

CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

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CSOS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROGRAMMES OF THE CANDIDATES FOR THE LOCAL ELECTIONS

"We need an institutional culture of listening to the voice of all citizens and all vulnerable groups", said one of the civic activists, participants at Civica Mobilitas Networking Meeting that took place at the end of June this year. This statement, given during the discussions on the priorities and expectations of CSOs when it comes to future mayors and municipal council members, is everything in one!

The citizens are facing another election cycle, which, according to the announcements, will take place in October. Here, we will not speak about the "standstill" that happens with each election cycle, but about the possibilities that we should use, and which concern the creation of the programmes of the candidates for mayors and municipal council members who will run for positions in the municipalities in the country.

We have often spoken about the fact that the local government and CSOs should ne partners rather than enemies, competitors or "parties at war". Both have the same goal, that the citizens have a better quality of life. They both have resources and plans how to reach their goal, but why should not they do it together, especially if the effects of their joint resources make a bigger change of the citizens for certain.

The discussions during the Networking Meeting were in this direction, so that they show the candidates for mayors and municipal council members the civic perspective on needs and challenges and give them proposals.

Digitalization is a topic that is discussed a lot. It is wanted both by the citizens and the municipal administration. There is an impression that it will be much easier for all if it happens. Nevertheless, the road to full usage of digital tools is not always simple. CSOs, via trainings and enabling the citizens to have digital skills can help in much easier and faster acceptance of these innovations in the functioning of the municipality. In this way, connecting with each other, they will round the whole process of establishing and usage of new digital services.

The support to CSOs by the municipalities with finances, space, support etc. should not be at the margins of their programmes. All of these resources that the municipality will use to help CSOs will be put in function to improve the lives of the citizens. The municipality, via clear, publicly announced criteria can set the themes in which they want the funded projects to be implemented. The topics that are part of the municipal programmes can be implemented by CSOs, as part of the joint efforts on both sides.

Regular consultations with all stakeholders were one of the most frequently mention ed possibilities. As Civica Mobilitas grantees say, they will promote CSOs as allies in overcoming the challenges at local level. "It is most important to start somewhere", they say and add: "Sometimes it is enough that the municipality simply gathers everybody at one place and says: 'Hey, we have a joint problem, let's see how we can together solve it'. When the businesses, civil sector and public institutions start to work side by side, solidarity stops being a concept, and it becomes something that is felt at daily level".

All together can promote the results of their joint work. The acknowledgment of a well implemented project is a motivation for the next one, a motivation for the others to follow these actions.

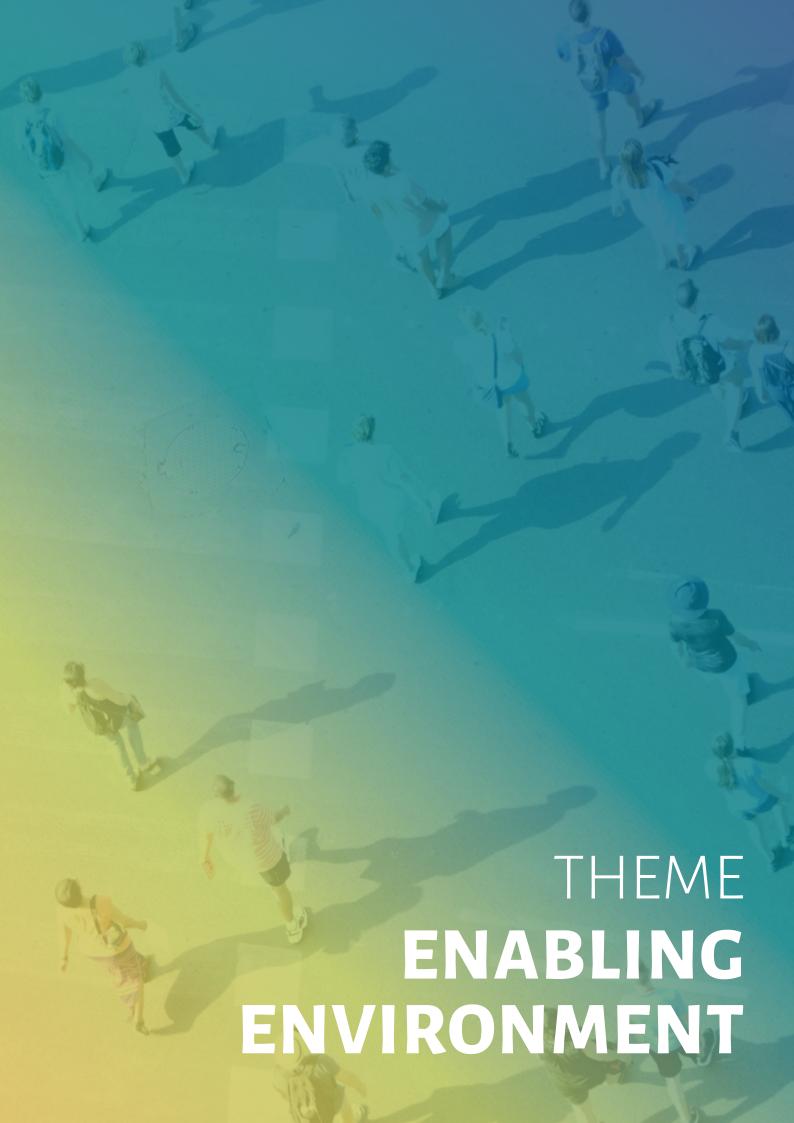
In the end, the demands of the CSOs for transparency and accountability, their research and recommendations are not criticism for the sake of criticism, but rather suggestions for improvement, possibilities for development that will improve the work of the municipality and improve the services for the citizens. And that is the final goal for everybody.

Have a nice reading!

Gonce Jakovlevska Civica Mobilitas National Coordinator for ICO

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Photo archives: Civica Mobilitas, Civil Society Resource Centre (GRC), Konekt, Women's Organization of Strumica (OZS), "Kindness", Center for Civil Communications (CCC), Metamorphosis Foundation, Pro Local, HERA, CMA KRIK, RCS "Spektar", HZ "Mother", Promo Idea, Women's Organization of the Municipality of Sveti Nikole (OZOSVN), Center for Sustainable Community Development Debar, Macedonian Association for Protection at Work (MZZPR), REFORD, I Want to Say (SDK), "Men and Mountain", Macedonia 2025, Autism Centre "Blue Puzzle", Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM) and DPD "Sveti Nikole".



Civil Society Support: New Strategy Announces Closer Cooperation and Better Conditions for the Work of CSOs



On 13th June 2025, there was a consultative meeting held at the Civil Society Resource Centre on finalizing the Government Draft Strategy for Cooperation and Development of the Civil Society and 2025-2028 Action Plan.

At the event, there were 26 representatives of CSOs and public institutions who are members of the working group for Strategy preparation, members of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and the Civil Society, as well as CSO representatives who actively contributed with their proposals in this process.

There was special attention paid to promoting the system for state funding to CSOs. The participants stressed the importance of the increased and more systematic support from the central and local budgets, establishing a guarantee fund for organizations that have projects from European and other international funds, as well as bigger transparency and accountability in the way of allocating the funds.

The Strategy also envisages clear definition of the mechanisms for CSO participation in public policy creation and EU integration process, with a focus on strengthening the existing cooperation models, such as the sector working groups. There were also discussions on establishing a system for monitoring, evaluation and learning that will enable monitoring of the implementation of the measures and timely insight in the Strategy results.

The process of preparation of the Draft Strategy started as early as November 2024, with a call to all interested CSOs to give their proposals for future measures. In January 2025, a working group was established, consisting of representatives of state institutions and CSOs that actively worked on preparing the Draft Strategy and Action Plan.

On 14th May 2025, the Draft Strategy and Action Plan were published on ENER for public consultations until 12th June 2025. On 23rd May 2025, there was an on-line consultative meeting with CSOs, organised by the Civil Society Resource Centre and the Office for Cooperation with NGOs, where the participants had the possibility to give their comments and suggestions for improving the contents of the Strategy and Action Plan. On 18th June 2025, the Government Draft Strategy for Cooperation and Development of the Civil Society with 2025-2028 Action Plan was reviewed at the third session of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and the Civil Society and it was then sent for review and adoption by the Government.

With the working groups, public consultations and on-line meetings, CSOs had the chance to be active participants rather than observers. This process is another confirmation that CSOs can and should be part of the decision-making system, with a real support, partnership and voice that is heard.

The consultative meetings were organised within the project "EU Support to Civil Society Resource Centre – Phase 2", financed by the European Union, and implemented by the National Foundation for Civil Society Development Civil Society Resource Centre, the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), Media Plus Shtip and the Association for Democratic Initiatives ADI Gostivar.

Konekt Donor Circle Raised MKD 683,000 for CSOs

Konekt's sixth donor circle took place on 12th June 2025 at Macedonian Telecom offices. The event united more than 120 citizens and companies in support and donation for CSOs that offer specific solutions for the challenges in our communities.

A total of MKD 683,000 were collected live, and additional MKD 300,300 from Konekt's donor fund were allocated via a grant to deal with the consequences of the Kochani fire. The funds were directed to the Foundation for Local Community Development — Shtip which works with the youth centres in Kochani and Shtip, providing support to the young people in these cities.

Apart from this, three CSOs also received financial support:

- HOPS Healthy Options Project Skopje, which, thanks to the donations from this event will send its experts to be field advisors, ready to respond to questions, offer help and promote healthy life choices. Their initiative is directed to educating young people on safety when experimenting with drugs in night clubs, parks and festivals. The research has shown that 70% of the young people experiment with drugs without having access to reliable information and support. There were donations for safe young people's curiosity and support to healthy life choices.
- To Baby Via In-Vitro Association, which offers support to families in fulfilling their wish for a child, by financing the difficult and expensive biofertilization treatments. From regular injections, to administrative labyrinths and many attempts again and again the biofertilization pathway is not easy. "To Baby via In-Vitro" helped 70 fellow citizens in fulfilling their wish to be a mom or a dad. There were donations for the babies that are still on their way.
- Association of People with Diabetes Ohrid, which works on educating the primary school students and providing first aid conditions for children with diabetes, creating support and awareness in the schools. There were donations for 500 primary school students to learn to keep their health and the health of their friends with diabetes. In this way, the care will be shared, the healthy food "in", and in the classrooms there will be first aid boxes with everything that is needed for a fast reaction of the teachers.

The donations were additionally increased thanks to the support of the companies such as "Telecom Foundation for Macedonia", "USJE Cement Factory". "EVN", "Farmahem", 'Veze Sharri" and "Uniqa Life" which doubled the values of individual donations.



Konekt's Executive Director Nikica Kusinikova stressed that these initiatives are of big importance for CSOs in conditions when financing is seriously limited and decreased.

"Whenever you have the chance, help a CSO, financially, by volunteering or in another way. This makes the circle even more important and gives the possibility for the citizens in solidarity and jointly to enable the organizations to maintain their programmes." Said Nikica Kusinikova.

The donor circle functions according to protected methodology and with the support of **The Funding Network**, where Konekt is an associative member, which guarantees transparency and effectiveness in the distribution of funds.



Initiative for Fair Financial Support to CSOs in Strumica



Representatives of the Women's Organization from Strumica had a meeting with the mayor of the Municipality of Strumica, Kostadin Kostadinov, on the issue of local self-government establishing a just, transparent and sustainable system for financing of CSOs from the municipal budget.

At the meeting, the three draft methodologies were presented, as well as the accompanying technical documentation, developed via a participatory process with an active participation of all stakeholders – members of the informal working group made by CSO representatives, cultural workers, municipal council members and municipality representatives.

The initiative that advocates introducing a fair financing model is part of the project "Active for Transparent and Sustainable Financing of CSOs", implemented by the Women's Organization from Strumica. The project aims to create a basis for long-term and systemic support to CSOs at local level, based on accountability and publicly accessible information.

The project is supported by an ad-hoc grant of the regional project "SMART Balkans – Civil Society for Connected Western Balkans", implemented by the Centre for Promotion of Civil Society (CPCD) from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Center for Research and Policy Creation (CRPC) from North Macedonia and the Institute for Democracy and Medication (IDM) from Albania, with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway.

"Kindness" Brings in Light and Dignity in the Lives of the Most Vulnerable



"Kindness" CSO which is active in supporting homeless people and socially endangered families and individuals has recently implemented two significant activities which have directly improved the life of the vulnerable categories of citizens – from legal battle for identity to returning the light in the homes without electricity.

The first story has a happy end for the twins born in Germany at the end of 2023 in a family with eight children. Immediately after the delivery, they were deported back to Macedonia, and the twins, although with German birth

certificates, remained unregistered in the Macedonian system and had no access to health care. Thanks to the legal protection provided by "Kindness", the procedure for belated registration in the record book of unregistered persons born abroad was started – a long and cumbersome process that finally ended successfully. The children were included in the health care system and they obtained health insurance. This intervention was part of the project ComHome, implemented with a financial support of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection of the Republic of Austria in North Macedonia.

Parallelly, then association has actively worked on improving the lives of the families that face electricity cuts due to debts. In June 2025, in cooperation with Ways2Help initiative, 47 electricity bills were paid for 22 families in the total amount of MKD 158,631. These activities are part of the continuous efforts of the association to intervene where there is no institutional support, while the needs are urgent and real. The bills are placed on Pay a Bill, where individual donors can choose which family they will help.

"Kindness" regularly implements activities like this one, not only for electricity bills, but also for food, clothes, shoes, hygienic products, medicines and other basic needs, always directed to those that face the biggest challenges. Anybody can join by paying on-line via Ways2Help platform or by donating to the Kindness fund for paying electricity bills by selecting the amount of the options offered.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

MoES Accepts CSO Initiative for Introduction of a Register of State Supported Students

One of the key recommendations of the project "Advocacy for Inclusive Development" which is implemented by the Forum for reasonable Policies (FRP), the Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities (ISSH-S) and the Balkan Institute for Regional Cooperation (BIRC) has been granted institutional support. The Minister of Education and Science, Vesna Janevska, announced establishing of a central digital register for all students supported by state scholarships that are studying or have studied abroad.

This measures comes from the analysis "Thick Knitting: On the Need for Networking in Education, Science and Knowledge Based Economy" which notes the lack of legal and institutional framework for systematic monitoring of the professionals educated abroad and stresses the need of networking in the education, science and knowledge based economy. With this announcement, MoES shows their openness for cooperation and listening to the expert and civic initiatives.

Minister Janevska stressed that the register will be voluntary in the part of public visibility of profiles, thus enabling that the students are recognised by interested institutions, including universities, chambers of commerce and research centres. "Our goal is to use their potential and connect them with the companies and universities in the country. With this register we will know if the students have returned, if they have graduated and where they have been engaged", she said.

Apart from the register, the analysis proposes that there are subsidies introduced for companies that will employ students from abroad with qualifications that lack, by involving the Ministry of Labour, Economy and Finance in creating measures to encourage engagement of highly quali-

fied professionals, from the diaspora, or foreign experts, in order to improve the competitiveness of the local economy.

The obligations of the supported students after their graduation are also precise. They will have to work in North Macedonia for double the time of the duration of their studies. If they are not offered appropriate job within six months after they return, their obligation is no longer valid. For those who temporarily remain abroad, a maximum of three years is allowed; afterwards they have to either come back or reimburse the funds.

"If they decide not to return to the country, they will have to reimburse the funds that the Ministry has paid them, no later than two years after the completion of their studies. In the past, the request was to reimburse the funds tenfold, which was not applicable", said Janevska. She added that around 50% of the 400 students supported so far have already returned and they work in the private sector. In the meantime, the calls for new scholarships for the academic 2025/2026 have been open with a support of USD 40,000 per scholarship for the universities ranked at the Shanghai list, as well as additional expenses for living, accommodation and transportation.

With these changes, the authorities try to overcome the weaknesses of the previous programmes and provide more efficient management of the invested public resources.

The original text published at BIRC is part of the project "Advocacy for Inclusive Development", financially supported by the Swiss Government via **Civica Mobilitas** programme.

HOPS Establishes a National System for Drug Prevention in High Schools in Cooperation with State Institutions

The usage of psychoactive substances with the young people is a serious challenge, especially in conditions when the research shows that almost 40% of the students experiment because of curiosity, while almost 30% because of their personal dissatisfaction. These figures are not only concerning statistics, but also a clear call for systemic action and long-term solutions.

In this context, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) made an important step forward, joining as an official partner in the project "Establishing a National System for Prevention of Drug Use in High Schools", which is implemented by HOPS — Healthy Life Options Skopje, with the support of the European Union via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDIHR).

This institutional involvement is a strong indicator for creating an enabling environment in which the state structures and civil society work together in the interest of the young people.

The project has been implemented since January 2025 and it aims to establish a national prevention programme which will be scientifically based, applicable and sustainable in the formal education. There are standards and educational contents created in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health and the Institute for Public Health. The project envisages involvement of more than hundred high schools from different regions of the country, as well as identification and training of at least 400 experts (teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and social workers) who will be directly involved in the implementation of the programme.

Parallelly to this, there will be a model-school developed as a specific example on how the new standards can function in practice, while public forums and educational events will be used to stimulate a broader discussion on the prevention as part of healthy growth and development of the young people. There will also be distribution of visual and educational materials – manuals, brochures and fliers that will help in the process of information and education.

"This is a key step to institutionalizing the prevention – not as an ad-hoc activity, but as a systemic approach that will protect health and future of the students in North Macedonia", add the people from HOPS.

This type of cooperation between the institutions and civil sector sets the foundations of a system based on proofs, involvement and care about the future of the young generation.

Register of Real Owners Reveals Former and Current Officials with Ownership of Companies Not Reported in Their Statements

In May, the Center for Civic Communications, the Association of Tax Advisors and Aktivo published their Research on Discovering Possible Conflict of Interests and Abuse of Power in Public Procurement with Politically Exposed Persons.

The research shows that the Register of Real Owners reveals the ownerships of companies of former and current mayors and ministers, who have not been reported in their statements of property and interests submitted to the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (DKSK).

Out of 360 analysed officials, 41 appear as real owners of some company, and as many as 23 have partially or fully concealed their participation in companies upon submitting their statements on property and interests to DKSK. These data indicate an absence of appropriate checks and verification of the accuracy of the data both in the Register of Real Owners and in the statements that the elected and appointed persons submit to DKSK.

Part of the companies associated with these persons have been granted contracts for public procurement, concessions and licences by public institutions, which increases the corruption risk even more.

Apart from this, the citizens, journalists and CSOs are limited in the possibility for control, because the access to the Register of Real Owners is not open and one has to pay for the information in it, while the data on the business interests of the officials in the publicly available electronic system of DKSK is incomplete. An additional obstacle is the fact that the statements submitted to DKSK by the end of 2023 is available only on paper.

The officials report their property and interests only regarding their closest family with whom they live, which additionally makes the full picture of the network of influence and ownership more difficult to see. In the absence of public, digital and comprehensive database, the citizens remain with a limited insight in the potential conflict of interest.

The research is part of the project "Using Data on Real Owners to Decrease Corruption", supported by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas.

CSOs as Enablers and Key Partners for Digital Transformation in the Parliament

The digital transformation of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia has been slowly gaining speed and it aspires to build an inclusive and modern parliamentary institution. The representatives of institutions, academic community and civil society have started discussions on how to create an enabling environment in which the citizens are active change makers rather than observers only.

Mila Josifovska Danilovska from Metamorphosis stressed the importance of the cooperation with the civil society in the development of the digital tools for the Parliament. "The value of the participation of the civil society in this process is multiple", she said and added that the civil society can help in bridging the gap between the institutions and citizens, promote transparent processes and digital tools that do not harm human rights and freedoms. Apart from this, according to Josifovska Danilovska, the trust in the Parliament can be increased by approximating the digital solutions to the citizens. In this sense, innovations, open data, digital rights or public policies often bring innovative solutions an designs directed to final beneficiaries.

Boban Stojanoski, Deputy Secretary General of the Parliament stressed that the institution was open for support

and expertise of external parties, including the civil sector:

"We create a modern Parliament and it cannot be achieved without the involvement of all stakeholders. The new Digitalization Strategy is our chance for joint transformation. Our goal is to improve the e-Parliament, the web page of the Parliament, to improve the software structure, as well as to improve the Internet. The digitalization will make the interinstitutional communication easier", said Stojanoski.

This view was supported by Karl-Morten Koppel from the ICT sector of the Estonian parliament, who used the Estonian examples to show how the civil sector and technological experts managed to improve the efficiency of the parliament via digital solutions.



He has especially stressed the use of artificial intelligence as a tool that, if implemented well, can increase the transparency and accessibility of data.

The university professor Boro Jakimovski stressed the academic capacities that the local experts can offer. He called for bigger usage of the local academic and expert potential, stressing that local capacities are crucial in creating sustainable and relevant digital solutions.

From the perspective of systemic functionality, Irena Bojadzievska from the Centre for Change Management (CCM) indicated the need of an analysis of the real capacities and needs of the administrative workers and the MPs: "It is important to map the needs of the employees and MPs. It is good to hear about successful examples, but we need to see where we are today, and after a while, when we finalize the strategy, we can tell how far we have gone", said Bojadzievska.

The Speaker of the Parliament Afrim Gashi stressed that the digital transformation is a specific implementation of the vision for open, efficient and trustable Parliament.

Although the digital transformation moves forward, as indicated by the data of the **reports on the digital progress of the country**, the process is still in its early phase. Therefore, it is necessary that the civil society continues to be actively involved as a controller, advisor and partner in its implementation.

Bitola Has Its Own Digital Cultural Calendar

In Bitola there was the final forum in which the **first Digital Cultural Calendar** of the city was presented, a tool which unites all cultural and sport events at one digital spot. The initiative is part of the project "Bitola 2.0 – Digital Municipality Closer to the Citizens", which is implemented with the support of the European Union and the Austrian Development Agency.

The tool will improve the information and access to cultural contents, especially for the young people from Bitola. Via public consultations, they stressed the need for a clear overview of an information source on everything that takes place in the city, for easier planning and following of the cultural life.

The new Digital Cultural Calendar, piloted by the municipality of Bitola with the support of Pro Local, European Union and the Austrian Development Agency, directly responds to this need and resolves the challenge of fragmented information on the events via many uncoordinated platform and channels. Besides being able to find all cultural and sport events at one place, the citizens will also be able to filter them per category, date, organizer or location, and subscribe for timely news, from any device.

There was also a Memorandum of Understanding signed at the Forum, between the Municipality of Bitola and 26 cultural providers from the city. They are all provided with access to the platform so that they can independently, timely and precisely publish and update the contents.

An important aspect of this new digital tools is its sustainability. The Digital Cultural Calendar is designed as an

official municipal web application, which is maintained together with the official web page of the Municipality of Bitola. This guarantees that the Calendar will remain functional, regularly updated and institutionally embedded for many more years. The development and coordination of the Calendar are done by the Cultural and Information Centre – Bitola, in the municipality. With this new step, Bitola joins culture and technology to respond to the real needs of its citizens, especially the young and make the cultural life of the city more visible, connected and more accessible for everybody.

The project is funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Austrian Development Agency, as part of the programme "Western Balkan Enablers for Reforming Public Administrations – WeBER 3.0".



World Health Day: What Is the Reality for Women, Girls and Vulnerable Groups in the Field?



The World Health Day this year is dedicated to the topic "Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Future" – a message that reminds us that health is the foundation for each story on development and dignified life. However, what does this mean in the reality for women, girls and vulnerable groups?

For many people, the access to **preventive** health care is still not a guaranteed right, but rather a privilege depending on the socio-economic status, place of living or personal circumstances. Women and girls face lack of accessible and quality services, especially when it comes to their reproductive health, screening programmes and preventive check-ups.

With the vulnerable communities, this reality is even more difficult, as the lack of appropriate information, financial barriers and discrimination often make the health services inaccessible.

Investments in health care, especially in prevention programmes are of crucial significance for the long-term improvement of public health; nevertheless, investments in this sector have remained limited. Since 2019 onwards, the state allocates on average no more than 10% of the budget of the Ministry of Health for preventive programmes, with the exception of 2021, when this percentage was temporarily increased to 18%. Instead of continuous growth, in the last year the budget for prevention programmes has decreased, especially in the areas such as the malignant diseases screening and prevention from contagious diseases. For example, the HIV prevention budget in 2019 was MKD 49,100,000, but until 2023 it was decreased for more than 60%, to MKD 19,469,000, which significantly limits the accessibility of these services for real prevention.

Women, girls and vulnerable groups most often face the biggest challenges when it comes to access to quality health services. Although the goal of the National Programme for Early Cervical Cancer Detection is to cover 75% of the women aged 21 to 59, according to the Analysis of the Programme for early detection and screening of malignant diseases, conducted by the civil sector, in reality only 15% were tested in the last three years. With breast cancer screening, the figures are even smaller – less than 10% of the women aged 50 to 69 were covered with the mammography check-up.

Although the rate of infant mortality has decreased, women, especially in the rural areas and from the vulnerable communities, such as the Roma still face serious obstacles.

In the country there are only 160 family gynaecologists, unevenly distributed, which means that many women have no access to regular check-ups during their pregnancies. The preventive gynaecological health care is late, thus endangering not only the reproductive, but also the overall health of women.

The activities are part of the project "Improving Health Rights of Women, Girls and Vulnerable Groups", implemented by HERA—Health Education and Research Association, in cooperation with the Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women—ESE, the Association Initiative for the Rights of Women from Shuto Orizari and the Association for Support of People Living with HIV—Stronger Together Skopje. The project is supported by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas.

You can read the complete news here.

"From Diversity to Justice – Equal in the Right to Healthy and Sustainable Environment for All"



On 16th June 2025, at the Europe House Skopje there was a thematic forum "From Diversity to Justice – Equal in the Right to Healthy and Sustainable Environment for All", organised by the partner organizations Centre for Youth Activism KRIK, Centre for Social Initiatives HOPE and the Association of Social Workers of Macedonia. The event was part of the project "Together for Green Advocacy for Environment Protection (ZZZ)", supported by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas programme; it has stressed the importance of creating inclusive, just and youth-informed environmental policies.

The event was opened by the project coordinator Angela Zdravkovska, with a speech presenting concerning data from the most recent national analysis. She stressed the main conclusions from the research, such as the information that more than 90% of the young people do not know where and how to report pollution, as well as the fact that 77.4% would volunteer for environment protection, if given the chance.

In the continuation of the Forum, there was a panel discussion entitled "Youth, Climate Justice and Institutions", moderated by Ana Zafirova. The panel connected the voices of the young people, the institutions and the civil sector in order to open a dialogue on climate justice, environmental inequality and the need for systemic involvement of the young people in the environmental policies.

The participants in the panel were Dushica Perishik, Executive Director of ZELS, Andrijana Gjelevska, expert on action research and author of part of the national analysis, Filip Ivkovski, former President of the National Youth Council of Macedonia, Aleksandra Dimitrievska Avramovska, Head of the Communal Inspection and Environment Inspection Department at Gazi Baba Municipality.

The event was also the first official presentation of the document "From Diversity to Justice — Equal in the Right to Healthy and Sustainable Environment for All", which is a comprehensive national analysis conducted in the eight planning regions of the country. The analysis is a result of a comprehensive action research which included: a survey of more than 1,200 young people from all eight planning regions, 18 focus groups with 148 young participants, eight round tables with 128 participants — representatives of municipalities, youth councils, social services and CSOs, as well as 11 individual interviews with stakeholders.

The research has shown that the climate and environmental problems do not concern everybody equally—the young people from the Polog region, rural environments, Roma communities, or the young people with disabilities are most often excluded from the processes, but most directly affected by the consequences. At the same time, they also have the biggest will to be engaged, if given the space and support.

ZZZ project aspires to fill in this gap – to connect the environmental with the social the youth with politics and build a new model of green advocacy where the young people are creators rather than an audience. The thematic focus was only the first step – there will be follow-up activities, local workshops, advocacy initiatives and presentations at local level, in order to have bigger visibility of the analysis, but also an encouragement to action.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Successfully Held Regional Conference on Financial Literacy of the Young People in Radovish



On 17th June 2025, at the offices of the Creative Community Centre NEKSUS in Radovish, there was a Regional Conference "Financial Literacy for the Young" – an event that opened important issues and topics related to financial education of the young, their economic independence and the role of all community stakeholders in improving financial culture.

The conference brought together more than 30 participants from the south-east region—young people, teachers, representatives of the local self-government, business sector and CSOs, who discussed together about the real challenges that the young people face in the area of financial knowledge and personal finance management.

In the four-hour programme, four key topics were covered:

- Financial education and formal education — The participants opened a debate on the question why financial literacy has not become part of the curricula yet, how the young people obtain (or do not obtain) knowledge about money and what can be done to improve this situation via informal and participatory learning.
- Consumer culture and "fast money" With real examples, the influence of social networks on young people was stressed, as well as the excessive spending and easy availability of micro-loans and on-line shopping. There was a discussion on the need of critical thinking and developing of conscious habits with the young people.
- Money psychology The session analysed the emotional aspects of spending, the connection between personal values and financial choices, as well as the importance of self-discipline and priority setting.

Budgeting at various levels – From personal to municipal budgets: there was a discussion on the role of planning with the young people, but also with institutions, businesses and CSOs, stressing the importance of transparency, responsibility and joint inclusion in the processes of budget creation and monitoring.

An especially interesting session was the one on "Young People Ask — Experts Respond", where the young people asked specific questions to the financial advisors and institution representatives — covering topics such as saving, setting up the budget, choosing expense monitoring applications and managing long-term financial goals.

Apart its educational character, the conference was also used as a networking platform, exchange of ideas and stimulating new initiatives in the local communities. The participants expressed the need that these topics have a continuity and approximate the young people even more—via workshops, trainings, digital resources and cooperation with educational institutions.



The conference was organised as part of the project "Youth Network for Financial Literacy at the Southeast", which aims to improve the level of financial literacy, enable practical tools and access to resources for the young people from the Southeast region. The project is supported by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas programme, and it is implemented by the associations KRUNA PLUS from Radovish, Primo Idea and Novus from Strumica.

First Regional Networking of Rural Women from the North-East: Loud and Together for Changes

Women from rural areas in the north-east region, who have rarely been given space and support for active participation in the public life, met for the first time at a regional networking meeting in Kriva Palanka, organised in order to stimulate women's participation in local decision making and civil activism. This is the first of the three planned regional meetings within the project "Active Women".

The event brought together the women from the settlements of Karposh and Pukovsko from Kumanovo, Konopica, Mozdivnjak and Durachka reka/Stanci from Kriva Palanka and Ketenovo, Shelogov and Turalevo from Kratovo, who shared their personal experience, challenges and initiatives directed to improvement of the conditions in their communities.

Motivated for action and initiative

"I come to such an organised event from the first time and I feel motivated to act in my community. Networking enables the voice of the rural women to be heard more when creating local policies, while the joint action contributes to a more efficient resolving of the crucial challenges that we all face with", stressed Emilija Jakimovska from Karposh settlement of Kumanovo.

Stressing the importance of women's connecting ad encouragement, a similar message was sent by Svetlana Kirova from Shlegovo, who expects specific changes in her community.

"Although women face numerous barriers, the change has already started. Upon our initiative, we have rehabilitated the local community building, which is a huge step forward for the whole village. This move is not only an expression of our wish, but also a clear and real need. It shows that when women join and undertake initiative, they can contribute for real changes in the community", said Kirova.

Challenges and barriers

Despite the growing will for changes, rural women also discussed the main reasons for poor women's activism. They face the deeply rooted social barriers that make their active role in the community more difficult.

The regional meeting was a proof that when women connect, they encourage and support each other and a real change is born. By exchanging experience, lessons learnt and personal stories, they were building solidarity and giving new ideas. This is only a beginning of a stronger, more connected and loud women's network.

The project "Active Women" is implemented by the Humanitarian Association "Mother" from Kumanovo, in partnership with the Regional Center for Sustainable Development from Kratovo, RCS "Spektar" from Kriva Palanka and the Foundation for Small and Medium Enterprise Development from Kumanovo. The project is supported by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas programme, which is implemented by MCIC.

You can read the complete news here.

Women and Girls in the First Rows of Civic Activism



The Women's Organization of the Municipality of Sveti Nikole (OZOSVN) showed again what civic engagement means in action. When the young people, especially girls, are given space, support and mentorship, they do not only grow, but also change their communities.

From April to June 2025, OZOSVN implemented a number of activities. Via educational workshops, trainings, volunteer actions and networking meetings, a new generation of aware, active and self-confident citizens was created – "mentors of the future", which know how to recognise a problem and initiate a solution.

The workshops on the topic of "Be the Change – Lead to Change", "Girls in Action" and "Own Your Power" have stimulated personal growth, critical thinking and communication skills, but also a deepened understanding of gender equality, feminism and civic responsibility. One the key activities was the three-day training in Ohrid – "We Grow Together – Skilful, Brave, Our Own", where some twenty girls from the Vardar and East regions learned key skills and created a new network of youth solidarity. They learned and spoke about communication, team work, emotional intelligence and leadership. The goal of the training was to encourage and build loud, active and self-confident young women, who recognise and aspire to real changes in the community.

Parallelly, with the project "Promotion of Safe School Environment", the mentors worked directly with students in primary and secondary schools. The topics such as peer violence, mental health and cyber violence were not only theoretically analysed, but the students also actively proposed and implemented their own initiatives, creating youth corners as safe spaces for sharing and growth.

Volunteer work was visible in the initiative "Day of Good Deeds" where students and mentors sent a message of care for the environment and community by planting trees and artistic graffiti.

Especially inspirational were the meeting with women fire fighters and representatives of Florian Operation where there were discussions about gender inclusion and volunteering in the firefighting sector, areas where girls dare more and more to enter and leave their mark.

With a consistent dedication and understanding of the local co next, OZOSVN not only motivates the young people to get involved, but it also changes the culture of civic engagement, from passive waiting to active work. Therefore, it is not by chance that this organization has been given "The Mark of Trust" as a recognition for its transparency, efficiency and dedication in building a better society. The mark is given to CSOs that apply the best international practices in their work and it aims to strengthen the confidence in the CSOs in a long term.

You can read more on each of the activities mentioned in the text, as well as on other OZOSVN activities in their **e-bulletin**.

CSOs in the First Rows in Shar-Korab Protection: First Cross-Border Patrol Took Place



On 30th June 2025, there was the first joint cross-border patrol in the protected mountain area of Shar-Korab, at the border pyramid no. 9, in the region of Velivar mountain, within Mavrovo National Park and the protected zone of Korab-Koritnik, near the villages of Zhirovnica (North Macedonia) and Rabdisht (Albania).

The goal of the patrol was to increase the efficiency in the supervision and complete monitoring of the cross-border protected zones, as well as improved revealing and prevention of illegal activities.

This activity would not be possible without the involvement of the CSOs that have cross-border cooperation and put efforts in building a protection system that goes beyond administrative borders. The patrol is part of the project "Protection and Sustainable Use of Protected Areas of the Shar Mountain, Mavrovo and Korab-Koritnik", implemented by the Centre for Sustainable Community Debar (CSCD), the Albanian Centre for Local Democracy Development (ALCDF) and LAG Tourist Debar with the financial support if Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT).

In the patrol, there were teams made by local park keepers, experts from Mavrovo National Park, Shar Mountain National Park, Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, border police, fire fighters, as well as local inhabitants from the two countries.

The North Macedonia team started from the pastures at the village of Zhirovnica with a more than 10 km walk, and the Albanian team from Ilnica summer sheepfold to the pastures above the village of Rabdisht, around 8.5 km. After the meeting, the patrol continued with a drone and binoculars, mapping and recording signs of illegal picking of medicinal herbs, excessive grazing, illegal crossings of tourists, hunting bullet shells, as well as other interventions of the local people.

There were also wild goats, bears, deer, eagles and their most frequent corridors noted. At the same time, critical zones with fire risks were noted. This is the first time that such an action was implemented in coordination with such a broad scope of parties from both countries.

These actions are an example of how CSOs can effectively connect the local population, institutions and nature in protection of joint natural heritage, and establish sustainable models for cross-border cooperation.

The meeting ended with exchange of information, experience and defining the need of constant coordination. The Albanian side undertook an obligation to strengthen the controls at the points for picking medicinal herbs, especially when it comes to protection of blueberry leaves, Orchis roots and primula.

157 Trees Planted in Memory of the Workers Killed in 2024

This year too, the Macedonian Association for Protection at Work (MZZPR) marked 28th April – World Day of Safety and Health at Work, which is celebrated in memory of the workers who lost their lives due to injuries at work or occupational hazards at global level

This year, the campaign of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is dedicated to the theme "New Era in Health and Safety: The Role of Artificial Intelligence and Digitalization at Work". The focus is on the challenges and possibilities which the new technologies bring in the area of safety and health at work.

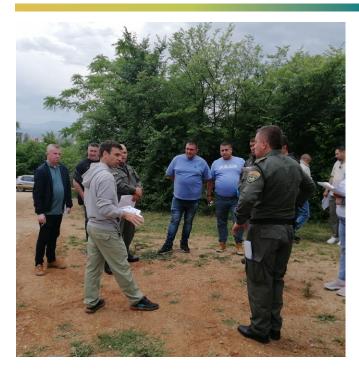
In partnership with the Municipality of Aerodrom, the companies Unifgrand and Amfenol Technology Macedonia, as well as with the support of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Macedonia, MZZPR continued the tradition started in 2019 to plant trees in honour of killed workers. This year, on "Serbia" boulevard, in the Municipality of Aerodrom, 17 trees were planted, as a symbol of the number of workers who were killed at work in 2024.

MZZPR presented their 2024 Annual Report on Injuries and Accidents at Work, which confirms the seriousness of the challenge, or that one still gets killed at work.

At MZZPR they say that raising the awareness on safe and healthy work conditions has to remain a priority, especially at the time when digital transformation changes work processes and opens new questions on worker protection.



REFORD with Field Trainings for Better Forest Protection



The Regional Centre for Forestry and Rural Development – REFORD organised two regional trainings within the project "2F – Forest Fight" intended for increasing the capacities of the forest police. The trainings were conducted at the foot of the Gazi Baba Park Forest in Skopje and at Preseka location, at the regional road Kichevo-Ohrid. The trainings

were attended by 28 representatives of the forest police from 13 stations, and the focus was on the application of modern technology for monitoring and protection of forest areas. The participants could practically work with drones (DJI Mavic Pro and DJI Mavic 2 Enterprise), the mobile GPS application Waypoints, as well as supervision cameras intended for monitoring of field activities. The technological capacities of the drones were presented: flight length, flight height, battery life, taking photographs and video recordings, programming of flying routes, etc. Part of the participants had the possibility to fly the drones themselves. With the mobile GPS application, the members of the forest police will be able to set the precise coordinates of the location in which that they are interested. In this way, they will be able to determine if something takes place in the forest, at agricultural land, at state or private property.

With this initiative, REFORD contributes to strengthening the institutional response to illegal cutting and other threats to forest ecosystems, putting technology in service of nature protection.

The project **2F – Forest Fight**, which started on 12th March 2025 and will last until the end of February 2026 is being implemented with the support of the Forest Service International Foundation. The goal of the project is to enable the institutions and the citizens for effective fight against the illegal forest cutting.

Most Massive Eco-Action of "Generalka Weekend" with Record Results



With a record involvement of 55,627 volunteers and more than 645 thousand kilos of waste collected at the territory of all municipalities in the country, the fifth jubilee edition of "Generalka Weekend" environmental action that took place from 9th—11th May 2025 ended. The action is part of a big volunteer campaign from citizens to citizens, organised by Man & Mountain association. According to the results, this is the most massive and most successful eco-action in the country so far. More than 600 organizations, institutions and companies, environmental, civil sport associations, pensioner organizations, public institutions, local and urban communities, kindergartens, schools, faculties and national parks participated in the three-day action.

The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning supported the action, and the Vice Prime Minister of the Government and Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning Izet Mexhiti stated: "Waste does not belong to the street or in the nature. The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MZSPP) supports all actions where there is strong initiative, inclusiveness and desire to be part of the changes that will enable better future for us and for the next generations. On our way to Europe, we should behave in a European way."

Apart from MZSPP, the action was also supported by the Association of the Local Self-Government Units (ZELS), the Red Cross, and with the help of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and UNICEF, "Generalka Weekend" has been included in the educational project "Eco Lesson" for the first time.

The students of all schools were involved in the three-day cleaning. On 9th May, they cleaned the schools together with their teachers, on 10th May they cleaned the homes and yards of their families and on 11th May the parks and

picnic locations in their vicinity. More than 36,000 students and 1,900 teachers participated, and with their activities in their surrounding they contributed for cleaner environment, and the results of their work were presented in the schools.

"The educational system directs the young people to take care of the environment in which they live. The curricula in all grades have elements that raise the awareness about the pollution risks and stimulate prevention action. However, with more partners from the educational institutions and good initiatives that are easily recognisable, the ecological education can be constantly improved", said the Minister of Education and Science Vesna Janevska.

The opening of "Generalka Weekend" eco-action was attended by the President Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, the President of ZELS and Mayor of the Municipality of Kisela Voda Orce Gjorgjievski, the Director of the Sector for Corporative Policies and Sustainability of Skopje Brewery Snezana Savik-Dimovska, the Austrian Ambassador Martin Pammer, the Mayor of the Municipality of Chair Visar Ganiu, representatives of the Office for Protection of Cultural Heritage, representatives of the embassies in Macedonia.

Since the beginning in 2021, more than 100,000 volunteers have participated in "Generalka Weekend" eco-action, more than 1.5 million kilos of waste have been collected, more than 1,000 locations have been cleaned, and more than 125,000 plants have been planted to various barren locations: around Mladost Lake in Veles, the village of Koljvija in the Municipality of Petrovec, at Kokino megalithic observatory and in the Municipality of Staro Nagorichane.

Projects that Improve the Life of the Citizens

The "Ambassador Club" of Macedonia 2025 donated MKD 538,000 for rehabilitation of the rooms at the children's ward at "Sveti Erazmo" special hospital in Ohrid.

This donation will improve the conditions were the youngest patients are accommodated, in order to create a more comfortable and more pleasant environment for them and their families. The funds are intended for improving the infrastructure and the conditions for stay and treatment, which will provide a more quality health care service.

"Our goal is to support projects that improve the life of the citizens and leave a permanent impact in the community. This donation is a sign of dedication of the members of Macedonia 2025 to Macedonia and our joint vision for better future for the children," said a representative of the Club.

The "Ambassador Club" of Macedonia 2025 is a network of distinguished professionals, visionaries and leaders who contribute for the economic and social development of Macedonia with their activities.



"Every Child Deserves Support and Place in the Society"

In April, the Month of Awareness Raising on Autism, the Association of Parents of Children with Autism Blue Puzzle was supported and recognised by the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth.

The State Secretary Fatmir Sabriu visited the day-care centre that is managed by the association in the interest of the children with autistic spectrum of disorders, stressing the importance of creating a society inclusive for all. "This month is more than symbolic. It is a reminder of the importance of understanding, accepting and support to the people with autism and their families. Today I want to stress once again – autism is not a disease. It is a spectre, difference, way of perceiving the world that does not have to be changed but accepted and understood. People with autism are unique – with their talents, interests, abilities and ways of communication. Our role as a society is to create a space where they will feel safe, heard and valued. Therefore, now we have a clear message: acceptance starts with understanding. Let us break the prejudices. Let us replace fear from the unknown with a desire to learn and cooperate. Let us enable inclusive schools in every community and inclusive institutions in each municipality. Let us not forget – differences do not divide us, they enrich us," stressed Sabriu in his address.

Blue Puzzle has been working in the field for several years, with parents, children and experts, building a space that does not only offer support, but it changes the perception about autism in the society. The opening of the day-care centre is a key step that deserves institutional support and recognition.



Sabriu said that the Ministry remains a partner to these civic initiatives and continues with the support to the associations in their fight to equal opportunities. "Let us build a world where diversity is celebrated rather than hidden. Every child with autism is different, but every child deserves the same: love, support and place in the society. Let us be the voice which encourages, the hand that supports, the heart that understands," he said.

Kriva Palanka with Young Creators: Podcast as a New Classroom at "Ilinden" Primary School



In the media club at "Ilinden" primary school from Kriva Palanka, podcast has become an innovative learning tool. Thanks to the club that actively functions in the school, the students have started producing their school podcast, via which they research the themes from their classes, talk about school life and interview teachers and classmates.

The teacher and club mentor, Dobri Jovevski, says that the podcast gives the students an opportunity to be heard, to discuss, interview and create media contents with a clear structure and goal. Via the process of research, script writing, recording and editing, they go through all stages of production of a modern media product, they obtain important skills such as digital literacy, critical thinking and team work.

The media club functions with the support of the Macedonian Institute of Media (MIM), which provides trainings and media support for the teachers and students. Besides the technical implementation of the podcast, there is stress on the development of the media literacy, responsible communication and creative thinking. The goal is to produce creative contents and build a culture of media literacy and responsible media use since the youngest age. This activity is based on successful educational practices in countries such as the USA and Finland, where podcast is used as a tool to include the students in the learning process.

With such initiatives, the students do not only enrich their education, but they also build a feeling of self-confidence, responsibility and awareness about the role of the media in the society. The project is an example of how the schools, with limited resources but with strong support and good ideas, can inspire the young people to become active citizens and media literate people

The original text was published by the author Aleksandar Manasiev at the web-page of the Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM).



Voluntary Firefighting Association (DPD) Sveti Nikole Celebrates 90 Years of Its Existence



Under the motto "90 Years of Humanity, Courage and Dedication", the voluntary firefighting association (DPD) Sveti Nilkole celebrated nine decades of its existence this year.

Founded in 1935, the association has turned into a symbol of love, solidarity and courage in the community. Their mission to protect the citizens and the nature has remained unchanged nowadays, 90 years later.

DPD Sveti Nikole works on prevention, for prevention of the environment and nature from fires and other harmful influences on voluntary basis, via education and coordination of the citizens in direct actions and interventions.

During its existence, the members of DPD Sveti Nikole have extinguished more than 10,000 fires, and they have successfully intervened in more than 20 bigger floods. The association has also participated in rescue missions at two earthquakes. During the Covid-19 pandemic, they conducted more than 150 actions to disinfect the streets and they made three innovative points for vehicle disinfection.

Every year there are actions for foresting burnt areas, by planting more than 1,000 new trees. They actively work on education of the participants via preventive programmes,

they implement exercises for evacuation in schools, they prepare fire protection projects and evacuation plans, thus increasing the safety culture in the community. "We stand with the same passion, same determination and even bigger love to our community and nature", stress the people at the association.

They expressed their huge satisfaction to all generations of fire fighters, supporters and friends that have participated in the creation of this institution. There was a special call to the young people to join and be part of the future of the voluntary firefighting in Sveti Nikole and Macedonia. "If you have a heart that beats strong to help, for the others and real human values, come, join us, participate in this timeless mission of ours", they said the DPD Sveti Nikole.

Read more on the **activities** and involvement of the firefighting unit DPD Sveti Nikole in dealing with **all kinds of incidents**.





Women from the Rural Areas Encouraged and Organised for Changes in the Local Communities



"I feel encouraged more self-confident and sufficiently informed about my rights, but also about the obligations of the municipality to respond to the demands of the women from rural areas and include them in the local policy creation. What is most important, for the first time I found out that we are not alone in this process, but that we have the support of the CSOs to work together and fulfil our needs. Now I know that the voice of a woman can become strong when it is supported by the community and joint with other women that believe in changes", says Anita Ristovska from the Kriva Palanka village of Mozhdivnjak.

Hew empowerment for civic engagement in the local community is a result of the active participation in the informative and educational workshops within the project "Active Women", that is implemented by the Humanitarian Association "Mother" from Kumanovo, in partnership with the Regional Centre for Sustainable Development from Kratovo, RCS "Spektar" from Kriva Palanka and the Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation from Kumanovo. The goal is to apply models for citizen participation in decision making at local level via gender sensitising of the tools so that they fit the needs of the rural women to work independently and contribute to the adoption of programmes and budgets of the municipalities of Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka and Kratovo. The project is supported by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas programme, implemented by MCIC.

Young Ristovska as a local animator showed that she was able to mobilise the women from her community. The citizens of Mozhdivnjak have not known so far what the competencies of the local self-government were and about its obligation to respond to the needs of the citizens. After the education, they were familiar with the possibilities for communication with the institutions, the meaning of joint approach and the methods for identifying the priority problems. At the same time, they showed their interest in being included in advocacy actions.

Read the complete story.

New Cooperation Possibilities for Waste Management



"Pakomak" company which has been working on packaging waste selection and processing for 15 years met with representatives of CSOs supported by Civica Mobilitas to strengthen the cooperation and improve the waste selection system. The meeting took place on 24th April 2025 at the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC).

The representative of "Pakomak" Iko Brdaroski presented their current activities, stressing the investments in infrastructure and citizen education on the significance of recycling. One of the key projects of the company is establishing a smart system for packaging waste management, in cooperation with the Swiss Embassy. The project lasts for 38 months and it implies an installation of 70 vending machines for return of packaging, as well as development of software and sensors for monitoring how full the containers are.

"Pakomak cooperates with 68 municipalities in the country, which is around 80% coverage at national level. At the moment, all 1,700 containers that are available have built-in sensors that signalise how full they are, which provides for optimization of the waste collection routes and decrease of expenses", stressed Brdaroski, adding that Macedonia is the first country in Europe with 100% coverage with such a smart system. He added that additional placement of 80 vending machines is planned for the next three to four years. "When the number of vending machines reaches 200, the system will move from the current "green point" model to a money deposit, a model that has been functioning successfully in many western European countries", said Brdaroski.

Apart from the investments in infrastructure, "Pakomak" implements a number of activities for education and public awareness raising via advertising and promotional materials in markets, schools and shopping centres.

"Although the budget for educational activities is legally limited to 5-15%, we need synergy with the local companies and organizations for more efficient spreading of ecological awareness", stressed Brdaroski.

The CSO representatives said that better coordination is needed between communal enterprises and municipalities, especially when it comes to unifying the regional approach to waste. Bojana Stanojevska from the Centre for Climate Changes stressed that the "primary plastic selection should

be gradually introduced in all households, parallelly to the introduction of the vending machines", adding that the projects funded by Civica Mobilitas actively work on creating habits for selection and primary sorting with the citizens.

Read the complete news.

Support to CSOs in Developing of Their Social Marketing Plans



Simon Forrester, the international expert of Civica Mobilitas had consultative meetings with five CSOs, current grantees of the programme where there was a discussion on developing social marketing plans. The visits took place in the period of 12th-14th May 2025, as a continuation of the previous trainings and workshops on sustainable financing.

The representatives of the Loud Textile Worker – Shtip, the Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI) – Gostivar, Center for Education and Development (CED) – Tearce, Center for Youth Activism KRIK – Skopje, and the Center for Climate Changes – Gevgelija use this tailor-made support to prepare social marketing plans as strategic tools that will help them to better position their mission, increase their visibility and provide additional self-sustainability resources.

At each of the meetings, there was an analysis of the current communication practice of the organization, target groups were analysed and ideas for campaigns and messages were developed, in order to be used for promotion and support mobilization. Simon Forrester offered practical tools and examples, guiding the organizations in the process of developing their own approach to social marketing.

These visits have strengthened Civica Mobilitas mission about building strong, visible and sustainable CSOs, which are connected with the communities to which they serve and know how to transfer their message.

Civic Participation, Volunteering and Local Involvement Also Important for European and African Organizations



Representatives of Civica Mobilitas, PACT from Tunisia and FAMOC from Mali participated at the experience exchange workshop organised by the partner organization NIRAS from 14th to 16th May in Denmark.

The presentation of the three programmes was a good basis for a discussion related to civic participation, local community development, as well as support and cooperation with the authorities. The common thread of the three programmes are the activities for stimulation of civic participation, volunteer strengthening and involvement at local level.

NIRAS colleagues also organised visits to two CSOs. It was useful to hear the experiences of the Foundation for Social Responsibility, an interesting example where women migrants have the main role, functioning as a support network for other migrant women that need help. The

help can be from simple socialization to support in access to education, possibilities for work or asking/obtaining services from public institutions. The engagement is on volunteer basis, and there are more such centres in the country. In the second organization, the City House (Byens Hus), which is located at Roskilde municipality, there was a presentation of the possibilities that they offer the citizens, such as using rooms for various activities where there are tools, books, creative corners, etc. The way of sustaining was also explained, in addition to the support of the municipality and the contribution that they have for the city and the community.

The NIRAS colleagues presented part of their activities, such as the NIRAS SDC Client Platform and Leading the

EU Civil Society Operational Facility, and the participants could also hear and discuss about the best ways to involve the citizens and the community and examples for public advocacy before local authorities.

The representatives of the three organizations shared lessons learnt. The experiences of the others, although from different contexts, van always be an inspiration in planning of the next steps.

Civic Involvement in Macedonia

The research "Civic Engagement 2024" reveals important findings about the citizen participation in different ways of association, political non-partisan activities and volunteering, as well as the reasons for (non)involvement and motivation for civic engagement. Almost half of the citizens (46.8%) do not know what the ways of association would be that would contribute to their needs. Out of those that gave a positive response, most numerous are (23.1%) the citizens that think that churches and religious communities are the way of association that contributes to supporting their needs. Unlike them, the political parties are the ones least selected by the respondents (5.3%).

As far as the political non-partisan activities are concerned, the citizens have most often practiced signing petitions and participating in peaceful protests (21.1% and 24.8% respectively). Compared to 2021, there is a 15.0% and 14.1% respective growth with these two activities. Unfortunately, the number of those who would never participate in these activities has also grown, and the differences are between 6.4% and 24.5%. Another piece of bad news is the drop of potential participants, i.e. those who have not participated, but would do it in the future. The decrease moves from 17.9% to 24.2%. demographically, the differences in age are the most striking, as the young people (18-29 years of age) are more prepared to participate, while the percentage of those who would never participate grows with the increase of age.

Personal reasons, i.e. lack of interest or will to participate at the most usual reasons for 46.8% of the respondents not to participate in non-partisan, political activities. The second most often mentioned reason is being too busy (25.3%) and the third one is not being informed (10.3%). Personal reasons prevail with older respondents, especially with those older than 65 (55.9%), while with the young people (18-29 years of age) it is being too busy (28.9%) or lack of information (10.2%).

Membership in CSOs is at an exceptionally low level, only 4.2% of the respondents stated that they are members of a CSO. The reasons for not being members of around one third of the respondents 933.8%) were personal (lack of interest or refusal to participate) and being too busy or not informed were the reasons for 24.5% and 7.9% of the respondents respectively.

The citizens prefer to volunteer in social and humanitarian organizations. The total of 30.1% of the respondents stated that they had already volunteered or would like to volunteer in such organizations. There is also readiness to volunteer in environmental organizations (26.5%) and organizations that work on culture and education (23.3%).

To the research "Civic Engagement 2024"



Accessible and Confidential Services Create a Strong Basis for Changes in Pelagonija



"I suffered domestic violence for years, but I did not know where to go. I had no finances to pay a lawyer, nor support from my family. With the project 'Her Voice — Her Power', I received free legal aid. It helped me understand that I have rights and that I do not have to be a victim until the end of my life. Thanks to the team, I started a protection procedure. Now I am stronger and more secure. This project has changed my life", says a 32-year old woman from the municipality of Dolneni.



Lack of information and access to services have influenced the quality of life of the population in Pelagonija. The girls from the rural areas rarely spoke about anxiety or depression, and when they would find the courage they had no place to ask for confidential psycho-social help. In order to fill in these gaps, in 2024 the Centre for Civic Initiative—Prilep, together with the Station PET Association

for Legal Education and Transparency and the Multi-ethnic association for All Ages from Crnilishte, Dolneni, started the project "Her Voice – Her Power: Empowering the marginalised Women and Girls in Pelagonija", supported by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas.

"More and more, women ask for help in cases related to domestic violence and discrimination at work. Many of the beneficiaries are from rural areas of the Pelagonija region, most often women with low level of education, unemployed or economically dependent. They face difficulties that have been kept quiet for a long time due to fear, not being informed or being isolated", says Talija Petreska, the legal advisor at the project.

Although primarily intended for women, the project is not reserved for them only. "As a single father, I faced many difficulties — especially administrative obstacles to fulfil my right to health insurance for my child. I did not know where to go, the documents were returned several times. Then I found out about the project and I received free legal aid. The lawyer helped me prepare the needed documentation. Thanks to the support, my child now has a regular access to health care", explained his experience a 48-year old single father from Prilep.

You can read the complete story here.

Youth Power against Climate Threats in Ohrid, Struga and Debar



How does it look when three CSOs join forces to enable the young people to become movers of changes? How does it look when the lake becomes a classroom, and the ship a stage for the voice of youth and science? The project "Let's learn about Climate Changes" gave this opportunity to the generations that learn, cooperate, imagine solutions and bravely walk to sustainable future.

Implemented by the Poreche Scout Brigade "Krste Jon" – Struga, the association Centre for Sustainable Community Development – Debar and the Regional Green Centre – Ohrid, supported by Civica Mobilitas via the Swiss Government, the project is focused on the children and youth from Struga, Ohrid and Debar. The initiative has crossed the barriers of age, language and municipalities, building a joint network of knowledge, empathy and action.

One of the series of activities that marked this initiative started with a two-day training in Struga, where 30 young participants were given the basis of project work: from call analysis, goal setting, to preparation of a logical framework and budget creation. For many of them, this was the first time that they got acquainted with the concepts that are the foundation for civic activism. "It was very interesting, there was time spent together, team work, many experiences that I would not expect in everyday life, unless we were in this project", says Miona Kralj (13), a participant from Struga. "Now I already have some knowledge about how to write a project, and that makes me more secure".

This training was an introduction to the five-day youth camp on climate changes. A dynamic, educational and emotional experience in which the young people continued what they had started. Their task was ambitious, i.e. they had to come up with a project application on climate issues, which can be realistically implemented in their municipalities. However, it was even more important to create something of their own, something that reflects their concerns and their dreams.

You can read the complete story here.

Cooperation between the Civil Sector and Municipalities Will Help in Building Transparent Local Government



This year's Civica Mobilitas Networking Meeting (25th to 27th June 2025), which took place in Gevgelija, gathered around 80 CSO representatives from the whole country. The meeting was dedicated to improving the cooperation and formulating joint proposals for improving local democracy, especially with respect to the forthcoming local elections. The focus was on the possibility for renewing Citizen Platform as a mechanism for uniting the civil sector and strengthening its voice in public policy creation. Besides the colleagues from the sector, the participants at the meeting had the opportunity to discuss with the Swiss Ambassador, H.E. Véronique Hulman, the Minister of Local Self-Government Zlatko Perinski and the Deputy Director of the Association of Local Self-Government Units (ZELS) Ardita Dema Mehmeti.

Aleksandar Krzhalovski, Civica Mobilitas Team Leader, stressed the importance of the collective engagement and announced the "capitalization" process of the biggest civil society support programme that has been supported by the Swiss Government for almost two decades.

The participants discussed the Council for Cooperation and Development of the Civil Sector, as a crucial mechanism for institutional dialogue. Nikica Kusinikova, the President of the Council and Executive Director of Konekt said that the Council is important, albeit often ignored. According to her, it should be used as a permanent advocacy tool, rather than in crisis moments only. "I do not represent only my organization in the Council, but the sector as a whole. I

want the information on the work of the Council to reach as many organizations as possible, and that each one of them has the opportunity to be involved," stressed Kusinikova talking about the coming closer to CSOs and increasing transparency. Valentina Velichkovska, a member of the Council from the Citizen Resource Centre called the Council a "bridge" between the organizations and institutions, stressing that, according to the latest research, 56% of the CSOs recognise it as relevant. The participants suggested that the communication could be improved via monthly newsletters and the accountability of the Council should be increased.

At the Networking Meeting there was a discussion about the possibilities for creating a platform of CSOs. "The more and more frequent demands for solidarity in the civil sector and the need for mutual support motivated us to open the issue of building a platform in this CSO forum", said Gonce Jakovleska from Civica Mobilitas. The experiences from the Citizen Platform of Macedonia (GPM) which was created in 2004 were shared with the participants.

You can read the complete news here.



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