says, pointing to the shortcomings in education and the fact that educational support often comes through informal education.

Ermina Redzepova, president of "Ternipe MK," works on promoting education and improving the socio-economic situation of Roma and youth of all ethnicities in the region. Through informal education, Redzepova focuses on preserving the local, multicultural heritage and on actualizing Roma culture. At her Roma Cultural and Educational Centre, there are 95 members taking active part in presenting Roma culture through various artistic forms.

Dzemiliana Abdulova, author of "A Small Roma Memory Book", also supports the importance of fostering Roma culture. "Romanipe — the uniqueness of the Roma spirit — is what makes us special," she says, adding that traditional and contemporary elements of culture should be combined. Her Memory Book is full of references to the (in)tangible cultural heritage and aims to leave a mark in cultural history. Redzepova points out that, although Roma population is still not sufficiently included in the educational process, the situation is improving. "Year after year, the inclusion of Roma students has seen noticeable improvement, while the percentage of children absent from school has decreased from 40 to 20 per cent," she says.

Both Berat and Redzepova agree that stereotypes and discrimination still exist, but can be overcome through perseverance and motivation. "As a young Roma woman, I always have to put in triple effort to achieve something more," Abdulova says, pointing to the need for changing the negative perceptions. "Education is the only path to progress," Berat adds.

These female activists continue to work on promoting culture and improving education, convinced that culture is alive and important for the identity of the Roma. "If the culture of a people dies, the people dies, too. Through song, poetry and performances, we ourselves come to life," concludes Abdulova. They are determined to continue to fight for the rights of Roma and for the acknowledgement of their contribution to Macedonian society.

The text was published by the "Margini" Coalition, taken from **trn.mk** 

#### **HERA** continued its gender equality education

The key concepts of gender, gender equality and social inclusion were on the agenda of the workshop for the leadership group on gender equality organized by HERA – Health Education and Research Association from 12th to 14th September 2024, in Mavrovo.

Igor Jadrovski, President of the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, and Neda Chalovska, gender expert, conveyed their theoretical knowledge on the basics of gender concepts and vulnerable groups, while the participants presented the techniques for integrating the gender perspective into the political processes, with

an emphasis on the evidencebased measures and policies. Apart from this, also discussed at the workshop was the current status of gender equality in North Macedonia, highlighting some important recommendations for improving the current policies and implementing the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) processes, in partnership with the Ministry of Public Administration.

The participants were acquainted with the basic pillars of the RESI methodology — Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. The implementation of this methodology enables the creation of gender-responsive measures and policies that promote social inclusion at all levels.

The workshop was organized as part of the "Together for Gender Equality: Building Support for Gender Inclusive

Policies" project, which is implemented with the support of the British Embassy in Skopje.



#### Summer school on digital rights and cybersecurity



Twenty-eight young people from different cities and towns around the country learned about digital rights and cybersecurity at the Summer School organized by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

The School was held from 4th to 10th August 2024 in Ohrid, and the participants gained knowledge about personal data protection, the right to privacy, cyber violence, human and digital rights. The programme also included topics such as digital gender-based violence, media literacy and fact-checking resources.

In addition to the theoretical teaching, the participants actively engaged in creative and sports activities, which contributed to creating a positive atmosphere for learning and cooperation.

Lecturers Bojana Netkova, Liljana Pecova-Ilievska and Marina Trajkova conveyed their expertise successfully through interactive lectures, enabling the participants to explore the new trends and challenges in the digital sphere.

At the end of this dynamic week, all participants received certificates. This event not only educated the young people, but also raised awareness about the importance of rights' protection in the digital environment.

The Summer School on Digital Rights and Cybersecurity was part of the "Creating a Safer Digital Environment for Youth" project, supported by SMART Balkans and funded by the Kingdom of Norway.

## Upcycling clothes and mind – sustainable fashion for a green future

The world of fashion industry generates significant quantities of waste and has negative impact on the environment. Therefore, a growing number of initiatives are aimed at integrating sustainability into everyday clothing.

The "GOOD PRACTICE" initiative offers innovative examples of upcycling, reuse of materials and ecological production, from different countries, which can be integrated into the educational system to raise awareness among students.

In Macedonia, the concept of sustainability in fashion is gaining increasing attention through projects that promote the reuse and upcycling of fabrics. Projects such as "Do not buy new – reuse the old one" and "FILTER" demonstrate how local communities can contribute to circular economy and the reduction of textile waste.

The first initiative is active in the "Astibo" kindergarten in Shtip and aims at educating children and parents about the importance of reusing old materials, with an emphasis on reducing textile waste. This initiative not only raises awareness, but also motivates participants to think differently about the clothes they already own. Instead of buying new pieces, the accent is on reuse, which leads to waste reduction and to saving the resources.

Such projects create an excellent basis for educational activities, especially by involving students and young people, who learn about the importance of sustainability through practical examples.

The second initiative is aimed at promoting circular economy and goes a step further, by engaging the whole family, including both children and parents, in the process of upcycling and creating new clothes from old fabrics. "FILTER" not only creates awareness about the importance of upcycling, but also encourages creativity among young people and gives them new skills, such as tailoring and design. Through these activities, the participants directly contribute to waste reduction and support the idea of responsible consumption.

These initiatives show that Macedonia actively contributes to the global trend of sustainable fashion, creating platforms for education and raising awareness of the importance of sustainable living.

Other countries are working on sustainable fashion as well. In Austria, the "Dogdays of Summer" project turns old clothes into new fashion creations, serving as an example for students of how waste can be transformed into something useful and creative. Estonia, through the "Reet Aus" project, uses textile waste to create modern and

sustainable clothing, which can inspire discussions in the classrooms about responsible consumption.

The **brochure on good practices** presents projects and initiatives from all countries, including the "Do not buy new—reuse the old one" initiative presented by Eco Logic.

Although fashion industry traditionally has a negative impact on the environment, sustainability initiatives can become a tool for educational activities that will inspire change. Sustainable fashion, as demonstrated through these projects, offers opportunities for practical learning and contribution to a green future.

The "Upcycling Clothes and Mind" project is supported by the Erasmus + programme, co-financed by the European Union, with the National Agency Education for Europe at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training from Germany as its donor.

#### Unique fashion show for people with disabilities held in Skopje

On 8th October 2024, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje hosted a spectacular fashion show titled "ZEN Inclusive Soiree", which constituted an important step in promoting inclusion and creativity in fashion.

This event, organized by the "Equality" Association and the "Zen Futurus" company, brought a new dimension onto the fashion scene, presenting the first collection of wardrobe adapted for persons with disabilities.

The event was complemented by a refined musical programme and culinary specialties, creating a complete cultural experience. All attendees had the opportunity to enjoy in an exclusive exhibition of portraits of persons with disabilities carrying powerful social messages and inspiring respect for diversity.

The main goal of the project is to transform the challenges of people with disabilities into opportunities, creating















The show featured 31 models, each with their own unique story and abilities. They proudly paraded down the catwalk, demonstrating not only style and beauty, but also the power of togetherness and the need for active social inclusion. The audience was delighted by the combination of fashion and profound social messages that called for greater integration of people with disabilities into all spheres of life.

conditions for improving their quality of life and self-confidence. By directly involving people with disabilities in the design process of the collection, ZEN created clothing that was not only stylish, but practical as well, made to individual measurements. "Our mission is to break down barriers and create a community where all can participate and express themselves," said one of the organizers.

This initiative shows how fashion can be a powerful tool for social change.

Supported by the Swiss Government's "Education for Employment" project, implemented by Helvetas, the event brought together the companies and institutions that share a vision for an inclusive society. The catering was provided by students from the "St. Naum Ohridski" State Secondary School for Rehabilitation and Education and the "Lazar Tanev" vocational high school, while the students of "Dimitar Vlahov" took care of the hair and makeup, in

collaboration with several companies.

The "ZEN Inclusive Soiree" not only set new standards in fashion, but also confirmed the importance of inclusion as a fundamental value in our society.

This event was an inspiration for all of us, reminding us that diversity is not a barrier, but an asset that we should celebrate.

The original text was published by Umno.mk

#### Youth in the Pelagonia region held a debate on corruption



On 15th September 2024, at the Manaki Cinema in Bitola, the youth from the region could hear about and discuss corruption during a public debate organized by "Pro Local" and moderated by journalist Vasko Magleshov. The debate panelists, Biljana Ivanovska, Advisor to the Auditor General of the Audit Authority for IPA Funds, German Filkov, anti-corruption activist, and Denica Chadikovska, Communications Editor at IRL, sent out a strong message: "Fight against corruption should be part of everyday life, with small but courageous steps, and without fear!".

The panelists underlined that corruption pollutes the air, the water, and steals the potential of future generations. The young people understood that corruption was not just an abstract concept, but manifested itself in many aspects of everyday life, directly affecting the quality of their lives and of the entire society. German Filkov pointed out that youth played a key role in the fight against corruption and called on them to react as soon as they noticed irregularities, stressing that their engagement could bring about real change.

He emphasized that the public did not turn a blind eye to young people and encouraged them to take action: "When

you notice something off that catches your eye, inquire immediately and react!"

In her address, Biljana Ivanovska (former President of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption – SCPC) emphasized the importance of leading by personal example in the fight against corruption: "Each of us can add a pebble to the mosaic and contribute to its prevention."

Denica Chadikovska of IRL explained to the youth that the threats against those who fight corruption were not only personal, but systemic as well, aimed at silencing the voices of truth. "IRL has faced defamation verdicts and a closure order," she underlined, pointing out the influence corrupt powerful people have on the justice system.

This debate, organized as part of the "Empowering the People of Pelagonija 2" project, implemented by "Pro Local" with the support of the Embassy of the Netherlands, constitutes an important step in educating and activating young people regarding this critical topic that has long-term consequences for the country's future.

#### "Sound of Green" - PAKOMAK's Traditional Eco-festival

Skopje audience had an opportunity to enjoy the musical performances of the young local band called "Moira", Igor Dzambazov and Guru Hare with their band, as well as the guests from Switzerland, Orphia and Alex Nantaya, on two separate stages — in the park behind the Youth Cultural Centre (YCC) and in front of the coffee bar.

The performances were part of the traditional ecofestival organized by the "Pakomak" Packaging Waste Management Company, in cooperation with the Swiss



Embassy, which was held on 30 August this year.

Before the start of the musical programme, an exhibition titled "Clean Technology – Swiss Solutions for Today's Challenges" was opened, as part of the Embassy's events in honour of the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and North Macedonia.

The exhibition conveyed the key message about the vision of a green future. Ambassador Veronique Hulmann, Muhamed Veliu of the KRIK Centre for Youth Activism, Filip Ivanovski of "Pakomak" and Marija Dukovska Pavlovska of "Makstil" emphasized the importance of innovation, educated youth, sustainable practices such as waste selection and circular economy, in the fight against climate change.



"These events highlighted the fact that climate change affects more those most vulnerable in our communities – persons with disabilities, Roma, women and girls, youth...

Inspired by environmental justice, social justice had to turn green," stressed Muhamed Veliu in his address.

According to Ambassador Hulmann, technology and innovation are key to ensuring a sustainable future, but they must be accompanied by a change in the ways of thinking and conduct that are harmful to the environment.

This exhibition showcased young startups and companies in Switzerland that are committed to promoting sustainable solutions and some successful initiatives by companies in North Macedonia that have contributed to improving environmental protection or to increasing resilience to environmental risks.



"The rising challenges of climate change, environmental degradation and unsustainable practices make us realize that we must act now in order to ensure a future worth celebrating," added Ambassador Hulmann. The "Sound of Green" Festival allows young people to obtain information about environmental protection while having fun, creating a platform for them as active partakers in the change.

"Through this Festival, we are sending out the message that packaging waste segregation and recycling should become part of our daily routine. We are inviting our fellow citizens to join us, bring some empty bottles or cans, and we will take care of their recycling," said Iko Brdaroski, Deputy CEO of "Pakomak".

Te festival ticket was in the spirit of the theme: a plastic bottle, an empty can or an installed Pakomak application for using the vending machines. For an even greater motivation, the first 300 visitors with an installed mobile application and a minimum of 10 green points received an unexpected surprise – a gift from "Pakomak".

#### Regional connection of youth with nature



A total of 27 young people from Gostivar and Dragash had a unique opportunity to participate in a youth camp in Mavrovo, organized by the Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI) from Gostivar and the AVOKO Youth Center from Dragash, Kosovo.

During the organized hikes and practical activities, through a series of educational sessions, the youth were introduced to the importance of preserving natural resources.

The camp also encouraged the development of team spirit and cooperation among the participants who had the opportunity to develop communication and group work skills.

This initiative not only unites young people from different parts of the region, but also encourages them to become active members of their respective communities, promoting inclusivity and sustainability.

Participants discover the beauty of nature and learn how to respect and protect it, creating a new generation that is aware of the importance of environmental issues.

The participants expressed gratitude for the knowledge and experiences they gained, confident that this initiative would continue to influence their communities. The project not only raises awareness of nature protection, but also creates a basis for new opportunities and innovations in the areas of sustainable development and environmental protection.

Theyouth camp was organized within the frameworks of the "Connecting Youth for an Inclusive and Sustainable Region" project, as part of the "Regional Programme for Local Democracy in the Western Balkans 2 – ReLoaD2," which is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

## International sign languages day: "Hear Me Out!" – Celebrating the identity and culture of the deaf community

In the deaf community, sign language is not just a means of communication, it is a symbol of identity, culture and pride!

On 23 September, the Youth Educational Forum (YEF), in cooperation with the MLAD ZNAK Youth Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, marked the International Day of Sign Languages under the slogan "Hear Me Out!". This event was dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of sign languages.

During the event, five members of the deaf community shared their inspiring stories, accomplishments and challenges. Their experiences emphasized the importance of sign language and its place in society.

Collectively, they called for active support and promotion of the sign language, which should be integrated into the daily functioning of institutions.

The organizers thanked all those present who came to celebrate the rich identity and culture of this community and discovered the power and beauty of the Macedonian sign language.

"Sign language and the deaf community should not be celebrated only one day in the year, and their challenges should not remain forgotten. Sign language should be part of the daily functioning of institutions, while innovative and practical solutions should be found to ensure easier access to the state's services.

The institutions need to not only accept sign language, but also to actively promote it, through various educational and public programmes, as well as to remove barriers for professional interpreters," YEF underlined. In Macedonia, many sign language interpreters cannot work as educational assistants, although they can offer significant support to children with hearing impairment.



YEF remains committed to supporting the deaf and hard of hearing persons and to promoting the sign language as a key tool for inclusion and equitable access to information.

The event was organized as part of the USAID North Macedonia's youth activity, "Youth Actively Create Opportunities," confirming the organization's commitment

to creating opportunities and supporting all members of society.

#### Youth Festival held for the third time in Strumica

The NOVUS Research and Analysis Centre organized the Youth Festival for the third time in a row, on 12 August 2024. Five young enthusiasts had started this initiative in 2022, and it quickly established itself as a traditional celebration of the International Youth Day. The third edition of the Festival, held in the Strumica City Park, offered a four-hour programme, attracted over 500 participants from different cities and towns and established itself as one of the most significant youth events in the region.

"This year, we can proudly say that we had over 500 participants, including organizers, volunteers, music bands, panelists, bazaar exhibitors, moderators, as well as young people from Veles, Kavadarci, Shtip, Strumica, Skopje, Gevgelija," said Danche Kirova, a NOVUS representative. One of the exhibitions set up at various locations in the City Park, showed the achievements of young people from the previous editions.

The photos reminded the visitors of the Festival's past editions, while at the same time motivating and inspiring the youth to get involved in its future editions.

"The bazaar was a true centre of youth creativity and entrepreneurship. The young artisans and artists had an opportunity to exhibit and sell their handmade products, such as jewelry, fashion accessories and works of art," Kirova added.

The central event of the Festival was the panel discussion titled: "What does "Community" need?," focusing on youth, youth activism and volunteerism in the community. Influential young leaders and activists shared their success stories about their contribution to positive changes in



their respective communities. The speakers discussed leadership, activism and how young people can initiate change through involvement in the local projects. Representatives of the "Join the Community" initiative, which promotes the "Community" platform, also took part in the panel.

This platform supports youth activism and philanthropy, and encourages young people to connect and take part in various initiatives.

The "Youth Call" youth platform, which unites young people from Strumica and the region, was promoted at the Festival as a space for exchanging ideas and opportunities for cooperation on various initiatives. At their stand, the young people were motivated to get involved in future projects and become active participants in the community.

The installed interactive Chill Out Zone offered the attendees a variety of activities for relaxation and socializing, including mental health workshops and social games. One of the most striking aspects of the Festival was the Thrift Store, a corner for selling second-hand clothing. The bazaar sold clothes collected from donations.

The proceeds from the sales (MKD 6,000) were intended as a fund for youth initiatives. A total of 121 pieces of clothing were sold, while the remaining pieces were donated to the

"Kopche" (Button) social enterprise in Skopje, with which the Festival cooperates to support sustainable fashion and raise awareness about second-hand shopping.

The Festival not only encouraged youth creativity, but also created learning and networking opportunities. Young children enjoyed the creative activities, older visitors enjoyed the exhibitions and stands, while the performances by young local musicians and bands attracted the attention of all generations, creating a sense of ownership and involvement among the young organizers.

The youth's key motivation was the fact that the Festival was organized by their peers, which gave them a sense of ownership and involvement in the event's creation. Strumica Youth Festival has become a platform for artistic expression and activism, encouraging young people to get involved and become active participants in their community.





# Rural Coalition: 10 years of dedicated work bringing positive changes to the community!



The Rural Coalition is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, confirming its key role in improving the conditions in rural areas.

"During the past decade, the Rural Coalition has implemented over 500 trainings on various topics, including agricultural innovations, climate change and gender equality. The "Agro-Rural Informer" platform has become an important resource for the farmers, providing them with information on the latest trends and practices in rural development," says Liljana Jonoski, Executive Director of the Network.

The Coalition has particularly distinguished itself in the economic empowerment of women from the rural areas. The creation of the first measure for financial support to women farmers, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, is just one of the many examples of their commitment to gender equality.

In 2022, the Rural Coalition established the "Treska" Local Action Group in the municipalities of Kichevo, Plasnica and Makedonski Brod. With this initiative and the development of three local environmental action plans, the Coalition demonstrated its commitment to sustainable development and tackling climate change, setting new standards in resource management. "We are also working to increase the transparency and accountability of public administration, and to strengthen the capacities of young people. Our work is important not only for the development of rural areas, but also for creating active and involved citizens," Jonoski points put.

The Coalition is also actively participating in the digitalization of services and in increasing the use of e-services at the local level. "We have managed to set our

strategic priorities through the implementation of the third Organizational Development Strategy 2021-2025, thanks to the institutional support of the Civica Mobilitas programme," says Director Jonoski.

The Rural Coalition took part in the creation of the first strategy for school schemes, which will enable local schools to purchase products from the farmers, thus directly contributing to local economic development.

All these activities have improved the quality of life in the rural areas and have created examples of successful civic organizing and civic activism. The Rural Coalition continues to be an example of positive community change and to support the transformation of rural development in North Macedonia.





## Youth engagement at the centre of discussions during NIRAS visits



A part of the Civica Mobilitas team accompanied colleagues from the Danish partner organisation NIRAS during their visit to civil society organisations implementing the "Youth Policies Tailored to Youth" project from 10th to 12th July 2024. They had the opportunity to speak with representatives from the lead organisation, Pro Lokal, and the Youth Centre Pelagonci "Ethnos", the Youth Council of Prilep, and Empowering — Kruševo. The discussions with all four organisations focused on youth, their engagement, needs, and opportunities.

The team from the Youth Centre Pelagonci "Ethnos" highlighted issues related to fire protection and healthcare services in the region. They pointed out that the local population struggles to access healthcare, with a lack of ambulances and fire trucks. "Debrešte and the surrounding areas need efficient measures and strategies for fire prevention, especially during the summer months when the fire risk is higher," they said. Through a project supported by the Swiss Government, via Civica Mobilitas, activities are underway to raise awareness among young people about the importance of fire prevention and improving healthcare services in the community. Edžeis Mustafa, president of "Ethnos", emphasised the need for greater youth involvement, not only in these matters but in all issues affecting the community.

During the meeting with representatives of Pro Lokal, the discussion focused on public transport issues in the region. Young people from distant municipalities struggle to travel to and from Bitola after 7 p.m. as city buses stop running by that time. They stressed the importance of youth participation in public debates and initiatives to influence legislation that affects their rights and needs. "Youth engagement is key to local businesses and economic development in smaller municipalities, as without active youth involvement, the survival and growth of local

businesses could be significantly limited," the participants noted.

For the Youth Council of Prilep, youth policies are their top priority. Representatives of this organisation are working to involve more young people in activities that support municipalities, thereby contributing to the development of local policies.

Environmental protection is the main focus of Empowering Kruševo. They shared that in July, they will organise two focus groups to engage stakeholders in discussions about Kruševo's future. Their goal is to improve waste sorting and find ways to prevent illegal dumpsites, which often cause fires during the summer months.

They have requested the local authorities and the mayor to provide them with a new space for a youth centre. With their ambitious approach and dedication to environmental protection, the members are not only promoting ecological values but also demonstrating the importance of civic activism and influence. "Our mission is not only to preserve nature but also to create a community that cares for it," said Zorica Kuzmanoska, president of the association and a high school teacher in Kruševo.

The NIRAS representatives were able to gain a deeper understanding of the project's progress, the grantees' activities, and the challenges they face.

#### Meet the new grantees of Civica Mobilitas

The recipients of the grants for civic engagement will focus on increasing citizen activism and involvement in their local communities through their projects.

Here are the organisations and brief profiles of the actions they will implement:

1. Association for Democratic Initiatives – Gostivar

Project: "Empowering Youth: Promoting Civic Engagement and Entrepreneurship in the Polog Region" In partnership with the Centre for Education and Development (Tearce), the Institute for Leadership and Public Policy (Tetovo), and the Institute for Social Change (InSoK – Tetovo).

2. Association for the Protection of Workers' Rights – Glasen Tekstilec, Štip

Project: "Through Women's Activism and Initiatives to Gender-Inclusive and Responsible Municipalities" In partnership with EHO Educational-Humanitarian Organisation (Štip) and the Initiative of Unemployed Intellectuals (Vinica).

3. Scout Unit "Krste Jon" – Struga

Project: "Let's Learn About Climate Change!" In partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Community Development (Debar) and the Regional Green Centre (Ohrid).

4. Finance Think – Institute for Economic Research and Policies, Skopje

Project: "Civic Monitoring: Bridging the Gap Between Political Promises and Achievements in Four Development Areas" In partnership with the Macedonian Civic Education Centre, the Youth Educational Forum, the Centre for the Development and Promotion of Democracy, Media and Journalism Standards, Freedom of Expression in Macedonia (360 Degrees), and the Macedonian Medical Association.

5. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights – Skopje

Project: "Equality Now - Empowering Marginalised

Communities for Social Inclusion and Non-Discrimination" In partnership with HOPS — Healthy Options Project (Skopje) and the Coalition for Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalised Communities (Margini – Skopje).

6. Humanitarian Association "Majka" - Kumanovo

Project: "Active Women" In partnership with the Regional Centre for Cooperation "Spektar" (Kriva Palanka), the Foundation for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises (Kumanovo), and the Regional Centre for Sustainable Development (Kratovo).

7. Centre for Civic Initiative - Prilep

Project: "Her Voice – Her Power: Empowering Marginalised Women and Girls in Pelagonia" In partnership with the Association for Legal Education and Transparency (Stanica P.E.T. – Prilep) and the Multi-Ethnic Association for All Ages (Crnilishte, Dolneni).

8.Centre for Assistance to People with Mental Disabilities – Poraka Negotino

Project: "Facing Challenges and Stigmatisation" In partnership with Eko-Zhivot (Kavadarci) and the Association of People with Cerebral Palsy and Other Disabilities (Veles).

- 9. Centre for Development and Promotion Promo Idea, Strumica Project: "Youth Network for Financial Literacy in the Southeast" In partnership with the Centre for Research and Analysis (Novus Strumica) and the Association for Improving Citizens' Quality of Life (Kruna Plus Radoviš).
- 10. Environmental Resource Centre (REC) North Macedonia, Skopje

Project: "Civic Activism for Achieving a Circular Economy in Organic Waste Management" In partnership with Eco-Logic (Skopje) and Florozon – Centre for Environmental Democracy (Skopje).

**Read more** about the grantees and their projects.

ЗАПОЗНАЈТЕ ГИ НОВИТЕ ГРАНТИСТИ НА ЦИВИКА МОБИЛИТАС



## Civica Mobilitas encourages better communication and visibility of civil society organisations



On 27th August 2024, a workshop dedicated to the communications of Civica Mobilitas and civil society organisations was held at the Civil Resource Centre in Skopje.

A total of 34 representatives from 33 civil society organisations, all current recipients of grants for civic engagement, discussed communication challenges and how to more easily follow the rules for successful reporting on their achievements.

All participants agreed that it is important to place greater emphasis on sharing the achievements of their engagements rather than simply reporting on the completion of activities. While reporting on activities remains important, it is crucial to convey the results and impacts of their engagements, which can help raise public awareness and improve the perception of civil society organisations' work.

During the workshop, some participants shared their experiences of communicating with the media and effectively using media platforms to increase the visibility and impact of their activities. Topics such as visibility, the use of logos, the process of reporting on events, and similar issues were also discussed.

The Civica Mobilitas team presented the resources available to grantees, emphasising the use of hashtags and mentions of Civica Mobilitas and SDC profiles to increase the reach of their information. The new e-platform or website of Civica Mobilitas, which offers many options to support the communication efforts of grantees, was also presented. However, whether these options are utilised or not depends entirely on the grantees and their active use of the platform.

Participants were encouraged to understand the communication habits of their target groups and adapt their strategies to achieve better results. While posting on social media is quick and easy, regular updates on websites are also important. Additionally, examples of photographs were reviewed and compared, highlighting the importance of selecting high-quality images to tell a compelling story or create a positive media image.

At the end of the workshop, participants expressed their agreement to strengthen communication and collaboration among themselves, while the Civica Mobilitas team will continue to provide support to improve the communication strategies of civil society organisations.

#### Implementation of "Islands of Integrity" begins

Workshops called "Islands of Integrity" have begun for representatives of 12 civil society organisations, grantees of Civica Mobilitas, aimed at strengthening personal integrity and leading to systemic and organisational changes that will increase resistance to corruption.

Workshop W.jpg 2The first two of the four-part workshop series were held in September. On 4th September, during the first workshop, participants learned more about the concepts of integrity and corruption. They assessed the values of personal integrity and later evaluated the culture of organisational integrity. One of their tasks between sessions was to share a questionnaire with colleagues and other stakeholders familiar with the organisation's work, summarise the data, and prepare a report.

Regarding corruption, statistical information about the situation in the country was presented, and discussions focused on possible actions to combat it. The trainers introduced the "Islands of Integrity" methodology and Professor Robert Klitgaard's corruption formula.

The second workshop focused on a general and in-depth diagnosis of the integrity and vulnerability to corruption within the organisations. Through four questionnaires, participants assessed the levels of monopoly, discretion, transparency, and accountability in four areas: financial and

asset management, human resource management, project implementation and service delivery, and governance and partnerships.

This diagnosis helped them identify potential corruption risks, and in the in-depth analysis, they examined the activities most vulnerable to corruption. In the days leading up to the third workshop, participants will share the questionnaires with their colleagues and other stakeholders connected to the organisation to gain a broader perspective on these issues.

The workshops were filled with discussions, which participants found useful and inspiring. At this stage of the "Islands of Integrity" implementation, the participating organisations include HERA, Pro Lokal, the Environmental Resource Centre, the Climate Change Centre, the Centre for Civil Initiatives, the Youth Educational Forum, the Forum for Reasonable Policies, Glasen Tekstilec, Promo Idea Strumica, CMA-KRIK, the Rural Coalition, and InSok Tetovo.

Civica Mobilitas is considering the possibility of conducting another cycle of workshops, where interested organisations that are not part of this cycle can participate.



#### Strong cooperation for a strong civil society



Civica Mobilitas organised the first meeting of some of its grantees with the Ambassador of Switzerland.

In addition to presenting the supported projects, the aim of the meeting was to foster dialogue on challenges, strengthen cooperation, and explore synergies with other projects supported by Switzerland, thereby increasing impact and support.

"We have been supporting and actively working to improve civil society for almost 20 years," said Ambassador Hulmann, adding that civil society organisations must assert themselves as actors of good governance by advocating for transparency, accountability, and citizen participation.

Representatives of the civil society organisations discussed their ongoing projects, shared their achievements, and emphasised the need for increased collaboration with state institutions.

They also addressed activities being implemented at the local level, the accountability of political parties, opportunities for digitisation, and the implementation of existing laws, particularly the use of information regarding actual ownership, among other topics.

The meeting was attended by representatives from four consortia working on good governance, anti-corruption,

and education. These included representatives from: the Forum for Reasonable Policies, the Balkan Institute for Regional Cooperation, the Centre for Civil Communications, the Association of Tax Advisers of the Republic of Macedonia, the Metamorphosis Foundation, the Blink 42-21 Centre for Social Innovations, Finance Think, and the Macedonian Civic Education Centre.

The meeting took place on 24th September 2024 at the premises of MCMS. Ambassador Hulmann is expected to meet other grantees in upcoming thematic meetings.

## **CITIZENS FOR CHANGE**

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