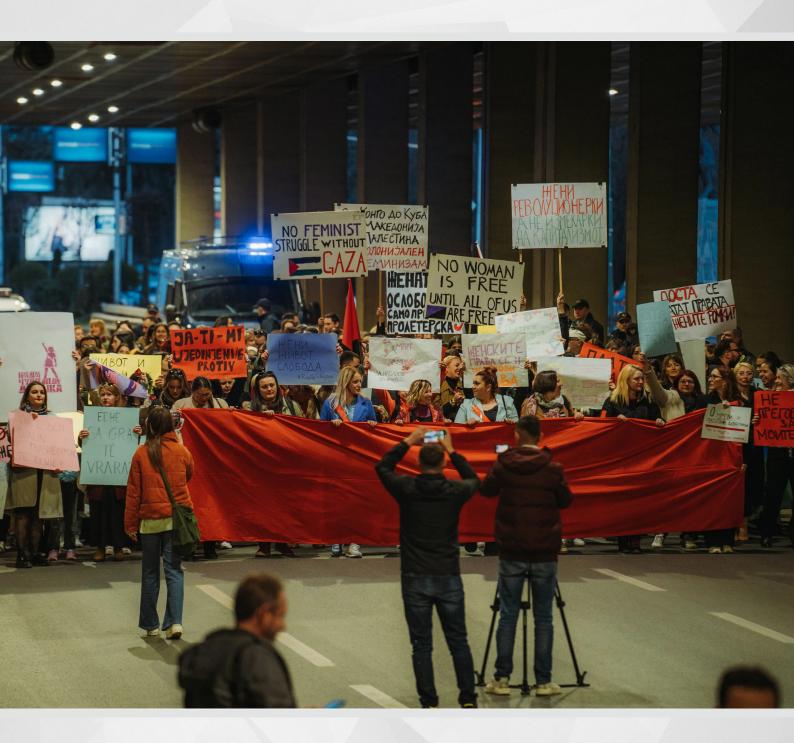


CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

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MAGAZINE NR.16





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Welcome to the new issue of Civica Mobilitas' magazine, Citizens for Change, the newsletter of a civil society support program backed by the Government of Switzerland, and the voice of the entire civil society sector.

After a break of almost a year, we are returning to the topics and initiatives that shape our society. This issue is filled with inspiring stories of civic engagement and citizen participation, dedicated to environmental challenges, women's rights, education, and much more.

In a time of growing ecological crisis, Macedonia is facing serious challenges such as air pollution, inadequate waste management, and climate change. In this issue, you will read about the conference organized by the Institute of Communication Studies, where experts and activists discussed the importance of effective environmental communication and the role of citizens in conserving nature. Additionally, we have provided space for the Declaration on Active Environmental Protection and Climate Change Mitigation signed by mayors from municipalities across the country.

This year's traditional March 8th march took place under the motto, "Women's Rights Are Not Up for Negotiation." Activists called for action to advance women's healthcare, educational, and economic rights. They highlighted eight red lines describing the requested changes, including equal pay for equal work and a systematic solution to paid maternity leave access for female farmers. The need for higher education to be integrated into the country's economic processes was discussed during the thematic forum, "A Tight Knit: The Need for Networking between Education, Science, and an Innovation-Based Economy." Experts and representatives from the academic and business sectors discussed the importance of networking in education, science, and an innovation-based economy.

This issue also highlights the initiative to network organizations that provide social services, workshops for high school students on peer violence, an action to monitor polling stations and their accessibility for people with disabilities, and more.

We believe we have provided diverse content that will meet our readers' interests. These stories reflect the efforts of civil society organizations to improve our society and show that change is possible.

You, too, can contribute to upcoming issues of Citizens for Change. Write to us and send us information about your activities and achievements, interesting stories about your beneficiaries, or initiatives you have started. Let's share the information, because it matters when it reaches those who need it.

Enjoy your reading!

Gonce Jakovleska

Civica Mobilitas National Coordinator for ICO

We would like to thank: Council of Media Ethics, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, the Consumers' Organization of Macedonia, the Forum for Reasonable Policies (FRP), the European Policy Institute (EPI), the Institute of Communication Studies (ICS), HERA – Association for Health Education and Research, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (KSZD), the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), the Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM), the Citizens' Association Media Plus Štip, the Children's Embassy Megjashi, and Eco-svet for their support and for providing access to information during the preparation of the texts for this issue.

Photo archives: Citizens' Association Media Plus Štip, ICS, FRP, EPI, SOS Children's Village, Climate Change, Children's Embassy Megjashi, the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM), and Eco-svet.



"Women's rights are non-negotiable" was the motto of the 8th March Rally



Let the changes begin now – appealed the participants of the women's rights rally, which this year took place under the motto: "Red Line: women's rights are non-negotiable!". The traditional 8th March rally organised by the Platform for Gender Equality and the women's rights activists on the occasion of the International Women's Day started at 17:00 hrs at the Skenderbeg Square in Skopje.

The rally mobilised hundreds of attendees who protested against inequality and injustice towards women and girls, thus raising the awareness of the need to advance women's health, educational, labour, cultural, political and economic rights. The activists called for action, motivated by the trend of erosion of women's rights and their continuous exclusion from the creation and adoption of decisions that directly affect their lives.

This year's proclamation sets eight red lines describing the requested change:

- My body my choice unlimited access to safe and legal medical abortion in every municipality.
- z. Equal pay for equal work fair compensation that will realistically reflect the value of women's labour both at their workplace and at home, as well as equal wages between men and women.
- Institutions in charge of prevention and protection from gender-based violence should act with due attention.
- 4. Transformation of the status of women working in the culture sector who have been facing uncertainty regarding their

working status for years.

- 5. 50% representation of women in positions of power should become a reality.
- **6. Systematic solution** to provide access to paid maternity leave and sick leave for the **women working** in the agricultural sector.
- 7. The state should take vigorous action to provide female workers with childcare that will enable them full participation in the work process without sacrificing their role as parents.
- 8. The state should invest in the fight against bribe and corruption that have disproportional effect on women and are the main reason for young people to leave the country.

The activists pointed out that these red lines are not just requests – they are also a roadmap with measures that can lead to progress. Hence, they called on the decision makers, the politicians and the political parties to take into consideration these requests seriously and take concrete steps for their implementation in order to improve the position of women and gender equality in North Macedonia.

Citizens and CSOs complained mostly about the journalistic reporting

On 19th January the Council of Media Ethics published the statistical overview of the decisions adopted by the Complaints Commission in 2023.

The overview shows that the Commission received 132 complaints and adopted 107 decisions and opinions. In 61 of them a breach of the Code of Journalists was established. The Commission has decided that 41 of the complaints were unfounded and no procedure has been initiated for 20 complaints. Five complaints have been solved through reconciliation or mediation.

When it comes to the media that were the subject of the complaints, most of them, or 110 in total refer to internet portals. Ten complaints regard the web sites of TV stations while 6 refer to the TV stations themselves. The printed media and their online editions received the least complaints, 2 in total. The Commission also points out that no procedure was initiated upon four of the received

complaints because they did not fall under its competence. The complaints refer to posts published on the social network Facebook and the news aggregator time.mk.

Most of the complaints in 2023 were filed by citizens, 53 in total. They are followed by the organisations and associations with 35 complaints, media and journalists with 22 and political parties with 10. All other complainants have a one-digit number of complaints, namely five are filed by private companies, four are defined as others, two come from holders of public functions and one from legal representatives.

The infographic shows which articles of the Code of Journalists have been breached in most of the cases. More than one third of the violations refer to Article 1, which is publication of incorrect and unchecked information, absence of "second source of information" and lack of at least two mutually unrelated sources.





Party tensions towards journalists are unnecessary and counter-productive

The Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) reacted on the statement made by the President of SDSM and former Prime Minister, Dimitar Kovachevski, in which the journalists are unnecessarily accused, especially in the period before the elections.

"Such negative political speech can lead to increased risks of attacks against journalists and hinder citizens' right to be appropriately informed. Kovachevski's statements given at a political party event on 19th February, in which he addressed pejorative words towards the journalists, implying political manipulation with the media, are especially alarming", reads AJM's press release.

AJM emphasizes the importance for the politicians to address the concerns related to media coverage through appropriate channels, such as the media self-regulatory

bodies: AJM's Council of Honour and the Council of Media Ethics instead of resorting to personal attacks. At the same time, it points out that a new coordination body has been established in cooperation with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which follows the compliance with the Code of Conduct in the Online Sphere during electoral processes. This body will decide upon submissions regarding disinformation, hate speech and other unethical behaviour on the internet, which can be forwarded to koordinativnotelozaizbori@avmu.mk.

AJM calls on all political parties to respect the role of journalists and support media freedom and professionalism, which are of core importance for a democratic society and fair elections.

High school students from Shtip and Sveti Nikole learned about peer violence



Students from three high schools from Shtip joined the workshops on peer violence led by youth educator Dragana Mitrovic. Through the workshop content they learned about the dynamics of bullying and researched the strategies for prevention and intervention.

By means of role plays, group work, presentations and other activities, the students from "Slavcho Stojmenski", "Kole Nehtenin" and "Jane Sandanski" high schools from Shtip discussed the dynamics of bullying and the strategies to overcome it, the ways to recognize peer violence and react accordingly. In the process, their role as observers was emphasized as well as what they can do as students.

The workshop in Sveti Nikole gathered 19 students from "Kocho Racin" high school, who were exploring ways to identify and counter peer violence, dealing with the complexity of changing roles between the bully and the victim.

Under Mitrovic's guidance they created plans to deal with peer violence in their school communities.

In the course of the school year the trained peer educators will have the possibility to talk to their peers, transfer their knowledge and discuss about ways to stop the expansion of peer violence. These efforts encourage the young people to counter bullying and promote a culture of respect and empathy among their peers.

The workshops for peer educators were implemented by the association "Media Plus" from Shtip in the framework of the project "Safety is Our Motto", partially supported by the Embassy of the USA in Skopje.

Training for youth trainers

From 13th to 15th February 2024 the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM) implemented the Training of Trainers in Veles, Macedonia. In partnership with CARE International and the Center for Counselling, Social Services and Research, twenty young representatives were trained from the partner organizations Mladite Mozhat – Youth Can, Organized Youth Association, Association Kreaktiv / Mladinska Asocijacija Kreaktiv Kavadarci, Foundation for Development of the Local Community – Shtip and Zdruzhenie Akva.

Topics from Program M were covered. Working with men and boys to challenge gender inequalities can have a positive impact on the health and well-being of women and girls. There is also an increased understanding of how rigid ideas of gender and masculinities can also lead to specific vulnerabilities among men and boys.

Program Y focused on transforming the school environment to one that supports and nurtures gender equality and

promotes a culture of non-violence. With the knowledge gained, the peer educators from youth CSOs will be conducting the workshops in their local communities.

The educators improved their presentation skills, deepened their knowledge of peer violence prevention, labelling and harmful consequences of alcohol and drug use. The same topics will be part of their future workshops with high school students which will be implemented in the schools or in the youth centres.

During the last day of the training, the Ambassador of the Netherlands visited the participants and took an active part in the session where the peer-educators implemented workshops.

At the end of the training, the Ambassador gave certificates to the participants for successful completion of the training.

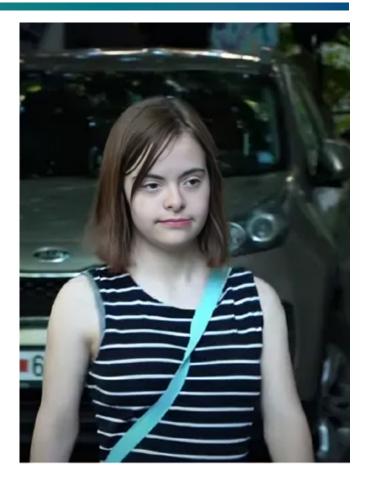
The Story of Ilina told at the United Nations in Geneva

The promotion of "The Story of Ilina: Her Wings are Made of Love" at the Permanent Mission of North Macedonia in Geneva marked the World Day of People with Down Syndrome, 21st March. Ilina's mother Mimoza Petreska Georgieva is the author of the story, and the illustrations are made by her father, Pero Georgiev. Dr. Teuta Agai Demjaha, Ambassador at the Permanent Mission of North Macedonia in Geneva also spoke at the event.

Twenty-year-old Ilina, a girl with a Down syndrome, is ambitious, hard-working, open, persistent person who makes a great impression with her positive energy and team spirit. Singing and dancing are her love and obsession and thanks to her great will and determination she managed to master swimming as well, for which she won first and second place medals at several competitions.

During the presentation of the story, Ilina spoke about herself and had a solo dance performance. The video was produced in the framework of the campaign "We Might Be Different, but We Are All Talented" by the First Children's Embassy in the World Megjashi. It shows only a small part of Ilina's exciting everyday life.

This positive young girl moved to Switzerland one year ago. Ilina started her journey of integration in her new home, taking decisive steps ahead with determination and perseverance.



Let us talk more about the environment in times of growing environmental crisis

Macedonia is threatened by various pollutants. Air pollution is one of the highest in Europe, a large amount of waste is not being recycled, water quality is deteriorating, there is excessive deforestation, biodiversity is under the threat of extinction, and climate change is affecting food production. In such a growing ecological crisis, public institutions, businesses, CSOs, the media and academia should become increasingly accountable for their actions and communicate about the environment. In this way, awareness and understanding of complex environmental issues will be raised, which in turn will strengthen the role of citizens and organizations in the preservation of the environment.

This was said at the conference "How to Communicate about the Environment in a Growing Environmental Crisis: — Practical Experiences and New Perspectives", organized by the Institute of Communication Studies on 27th March in Skopje.

In the opening address, Dejan Andonov, Programme Coordinator at ICS, stated that effective communication can help in policy advocacy, changing people's behaviour, conflict resolution and enacting environmental laws.

The president of the International Environmental Communication Association, Steve Depoe, said that on one side is the rhetoric that supports overexploitation of resources and profit, which is sceptical towards science and sustainability, and on the other hand are those who talk about climate emergencies and existential threats with emotions of anger and fear. The environmental rhetoric based on scientific interpretation and meaning is much less prevalent.

It is important that activists, public officials, scientists, journalists and professional communicators know how to properly address, research, explain and disseminate information about environmental problems to a wider audience. In this direction, Dime Melovski from the Macedonian Ecological Society shared his experience with the public affirmation of the protection of the Balkan lynx. He pointed out that the program for recovery of the Balkan lynx started 18 years ago. "The data we have obtained by capturing the lynxes help us in the preparation of the action and conservation plans for protection of the lynx, while the next stage will be aimed at strengthening the lynx gene pool", Melovski said.



"We need future generations who understand this area and who will have a developed awareness. We try to present environmental problems to them in an understandable way in order to avoid eco-anxiety – when they do not know how to act in relation to these pressing issues.", Mila Jovanovska from" Go Green" said.

The need to promote nature-based solutions and build climate-resilient communities, the need for companies to better position themselves by embracing environmental responsibility and sustainability, and for the media and social media influencers to help understand and solve environmental problems was also discussed at the conference.

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The conference was implemented within the project "Mainstreaming environmental communication through online learning and virtual mobility", implemented by the Institute of Communication Studies in partnership with the universities of Novi Sad, Zagreb, Sarajevo and Tirana. The project is financed by the ERASMUS+ program through the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility.

15th March – World consumer rights day

This year's World Consumer Rights Day placed Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the centre of attention through the campaign entitled "Fair and Responsible Artificial Intelligence for the Consumers".

The campaign emphasised the need of greater attention to the construction and development of AI models especially in view of the legal data collection, with the consent of individuals or owners of intellectual property rights as well as the ethics behind the human labour marking and categorising these data.

As a matter of fact, the campaign was largely based on the Law on Artificial Intelligence adopted by the European Parliament on 13th March 2024. It should provide better conditions for development and utilisation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), as well as safety, transparency and non-discrimination by these systems. The Law defines the artificial intelligence systems according to the level of risk, with new regulations for high-risk systems, also identifying cases of AI usage that should be fully forbidden, such as biometric identification in public spaces.

The world consumers organization (Consumers' International) marks the World Consumers Day recognised by the United Nations and runs consumer rights campaigns for over 40 years in order to unite the consumers movement



in joint activities aimed at raising the global awareness about the consumers' rights and needs. As a member of Consumers' International, the Consumers' Organisation of Macedonia joins these campaigns for a third decade in a row.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Higher education should be integrated in the economic processes

On 27th March 2024, the Forum for Reasonable Policies, in cooperation with the partner organizations — the Institute for Social and Humanistic Sciences and the Balkan Institute for Regional Cooperation held a thematic forum entitled "Towards Interweaving Education, Science and Innovation-based Economy".

Previous efforts for improved higher education and future steps that will lead towards creating the appropriate climate for more efficient advocacy were some of the topics discussed at the forum.

"There are bureaucratic complications, but they are not impossible to solve, on the contrary", said Gordan Georgiev from the Forum for Reasonable Policies. He emphasized that they plan to alarm the new government and point out the things that can be quickly addressed as well as to encourage and motivate the good people working in the public administration. According to Ana Shopovska from the University Parliament, it is necessary to increase the attractiveness of studying. "The state should provide accommodation. scholarships and better-quality programmes for the students, but also programmes in English, especially for the bachelor studies", she said and called on the companies to involve the students in the production processes during their internship to help them learn the necessary skills.

Aleksandar Bogojevski from the National Agency for European Educational Programs and Mobility spoke about the importance of the cooperation within the Western Balkans. According to him, joint funds, support for the research projects, automated recognition of diplomas and acquired credits are of great importance. "The study programme should be created in cooperation with the



entrepreneurship community and we all bare great responsibility in this process", said professor Kiril Barbareev from the "Goce Delchev" University in Shtip.

The participants discussed about the higher education that should be deeply integrated in the economic processes within and outside the country, whereas the research and science will be translated into, and be an essential part of, the public policy making in the country, in which young successful students will be able to find a solid and safe academic and economic shelter, which will also decrease the brain drain.

The thematic forum is part of the project "Advocacy for Inclusive Growth", supported by the Government of Switzerland through the Civica Mobilitas Programme.

Civil monitoring of the accessibility of polling station

Last year the Basic Civil Court in Skopje passed a verdict establishing direct discrimination performed by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the State Election Commission against the people with disabilities

These institutions did not take the necessary measures to adjust the accessibility of the polling stations in order to enable the people with disabilities to take active participation in the voting process and exercise their right to vote. In its verdict, the Court obliges the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the State Election Commission to provide measures that will enable

the people with disabilities to fulfil their right to vote on equal grounds with all other citizens before the next electoral cycle.

At the same time, the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (CPPD) has established in a series of cases direct discrimination against the people with disabilities in the processes of active participation in the political life.

In 2021, CPPD adopted a General Recommendation by which the State Election Commission is recommended to take all necessary actions at the shortest notice and enable accessibility and appropriate adjustment of the

polling stations, which would enable equal accessibility for the people with physical handicap to the polling stations across the country.

This year's elections are the first to take place after the verdict passed by the Basic Civil Court. MCIC and CPPD have therefore started an initiative for civil monitoring of the accessibility of polling stations during the elections.

MCIC and CPPD have reached out to 88 CSOs active in the field of protection of the rights of people with disabilities to take part in the campaign. The representatives of these organizations have been invited to participate by monitoring the accessibility of the polling stations in their roles as voters at the moment they go out to vote. A questionnaire was developed for the needs of the monitoring, as well as a manual with more detailed guidelines. The questionnaire is available in Macedonian and Albanian languages online and in a Word format.

The data collected during the first and the second election

round will be summed up and will serve for CPPD to obtain a realistic picture of the actual situation and later on in the creation of the preventive and protection mechanisms to improve the conditions for actual political participation of the people with handicap during the election processes.

Questionnaire MK | Questionnaire ALB

Apart from this initiative, a short promotional video was prepared by CPPD with the support of MCIC, sending clear messages to refrain from hate speech. The candidates, voters and all involved stakeholders are requested to abstain from using offensive language. Sexism, spreading of prejudice and interethnic hatred, using marginalised groups to create fear and uniting in hatred is not freedom of speech. The members of CPPD call on refraining from giving and/or conveying hateful comments. Regardless of whether it is online or offline, we all need to act responsibly in order to stop the spread of hate speech during elections.

Representatives of BCSDN Will Participate in the Work of EESC

Four prominent representatives of the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BSCDN) will be part of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) as civil society representatives from the nine EU membership candidate countries. Biljana Spasovska, executive director of BSCDN, Julijana Hoxha, executive director of Partners Albania, Aida Daguda, executive director of the Centre for Civil Society Promotion (CPCD) Bosnia and Herzegovina and Güneş Engin Karamanci, project coordinator from TUSEV (Türkiye) participated at the EESC plenary debates for the first time, enriching the dialogue with diverse perspectives and expertise.

Their involvement emphasizes the key role BCSDN plays in advancing the voice of civil society and democracy throughout the Western Balkans and Türkiye.

The initiative for enlargement candidate members, supported by the president of EESC Oliver Röpke, is a pioneer pilot project aiming at integrating the candidate countries in the EU by supporting the cooperation between the CSOs and EESC. Through active participation in the preparation of opinions, engagement in study groups and contributions during the plenary sessions, the CSO representatives will play a vital role in the shaping of EU policies and initiatives with regards to enlargement, the Single Market, the Green Deal and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

"As BCSDN we are honoured to be recognised by the EESC and to be able to contribute to this initiative. This emphasizes our role in the strengthening of the civil society and the protection of citizens' freedoms in the Western Balkans and Türkiye", says Biljana Spasovska. This initiative not only improves the EU enlargement democratic processes, but it is also an important step forward towards promoting freedom, democracy and socio-economic prosperity in the candidate countries.

North Macedonia will have 14 representatives in the EESC.

- 1. Biljana Spasovska from BSCDN;
- 2 Branko Azeski, Economic Chamber of North Macedonia;
- 3. Trajan Angeloski, Union of Chambers of Commerce of Macedonia;
- 4. Valentina Disoska, Association of Business Women;
- 5. Lazar Nedanoski, Macedonian Enterprise Development Foundation;
- 6. Blagoja Ralpovski,
- 7. Jakim Nedelkov,
- 8. Zoran Dionisijev,
- 9. Daniela Janevska,
- 10. Sanela Donevska Andonovska, Confedereation of Free Trade Unions of Macedonia (KSS);
- 11. Blagica Petreski, Finance Think,
- 12. Simonida Kacarska, European Policy Institute (EPI); Denis Selmani, Institute for Research and Policy Analysis – Romalitiko;
- 14. Zoran Drangovski, Macedonian Young Lawyers Association.

EPI Presented a Statement at the 46th Pre-session of the Fourth Cycle of UPR

Angela Delevska and Ardita Vejseli, researchers from the European Policy Institute (EPI) participated at the 46th pre-session of the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodical Review (UPR) that took place from 13th to 16th February this year at the United Nations offices in Geneva, Switzerland.

Delovska presented EPI's statement covering two pressing issues, the challenges and obstacles to the independence and pluralism of the national equality body, i.e. the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (CPPD); as well as the challenges and infringement of the economic, social and cultural rights of the people with disabilities, that is the right to inclusive education.

She referred to the obstacles CPPD is faced with, such as the financial limitations, lack of independence of the human resources and the pressure coming from the political parties during the members selection process, which endangers its independence and efficiency. Regarding the second issue, although some progress has been made with the adoption of the laws and concepts for inclusive education, implementation lags behind. Insufficient support staff, inappropriate regulations for studying of the Braille alphabet and sign language as well as the accessibility barriers in the educational institutions are some of the key issues.

Delevska and Vejseli had multiple advocacy meetings with representatives of the permanent missions to the UN of Germany, Belgium, Sweden and Croatia. In addition, they also had an advocacy meeting with the EU Delegation in Geneva.



The UPR is a unique and only international mechanism of the Human Rights Council that calls for each UN Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights records every 4.5 years.

The UPR was established in 2007, with the first session being held in 2008. As the UPR is an inclusive mechanism, consultations with other stakeholders such as national and international CSOs, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and other local stakeholders are held in the presessions, organised one month in advance of the Working Group review. They offer the possibility for representatives of the permanent missions to gather complete and up-to-date information in a short period of time by meeting with multiple CSOs simultaneously.

Presentation of the research on the situation with media selfregulation in the country

To advance the functioning and efficiency of the media self-regulation in the country, continuous strengthening of the capacities of the self-regulatory bodies is necessary, especially when it comes to deciding upon ethical issues rising from the digital environment, regular updating of the ethical frames and improvement of the mechanisms to obtain their long-term sustainability.

At the same time, more initiatives are needed to raise the public awareness about the functioning of the selfregulating mechanisms.

These are the main conclusions resulting from the panel discussion "The importance of Media Self-regulation for the Improvement of Professional Standards" organised by the Macedonian Institute for Media as part of the regional project "Our Media: Initiative for Advancement of Media Literacy, Dialogue and Activism", co-financed by the European Union.

The key findings of the research "Media Self-regulation in North Macedonia: Imperative of Boosting Mechanisms and Reinforcing Effectiveness" conducted by MIM researchers Marina Tuneva and Vesna Nikodonoska were presented during the event. The Analysis focuses on the key ethical documents and analyses the capacities, challenges and good practices stemming from the functioning of the relevant mechanisms in this area, especially in the digital environment.

The event was opened by David Geer, Head of the European Union Delegation, who, among other things, pointed out that the European Commission encourages media self-regulation and that the Macedonian legislation will have to be harmonised with the European rules in this area. Opening remarks were also given by Mladen Chadikovski, president of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and Leunora Kaliqi, president of the administrative board of the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM).

The importance of media self-regulation for advancement of the professional standards also during pre-election periods was the topic discussed by Aneta Andonova, editor-in-chief of the First Programme Service of the Macedonian Television, Mirche Adamchevski, president

of the Complaints Commission of CMEM, Sashe Dimovski, president of the Council of Honuor of AJM and Dragica Ljubevska, head of sector at the Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services.

The Municipalities signed a Declaration for active protection of the environment and mitigating climate change



On 31st January this year the mayors of the municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia signed a Declaration for Active Protection of the Environment and Mitigating Climate Change, thus confirming the commitment to achieving the goals of sustainable urban development, environmental protection and improving the quality of life of current and future generations.

The event entitled "Local Approach to Active Protection of the Environment and Mitigating Climate Change" was opened by the Minister of Environment and Physical Planning Kaja Shukova, who expressed her satisfaction over the increasing environmental awareness of the municipalities, which can be seen by the number of mayors present at the event.

"By signing this Declaration for the Green Agenda 2020, the central and local administration take the responsibility to accomplish the commitments envisaged with the document, while the implementation will to a large extent take place at a local level.

It is therefore necessary that the municipalities fully participate in the implementation of the commitments and obligations and take the required measures in compliance with the Green Agenda", emphasised the Minister of Environment and Physical Planning Kaja Shukova.

At the same time, she expressed her conviction that the implementation of activities with joint participation of the central and local authorities will continue in the future. "This is most of all due to the need to strengthen the administrative capacities of the local self-government and improve the implementation of the environmental legislation, because the even greater number of activities that need to be undertaken to protect the environment at a local level remains a challenge for the local self-government", the Minister added.

The municipalities' obligations stemming from the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans were presented at the event through a display of activities and financing possibilities at the local level, as well as the municipalities' capacities to prepare plans for sustainable energy and climate.

The event was organised as part of the project "Civil Organisations in Action for Climate Change" implemented by Eko-svest, Macedonian Young Lawyers' Association (MYLA) and the Organisation for Connecting Natural Values and People — CNVP with the financial support of the Government of Sweden in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning — Sector for cooperation with the local self-government, administrative and supervisory affairs.

Eleven CSOs united to establish a network of providers of social services



On 17th January 2024 eleven civil society organisations initiated the **establishing of a "Formal Network of Providers of Social Services".** The organisations: SOS Children's Village, Humanost, Hera, Poraka — Negotino, Crisis Center "Hope", Open Gate, Montesori, HOPS, Inkluziva, Association of Persons with Cerebral Palsy and Other Disabilities — Veles and KRIK, which are social services providers or work in the area of social protection, aim to strengthen their operation and influence through this initiative, for the benefit of the vulnerable categories of citizens who they support and for whom they provide proper social services.

The event was also supported by high representatives from the international institutions, such as Steffen Hudolin, Head of Cooperation at the European Union Delegation in Skopje, Rossana Dudziak, Resident Coordinator of the UN in North Macedonia and Harald Fugger, Social Affairs Attaché at the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. They participated in the panel discussion, encouraged and supported the civil society organisations in the implementation of this idea.

Flakron Bexheti, State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy also took part in the panel and confirmed the **importance of the work of CSOs**, especially after the process of deinstitutionalisation and the social reforms implemented in the framework of the national strategy "Timjanik", 70% of which has already been accomplished. These changes have enabled the civil society organisations to participate in the provision of social services—something that was until now a sole competence of the state, but at

the same time to contribute with their experiences and expertise in the development of new services important for the citizens as well as the improvement of the existing ones. Today, 82 organisations are social services providers with a capacity to attend over 3,400 beneficiaries, of which 80% are supported with state funding. These organisations provide services such as: care for people with disabilities, care for children without parents and parental care, personal assistance, day-care centres, support to victims of human trafficking, counselling, etc.

Mario Janchev, Director for Programme Development at the SOS Children's Village and Elizabeta Bozhinoska, Programme Director at HERA also spoke at the event, elaborating on the need to unite and strengthen the operation of licenced providers of social services. A review of the social reform was presented, which is based on decentralisation, deinstitutionalisation and pluralisation of the social protection system. The pluralisation is exactly the feature giving legitimacy of the diversification of social services by non-state social service providers and their uniting, which will increase the influence and the dialogue among the social service providers and policy creators. An enabling environment is necessary to obtain good provision of social services in the country and secure sustainability of the existing social services, as well as to stimulate the opening of new ones in regions faced with lack of social services.



Info sessions for the new Civica Mobilitas grant call conclude



From 5th to 15th March 2024 the Civica Mobilitas team travelled over 2,000 kilometres, visiting eight planning regions and holding nine info sessions focused on the call for Civic Engagement Grants. Over 130 CSO representatives took part at the sessions in Kriva Palanka, Shtip, Strumica, Gostivar, Veles, Struga, Bitola and Skopje.

A significant part of the info sessions was dedicated to questions from the participants. Apart from their interest in clarifying some of the criteria for submitting applications and the proper way to fill in the necessary documents, the meetings also provided an opportunity to share experiences from previous partnerships, discuss pressing issues the organisations in the regions are faced with as well as to explore initial project ideas.

According to Risto Kamov, President of the organisation Changemekers from Gevgelija, this approach that enables long-term collaboration among the organisations from the regions is very beneficial. "We have had the experience of working together in the implementation of certain actions, but we have never had the opportunity to work together in a long-term project. I consider this a great opportunity to join forces and achieve more", he said.

The participants expressed their satisfaction with the fact that the info sessions took place in each of the regions, providing easier access and possibility to gather, network and discuss the important issues related to the civic engagement in the specific region.

With regards to the necessary application documents, the participants showed interest in the Cedrig light appendix that serves as an evaluation filter for the project's potential negative environmental impact. Those who had previous experience with this tool pointed out that failing to mitigate these risks prolongs the duration of the project activities.

All info sessions were held in public spaces. We would like to thank the colleagues from the Europe House offices in Kriva Palanka, Veles and Strumica, the American Corner in Struga, Mladi Hub in Bitola and the Civic Society Resource Center in Shtip, Gostivar and Skopje for providing the space and for their hospitality.

CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

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