



CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

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LET'S SOLVE IT TOGETHER!

These protests have shown that courage and perseverance can change a lot. From fight to air – to an example for humanity and togetherness. Let this also be an inspiration for the other initiatives throughout Macedonia", this was said to the citizens who gathered by one of the members of the independent initiative "Stop to Vardarishte", which had protested against the pollution of Vardarishte landfill for 40 days.

The initiative was started by the citizens who asked for clean air, healthy environment and responsible institutions. They clearly stated their demands and submitted them to the institutions in charge.

The protest was paused only after part of their demands had started to be implemented, in order to give the institutions space to finish their work. However, they warned: "if the process stops, if the promises are not fulfilled, we will return again, stronger and more numerous than ever!"

These initiatives are wind in the back of the civic engagement. Although we often hear that the citizens are not interested, indifferent, passive, still, in every part of the country one can find activists who tirelessly work on their goals.

Maybe the information on their activities is not very visible, but they are there, dedicated to the people with whom they work and they are persistent in what they want to achieve.

Many of us are part of this civic engagement. Sometimes we are not aware that by participating in some activities we build this activist network. Sometimes these are protests, but more often it is trainings, workshops, children's and youth camps, field actions, mini campaigns, debates, analyses...

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All of these activities enable us to build our knowledge and skills so that we use them demanding and contributing to the changes in our communities and in the society as a whole. None of the people involved in these activities has been excluded from interactions with the environment via which he/she influences the others.

In this way, consciously or unconsciously we all contribute to civil activism that helps us strengthen democracy from below. Civil engagement informs, includes and keeps the institutions accountable. It is the quickest way that local problems become public priorities – from clean air and safe streets to fair budgets and better services.

Activism builds confidence and solidarity among different groups, creates practical skills with the young people, increases the visibility of women and marginalized groups, and mobilizes the private and public support for common good. Most importantly, activism turns indifference into participation: from "let somebody else decide" into "let's solve it together!".

The new issue of "Citizens for Change" is an invitation to get involved: ask, propose, volunteer, donate, vote and create. Because civic engagement is not a one-off event – it is a habit that improves the everyday lives and makes our community stronger, more just and more resilient.

The activists from #стопзавардариште said to everybody who doubts – "remember, change doesn't come on itself. We are the ones that carry it!"

Have a pleasant reading!

Conce Jakovleska
Civica Mobilitas
National Coordinator for ICO



THEME

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Strengthening the Role of the Young People in the Democratic Processes



In the Youth Centre of the Municipality of Strumica there was a three-day training on "Election Navigator for Strengthening the Democracy and Election Process in the Republic of North Macedonia", organized by NOVUS Center for Research and Analysis. The training was intended for young people from then eight planning regions and its aim was to strengthen their role in the democratic processes and 2025 local elections.

The programme was implemented via interactive sessions and practical exercises on topics such as political power, social polarization, role of independent monitors, advocacy and lobbying, public speaking, political communication, propaganda and civil activism. The training was held by Sasho Ordanoski, an expert with a long-term experience, who led the young people to active civic participation and critical thinking via mentorship and practical examples

The first two days were dedicated to understanding of modern democracy, the preparations of 2025 local elections, role of the independent monitors in securing a fair and independent election process, as well as practical exercises on advocacy, lobbying and public speaking. The third day focused on the political communication, propaganda and civic activism, and the participants also tested the new tool "Election Navigator" which is an important resource for informed and active participation of the young people in the election processes.

The training is part of the project "Election Navigator for Strengthening of Democracy and Election Process in RNM", implemented by NOVIC, as a subgrantee of the project "EU Support to the Civil Society Resource Centre – Phase 2", funded by the European Union.центар – фаза 2", финансиран од Европската Унија.

On-Line Election Culture under Magnifying Lens

The Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM) has reactivated the mechanism of appeals related to election activities in the on-line space, in order to provide fair and democratic communication during the 2025 local elections.

The mechanism is implemented via a Coordination Body, made by representatives of the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Services (AVMU), the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM), CMEM, the Macedonian Institute for Media (MIM), the Institute for Communication Studies (ICS) and Metamorphosis Foundation. The body acts on appeals in cases of disinformation, hate speech, personal data abuse and other violations of the Code of Behaviour in On-Line Space during Elections and Referenda.

Individuals, CSOs, political parties or independent candidates can submit appeals to the Coordination Body, if they recognize violations of the Code of Journalists in Macedonia or the Guidelines for Ethnical Reporting of the On-Line Media. The Code of Behaviour in the On-Line Space, adopted in September 2023 covers all participants in the election process that communicate in the digital space – political parties, their candidates, independent candidates, on-line media, internet issues of broadcasters,

factcheckers, influencers or other players that can influence the voters. The goal of the Code and the activated mechanism is to provide correctness and integrity of information, transparency of political advertising, protection of personal data and stimulating culture of respect and accountability in the public discourse.

In the past two years, three political parties joined the Code – Levica, European Democratic Party and the Party of the Pensions, as well as 21 media organizations, among which TV Alfa, TV Koha, TV Tera, TV Due, TV Kochani LD, TV Spektra, Radio Bleta, Radio Kochani, Radio Vati, Radio Kometa, the newspaper Koha, Sport1, 4News, Ekipa, Radovish News, Gostivarsot, Flaka, Makpres, Odlucise.mk, Portalb and 360 Degrees.

The appeals are submitted to this [e-mail address](mailto:info@cmem.mk).

Multiparty Rural Eco Hackathon

The first multiparty eco hackathon united 29 representatives of the youth of 14 political parties from around the country. Under the mentorship and with the support of national experts, these creators or changes faced some of the most urgent ecological and agricultural challenges which are part of the rural communities nowadays.

The event ended with the signing of the first joint Declaration for Rural Development. This document unites the vision of the young political leaders on more sustainable and more prosperous rural communities.

The declaration is a result of the three-day intensive process of co-creation, in which the participants, with team work and expert support, prepared concrete recommendations related to:

- Local ecological risks – waste management and illegal landfills;
- Protection of natural resources and local ecosystems;
- Climate changes and their impact on agriculture and rural life; and
- Youth ecotourism and possibilities for rural entrepreneurial development. With the signing of the Declaration, the political party youth parts sent a clear message that the key challenges in the rural communities are more important than party differences. Their joint vision is that the future of the rural areas is based on sustainable development, mutual



cooperation and specific solutions for the citizens.

The document is the starting point, a beginning of a process in which the ideas and recommendations of the young people will be developed and built in the future election programmes and policies on rural development. With this declaration, the young people have shown that they are ready not only to discuss, but also to act in order to secure better life for the current and future generations.

The hackathon, as a collaborative event for developing sustainable solutions is part of the Swiss Programme for Election Support, organized by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Institute for Economic Strategies and International Relations – Ohrid.

First Milkomate for Fresh Monastery Milk in Macedonia

On 25th August 2025, in the centre of Kichevo, the first milkomate for fresh milk in Macedonia was officially put in practice. The citizens of Kichevo and its surroundings cannot purchase fresh cow's milk from the Agricultural Cooperative "Krnino" that operates at "Holy Mother of Christ" monastery. The milkomate has been secured with European Union funds, via AgroSmart project, implemented by the Macedonian Enterprise Development Foundation (MEDF), Hemera and CEP Mozhnosti.

"The milk that is offered via the milkomate is fresh, with preserved natural nutritious features, without any additives or preservatives and in controlled hygienic and temperature conditions. Apart from milk, consumers can also buy cheese," said Stanoja Stojanovski from the Cooperative.

Lazar Nedanovski, the MEDF Director, presented the milkomate as an example of modernization of the Macedonian farms and modernization of the sales of local agricultural produce with the financial support of the EU. The Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy Cvetan Tripunovski stressed that the modernization of agriculture is the focus of the policies and programmes of the Ministry.



The people present also visited the farm near the monastery, where the milking line and the dairy farm for production of fresh dairy products have been installed, showing how tradition and innovation can go hand in hand.

Trainings that Strengthen Local Journalism



Во септември, Велес и Штип беа центар на новинарски активности што го поттикнуваат аналитичкото известување на локално ниво. Две обуки за новинари и граѓански активисти се одржаа во рамки на платформата „Локал Актив Вардар“.

Во Велес, на 16 септември, 14 активисти и новинари од Вардарскиот регион учествуваа на обука посветена на пишување аналитички приказни. Под менторство на Билјана Георгиевска, претседателка на Советот за етика во медиумите и долгогодишна новинарка во ББЦ (BBC), учесниците се запознаа со структурата на новинарската анализа, пристапот до извори и техниките за истражување локални теми. Преку практични вежби, тие развија идеи за стории што ја одразуваат реалноста и потребите на нивните заедници.

Втората обука се одржа во Штип, на 30 септември, и беше наменета за новинари и граѓански организации од Источниот и Југоисточниот регион. Работилницата беше фокусирана на унапредување на аналитичкиот пристап во известувањето за локални проблеми, но и на значењето на точноста, авторизацијата и проверката на информациите од различни извори.

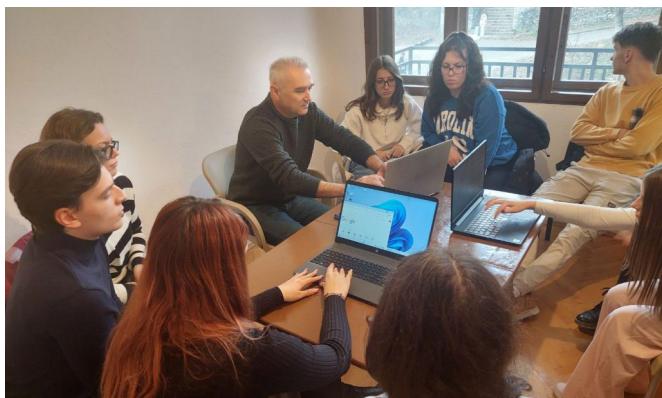
Во рамките на обуката се одржа и уреднички состанок, со кој беше означен почетокот на новиот циклус активности во рамки на „Локал Актив“.

Со овие обуки и активности се создава основа за развој на медиуми на заедницата како простор за дијалог, анализи, информирање и граѓански ангажман.

Активностите се дел од проектот „Медиуми на заедницата за граѓански ангажман“, што го спроведува Институтот РЕСИС со поддршка од Европската Унија.



Youth Media Laboratory



More than 300 young people from Pelagonija were trained in the area of media literacy via the activities of the project “Youth Media Laboratory”, implemented by the association “Citizen Pathways”. The workshops, trainings and mentorship programme, led by professional journalists and IT experts, enabled the participants to develop critical thinking and skills for creation of correct and responsible media contents.

“The workshops for interviewing and recording of podcasts attracted most attention. The young people learned to monitor the correctness and truthfulness of the news

and they showed that they can be a responsible media contents creators”, stresses Aneta Shijakova, the President of “Citizen Pathways”.

The participants assess that the trainings have helped them to recognize disinformation and develop critical approach to media. “After the trainings I started to check every information that I receive and I have learned to distinguish between true and false photographs”, adds Marta Kuzmanoska from Krushevo.

With the project, there was a video course made available at Medialab.mk, an educational platform with a test module for checking the acquired knowledge. Part of the young participants have already been applying the new skills by creating contents for the Young Journalists Blog, including stories and radio podcasts.

The project was implemented in cooperation with local CSOs (IKT Svet, Journalist, From the Young to the Young, Youth Civic Initiative and Eco Guerrilla Prespa) and it covered 12 youth workers in Bitola, Novaci, Mogila, Krushevo and Resen. It is financed via the small grant scheme “Our Media” which has supported 21 local projects in the Western Balkans.

Inclusive Youth Camp in Ohrid – Summer of Friendships, Creativity and Togetherness



From 11th to 15th August 2025 at the Scout Camp in Ohrid the traditional inclusive summer youth programme “We Implement Camping” took place, organized by the Centre for Youth Activism KRIK with the support of the Embassy of Spain, Europe House Skopje and Komercijalna banka AD Skopje, in cooperation with the Scout Association of Macedonia.

The camp united around 50 young people and adults with and without disability in a four-day adventure filled with nature, games, creativity and new friendships. The participants camped under the starry sky, enjoyed kayaking, team activities, music, creative workshops and a film evening in the open, creating memories that would be remembered for a long time.

“Our days at the Scout Centre in Ohrid were filled with adventures, time spent together and lot of laughter – from kayaking and team games, to creative workshops and dinners under the starry sky”, shared the people from “Krik”.

In the creative zone, every participant, regardless of his/her

abilities, had the opportunity to express himself/herself via artistic and creative workshops and create unique work as memories from the camp. Many people enjoyed the workshop on jewellery made of beads, which, as they say in “Krik”, “is no only creative, but also a therapeutic one: it calms us down, it connects us and helps us to express ourselves with colours and styles”.

The young people also participated in educational games in Spanish language and culture, where they have learned new words, customs and facts on Spain via fun and team spirit.

The creative game inspired by Europe House was especially impressive, as its participants created their imaginary countries with their own flags and anthems, building in them values such as solidarity, justice, equality, cultural diversity and education for all.

“Thanks to this support, our participants had a summer full with new experience, friendships and inspiration for togetherness and new worlds”, say the people from “Krik”.

“Every moment was special – we have created new friendships, we have learned new things and we have enjoyed the inclusiveness which makes this camp unique”, they add, summarizing the atmosphere of the summer adventure.

With these activities, the camp has once again confirmed its mission, to create an enabling and safe environment, where the young people can learn, spend time together and feel the real meaning of inclusion.

Young People from Radovish Carriers of Ecological Changes in Their Municipality

Six students from the municipality of Radovish have taken an initiative for ecological change in their community. With the support of Buchim mine and in cooperation with “Kruna Plus” association from Radovish, they have started their first independent innovative eco-project aimed at identifying, research and resolution of local ecological challenges, via the objective of the young people, for the young people.

The project combines education, field research, creative activities and media expression. The participants will learn from experts how to work in a team, how to produce podcasts, public presentations and mini campaigns with a strong message on environmental awareness and responsibility. With this initiative, the awareness on environmental issues will be increased and the young people will be enabled to be active creators of positive social changes.

In the introductory [video](#), the participants say that with this project they will learn how to work together and how to advocate for their views.

Buchim mine, as a socially responsible company, supports the youth initiatives and provides space for creative action. This project is part of this strategy for community engagement, especially in the areas of environment and civic responsibility.

The project creates a new generation of environmentally aware, active and inspired young people in Radovish who create solutions.



Camp Fest Prespa: Young People Awaken Love to Nature and Joint Action



During the last weekend of August, the coast of the Prespa Lake shone again with energy, music and civil awareness. At the auto-camp "Krani" beach there was the two-day "Prespa Cam Fest". This event merged adventure, entertainment and eco-activism in an honest experience of the nature.

More than fifty young people and nature fans camped free of charge at the lake coast, enjoying the music, evening fun and good atmosphere. The central moment was the eco action where around twenty young volunteers and local people together cleaned the wild grass-covered zone at "Krani" beach. With only several hours of work, the space

was turned into a neat place, worthy again of the natural wealth of Prespa.

Apart from the action, the participants also enjoyed the educational programme. By screening the documentary "What Suffocates Prespa?", short videos on eco-responsibility and an exhibition with message for environment protection, the camp showed that eco awareness and partying can go hand in hand.

The weekend ended with the performance of "Moodfellas" band, which brought positive energy, dancing and smiles under the sunset. With "Prespa Camp Fest", the young people once again confirmed that the real change starts with the citizens.

The festival, organized by Prespa Eco Guerrilla and the Institute for Communication Studies (ICS) as part of the campaign "Prespa? Wake Up for Clear Environment", supported by the European Union via "EU for Prespa" programme, showed how the young people with party and joint action can contribute to cleaner Prespa.

Children Ask for Bigger Protection in Digital World

Safety of children on the Internet was the focus of the public debate "Prevention and Protection of Children from Digital Abuse and Materials Related to Sexual Abuse of Children (CSAM)", organized by Megjashi - the First Children's Embassy in the World. The event brought together the civil sector, institutions, expert services, media, private sector and the young people with a common goal – creation of a safer digital space for the youngest.

Dragi Zmijanac, the President of Megjashi, stressed that the digital safety of children is one of the most pressing issues of today and that the need for joint efforts in prevention and protection is bigger than ever. He stressed the importance of involvement of all stakeholders in the creation of policies and mechanisms that would guarantee the digital safety of the youngest.

The focus of the debate was on the children and young people, who sent messages and proposals via previously held workshops on how to increase their safety on Internet. The moderator Jana Nikolovska presented their views, and there was also a presentation of the regional document with possible solutions for dealing with digital abuse.

At the public debate there was also a promotion of the publications prepared as part of the project TOMAS – Towards Uniformed Legislation Against CSAM. Jordanka Ch. Trajkoska, a psychologist and researcher, spoke about the process of their preparation, and the focus was on the Guide for Advocacy and Mass Lobbying for Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse via Internet.

At the panel discussion there were also representatives of the Ministry for Digital Transformation, Ministry of Interior, "Arseni Jovkov" high school, A1 company and the service for support of children and young people "AloBushavko".

The representatives stressed that the continuous cooperation and involvement of parents and teachers have proven to be crucial for the early detection of digital violence, and the business community via A1 Macedonia stressed its preparedness for partnerships in creating safer on-line space.

The children openly spoke about their perception of digital risks, indicating that they do not have enough trust in the institutions. The representatives of the schools, on the other hand, asked for clearer mechanisms for prevention and protection.

The event has confirmed the need of a systemic approach in dealing with digital abuse – via stronger institutional coordination, support from the civil sector and active participation of the young people in solution creation.

Active Citizenship in Krushevo



The first Local Assembly of the Young has been established in Krushevo, a step that enables the young people to participate directly in the creation of youth policies. There were changes to the municipal statute adopted, which opened the way for youth participation and institutionalization of their voice.

This initiative is part of the project "Young People Are the Voice of Changes in the Municipalities", funded by the European Union and implemented by the association "Youth Council of Prilep" in partnership with the youth association "Empowering" from Krushevo. The project will contribute to strengthening the local democracy via active citizenship and social inclusion of the young people, enabling them to have influence in the decision-making

processes.

More than 160 young people from Prilep and Krushevo participated in the workshops on youth participation and activism, obtaining knowledge and skills according to the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies.

The Local Youth Assembly is the first and basic step to creating a Local Youth Council, i.e. a formal body that will enable the young people to be actively involved in the decision-making processes and advocacy of youth interests in front of the Municipality and relevant local institutions. The Municipality, by supporting the project, has prepared the first public call for a Youth Council and provided the administrative and technical assistance for implementation of the procedures.

These activities are a significant step forward towards institutionalized youth participation, opening the possibilities for the young people to become active contributors to the development of their municipalities.

The activities are part of the subgrant of the project "EU Support to the Civil Society Resource Centre – Phase 2", financed by the European Union.

Rural Women from Southwestern and Polog Regions in the Centre of Local Decisions

In the municipalities of Kichevo and Gostivar, the women from the rural areas have become more and more active in creation of local policies and resolving community problems. This transformation has been encouraged with the project "Voice of Women from Rural Environments", implemented by the Association of Women Farmers "My Farm" from Gostivar, in partnership with the Institute for Education, Strategic Research and Analyses "Rural Think" from Kichevo. The project, that was implemented from January to September 2025 aimed to strengthen the capacities of the municipalities for gender responsible programming and enable active involvement of women in the local decision making, especially in the development and social welfare.

With gender analyses, public debates, public policy documents and gender responsible forums, the project has established a bridge between the institutions and the communities, creating the basis for more inclusive and most just local policies. The team has analysed three key programmes: Local Economic Development, Social Welfare and Gender Equality, identifying areas where gender perspective is missing. The results were presented to the public with visual materials and info graphs, to raise the awareness, increase the influence of women and inspire institutional reaction for creation of more inclusive communities.



Deconstructing Prejudices and Stigma for Discrimination-Free Life



The members and employees of the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (KSZD) have depended their expertise on inclusive and non-discriminatory approach to the marginalized communities.

The training for them was organized by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (HCHR) in partnership with HOPS and Margini Coalition on 23rd July. The goal was to deepen the understanding of prejudices, stigma

and discrimination against LGBTI people, people using drugs and people living with HIV, as well to strengthen the capacities for non-discriminatory and inclusive approach in their work.

The experts of the Network for Protection from Discrimination, Tona Kareva Taleska and Atanas Avramov led the participants through practical examples and methods to recognize personal and social prejudices, stressing the importance of the role of an ally in fulfilling the rights of the marginalized groups.

The training was part of the project "Equality Now – Empowering the Marginalised Communities for Social Inclusion and Non-Discrimination", funded by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas. With the new knowledge, KSZD will be able to more efficiently provide protection from discrimination and promote its work, especially in the area of prevention of discrimination against women from marginalised communities.

Connecting of the Communities via Philanthropy



From 14th to 17th July 2025, a delegation of 10 representatives from North Macedonia, from seven local CSOs from Strumica, Gevgelija, Ohrid, Bitola, Gostivar, Chair and Shuto Orizari participated in a study visit to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The visit was organized by "Konekt" association from Skopje, as part of the regional project "Community Foundations – Strengthening of the Local Philanthropy in the Western Balkans", funded by the European Union, in partnership with "Trace" foundation from Serbia and the "Foundation of the Community of Tuzla" from B&H.

During the visit, the participants exchanged experience and got acquainted with successful models of community foundations, which actively promote the local development agenda, civic activism and culture of donation. With direct meetings with foundations, community representatives and CSOs in Nish, Stara Pazova, Bijelina and Tuzla, the participants saw practices that can be applied in the establishment and functioning of future local foundations in North Macedonia. In Nish, the participants explored

the methods for transparent grant awarding and inclusive programmes for youth and marginalized groups, including on-line auctions and sport tournaments. In Stara Pazova, a model of a small, but efficient foundation with a strong support of the local government and business sector was presented. In Bijelina it was demonstrated how a foundation that has emerged from informal friendship and civic enthusiasm can grow into a reliable institution that successfully collaborates with the municipalities, while Tuzla inspired the participants with examples of youth activism, cultural revitalization and interethnic dialogue.

"This study visit was of great importance. I met new people and organizations, I have obtained new knowledge and work mechanisms," said one of the participants.

The visit confirmed the importance of the regional cooperation for building stronger, connected and sustainable communities, opening new possibilities for mentorship and joint projects.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

New Formulas for Equitable and More Quality Education



On 1st January 2026 the new methodology for financing of primary and secondary education will start, as adopted by the Government upon the proposal of the Ministry of Education and Science. The formulas, prepared with the support of UNICEF, World Bank, Swiss Embassy, ZMAI Association for Research and Analyses, ZELS Association of the Local Self-Government Units and the municipalities, are expected to lead to more efficient, equitable and more quality education for all students in the country.

"This is an example how the joint work, transparency and expertise can lead to lasting and quality solutions for our education," stated Viktor Mitevski, Executive Director of

ZMAI. He stressed that the new formulas are not taken from outside, but that they are a result of the five-year long work of Macedonian professionals and practitioners who, with the support of international experts, created a model adjusted to the local context.

The UNICEF representative, Leslie Miller, stressed the reform as a strategic twist towards a more inclusive and more efficient system, while Bojana Naceva from the World Bank stressed that the methodology has more transparency and accountability in spending of public funds. With clear criteria and rules, the municipalities will have the possibility to distribute the funds to the schools in a more balanced way, encouraging them to invest in better teaching quality.

With this change, prepared in a participatory process, the state makes a significant step towards a more modern educational system that follows the needs of the students and society, using a system based on fair approach, responsibility and vision for the future of the young people.

Ministries with Smaller Transparency, Municipalities Stagnate at 2024 Level

The Center for Civil Communications published its regular research on the active transparency of the state institutions for 2025, according to which, the average active transparency of the ministries, Government and municipalities is 80%, unchanged compared to last year. The active transparency of the ministries and Government has decreased compared to last year and now it is 84% (86% last year), while the municipalities kept the same level of active transparency, i.e. 79%.

Among the ministries, the highest results this year were achieved by the Ministry of Defence, for a fifth year in a row, with the maximum of 100% fulfilment of their obligations for more proactive release of information, as well as the newly established Ministry of Digital Transformation, which has also reached 100%. The lowest active transparency is with the Ministry of Sport (63%) and the Ministry of Energy, Mining and Minerals (65.2%).

At local level, out of the 80 municipalities, the municipalities of Kavadarci and Kichevo retained the maximum 100% of active transparency, while the lowest ranking is Lozovo with 33.3%. More than half of the municipalities are in the best group with "very good" active transparency (80-100%), and

none of the municipalities is in the lowest group.

The regions, according to the active transparency, are distributed in this way: eastern one with 88% has the first position for a third year in a row, with all municipalities in the group assessed as "very good"; south-east with 87% has a minimum improvement compared to last year; a leading municipality is Gevgelija with 93.1%; the south-west is the third one with 82%, and Kichevo is with the maximum 100%. The Pelagonija region has 80%, and the leading place is shared by Bitola and Prilep with 100%. The Skopje regions with 76% is not on the bottom for the first time, while Gazi Baba leads with 100%; the north-east with 73% has minimum changes with Kumanovo at the top with 97.1%; the Vardar region with 73% has a drop of 6 points, and Kavadarci leads with 100%. The Polog region with 71% remains at the last position, with the lowest active transparency, and it continues to face serious challenges in the proactive release of information.

The research, implemented from 1st July to 31st August, measures the active transparency via questionnaires and test-requests for free access to information of public character. Only 54% of the institutions have responded

within the legal deadline of 20 days, which is a significant deterioration compared to last year (71%).

The whole research can be seen [here](#).



HOPS: Harm Reduction Is not an Ideology – It Is a Proof that We Care about People

HOPS – Healthy Life Options Skopje joined the global initiative for preserving the role of the World Health Organization (WHO) in the policies for harm reduction. The initiative that is led by the international networks ([INPUD](#), [HRI](#) and [IDPC](#)), culminated with an [open letter to WHO Director-General](#), Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. The goal was to confirm that harm reduction is an essential part of the public health policies that save lives and protect human rights of the people using drugs.

In the letter, the organizations warn that the current cuts of WHO budgets and personnel can weaken the global leadership in this area. "Harm reduction policies are not an ideology, but rather a scientifically based approach that saves lives", said the signatories, among which HOPS – an organization with more than two-decade long experience in field work with the people using drugs and advocacy in Macedonia.

However, while the world unites around this issue, the situation at national level is more and more difficult. Blagorodna Koceva Simjanov from HOPS has warned that the system in Macedonia is in a fragile situation and that the programmes for harm reduction service thanks to the enthusiasm of the people that work in them, and not due to the stable institutional support.

"Macedonia was a pioneer in the region when more than two decades ago it started with harm reduction programmes – at the time when the topic was almost a taboo. Thanks to organizations such as HOPS, now we have a system of services that covers people using drugs, sex workers and their families, and in the past, it was recognized as an example of a successful public health policy. However, the situation is now concerning," says Blagorodna K. Simjanov.

According to her, the state support formally exists, but in reality, it is minimal and unpredictable. "Funds are continuously late, there is no predictability and there are frequent administrative hurdles. The system does not provide stable financing and it is mostly felt in the field – with the people who need continuous, available and confidential services".

HOPS, via the Centre for Rehabilitation and Reintegration and their field teams covers on annual basis between 900 and 1,000 people and provides more than

8,000 individual services – from health support and advice to psychosocial assistance and resocialization. However, according to Blagorodna, these are results achieved with minimal funds and huge personal engagement.

"The financial situation is horrible. The funds that are allocated do not cover even the basic work expenses, much less any development or adaptation to the new usage trends – such as the occurrence of new psychoactive substances, combining medicines with stimulants, on-line purchase of drugs and increase of psychological vulnerability with the young people", she explains.

According to the data shared by HOPS, the effects of the programmes are visible and significant. Macedonia continues to have a stable, low rate of HIV among the people injecting drugs – which is one of the clearest indicators that the approach functions. Every year, with the harm reduction programmes, there are more than 70,000 sterile sets distributed, up to 1,000 HIV and hepatitis tests conducted, and there are thousands of individual services provided – starting from health and psychosocial counselling, up to support for inclusion in treatment and rehabilitation.

An additional problem is the closing of "DropIn" centres, which for years used to be a safe place where the people who used drugs could receive several services at one spot. "In the last years, the organizations that worked on harm reduction closed the DropIn centres not because they had no results, but because they had no way to survive. And it was these centres that were crucial for the contact with the community", explains Blagorodna K. Simjanov.

She says that it is time that the institutions recognized the significance of these programmes not as a humanitarian obligation, but as part of the public health.

"Our message is simple: harm reduction is not a policy of tolerance to drugs, but rather a policy of care for people. Every person deserves support and chance, and not stigma and judgement."



ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society Has Adopted the 2025-2026 Work Programme

At the session held on 25th September 2025, the Council for Cooperation between the Government and the Civil Society adopted the 2025-2026 Work Programme, a document that sets the directions for promoting policies, laws and institutional frameworks in which CSOs function.

The crucial priority of the Council in the next period was the creation and monitoring of the enabling environment for development of the civil society by improving the legal framework, encouraging transparent financing and promoting the cooperation between the institutions and CSOs.

One of the competencies of the Council is monitoring the public policies. The Council will organize thematic meetings and public policy analyses that influence the environment in which civil society develops. There is regular monitoring planned of the Annual Enabling Environment Report and the Monitoring Matrix, in order to timely react to policies that can have a negative impact on associations and foundations.

There is a plan to prepare opinions and recommendations on changes of crucial laws, such as the Law on Associations and Foundations, the Law on Volunteering, Law on Donations and Sponsorships, Law on Social Enterprises, etc. These changes are expected to improve the environment in which civil society is developing, as well as approximate

public policies to the needs of the civil society.

“With respect to the financial sustainability of CSOs which has been one of the main challenges for CSOs in the past period, the key focus of the Council will be promoting the system of state financing of CSOs, including the implementation of the Code of Good Practices for Financial Support to Citizen Associations and Foundations as well as improving the tax framework on CSOs,” states the document.

The Council will open a channel for direct communication with CSOs and it will implement an information campaign on its role and activities. The programme envisages regular meetings, public debates and an annual forum in order to promote trust, transparency and cooperation.

In the coming period, the Council will also adopt a 2025-2028 Communication Strategy with the support of the EU project for technical support in order to improve the enabling environment for CSOs, as well as a Communication Plan of the Council.



What Will Be Changed in the Law on Associations and Foundations?

Starting from August this year, the process for changing and amending the Law on Associations and Foundations has been reactivated. The Ministry of Justice as a line ministry has established a working group made by civil sector representatives, state institutions in charge and people from the academia.

The goal of opening the Law has remained the same as in the previous phase, to improve some legal regulations whose implementation in practice has turned out to be a challenge. In this way, the law would be more functional. Apart from this, in the announcement for the start of the process for preparing a draft law, it is stressed that one

of the objectives of the changes is to regulate the way of financing of the CSOs, with a focus on the state funding. The regulations that concern the status of organizations of public interest will also be in the focus, as well as the challenges that have been detected in the registration of the CSOs.

The dynamics of this process is the preparation of a draft by the working group until the end of 2025, which is to then pass the filters of government and parliamentary procedure before being adopted. It is expected that there would also be broader public consultations with all stakeholders after the end of this phase.

Access to Information of Public Character Has Become a Challenge

The 2024 Enabling Environment Reports notes negative trends in the availability of information of public character by the institutions. After the survey conducted with CSOs, 70% of those surveyed submitted requests for information of public character to some institutions. Around one third of them (33%) say that they have not received a response within the legal deadline, which shows the existing gap between the legal regulations and practical implementation.

In the MCIC report it is concluded that the situation with the access to information of public character has deteriorated in practice, especially when it comes to implementation of the legal regulations and institutional transparency.

This information shows that there is a bigger systemic challenge: although legally the framework exists (Law on Free Access to Information of Public Character), the implementation, i.e. the practical availability of information, as well as the implementation of deadlines and positive responses from the institutions has started

to become a challenge. This can create lack of trust in the institutions, feeling of exclusion and limitation of transparency. These trends have also been noted by the media and journalists who often report institutional obstacles – such as bigger bureaucratic demands, procedural delays and purposeful redirecting when there are attempts to obtain information of public character. This is especially visible with the journalists who work on investigative stories. These conclusions are recorded in the reports of the Association of Journalists and in the report of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN).

In 2025, the Law of Free Access to Information of Public Character was open by the line Ministry of Justice for changes and amendments. The process is still active and it is in government procedure.



NEWS
**FROM CIVICA
MOBILITAS**

“If We Do Not Take Care about Public Money – Who Will Do It instead of Us?” – Ask the Young People from the Southeast



“Nobody has explained us so far why it is important to have a personal budget, and even less how to do it. This was quite useful and understandable”, said one of the young participants at the info-session for personal finance in Strumica. This simple, but deeply honest statement perfectly depicts the essence of the project “Youth Network for Financial Literacy in the Southeast”, which is implemented by the organizations Promo Idea and Novus from Strumica, and Kruna Plus from Radovish. Supported by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas, the project enabled the young people from the region not only to learn how to manage the personal finances, but also to understand the public finance and become more aware about the impact that corruption has on their future.

The research on financial knowledge and skills of the young

people aged 18-29 in the Southeast region, conducted at the very beginning of the project revealed information that confirm that this topic was to be tabled long ago. Almost 30 percent of the young people admitted that they do not keep any records of their monthly expenses, which indicates a striking need of practical education and capacity building related to rational management of personal finances. These figures were translated into contents, events and areas for questions and dialogues, especially when it comes to the topics that are still rarely open in the formal education, such as pension funds, taxes, personal savings and responsible budgeting.

One of the key activities was the debate “Who Pays the Pensions?”, which took place in Strumica. For the first time, the young people had the possibility to hear and speak about the three pension pillars and about the importance of personal savings. “I didn’t know that there was a voluntary pension fund as well. Now I see that I need to think about my future in time”, said Mitko Ninov, one of the participants in the debate. His reaction was just one of the many that showed that the young people were eager to know something of practical value.

[Read the complete story.](#)

Civic Initiative for Prevention from Forest Fires in Berovo and Tetovo



In the summer of 2025, R.N. Macedonia faced an increased risk of forest fires. From the beginning of July, when the authorities introduced a ban on entering forests and declared a state of crisis, until the end of August, there were reports of new fires almost on daily basis. According to the data of the Centre for Crisis Management (CUK), on certain days (such as, for example, on 27th and 28th July), there were even more than 50 fires registered. These figures confirm the urgency of prevention, fast reaction of the institutions and active involvement of the citizens in nature protection.

and partner organizations reacted proactively, organizing additional, project activities for dealing with the current situation. They educated the citizens by organizing a public event in Berovo and practical training in Tetovo, in order to raise the awareness and develop skills for prevention and dealing with forest fires.

On 26th July 2025, at Berovo city square there was a public event “Fire Does not Forgive, and the Forest Is Life”, organized by Eco Green Movement from Berovo and the Centre for Climate Changes, within the project “Regional Partnership for Better Implementation of the Green Agenda at Local Level”, financed by the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas. At the time when the fires endangered the nature and life in the region again, this gathering aimed to send a strong message for prevention and protection of forests, to mobilize and call for joint responsibility.

[Read the complety story.](#)

Civica Mobilitas Submitted Proposals to the Candidates at 2025 Local Elections

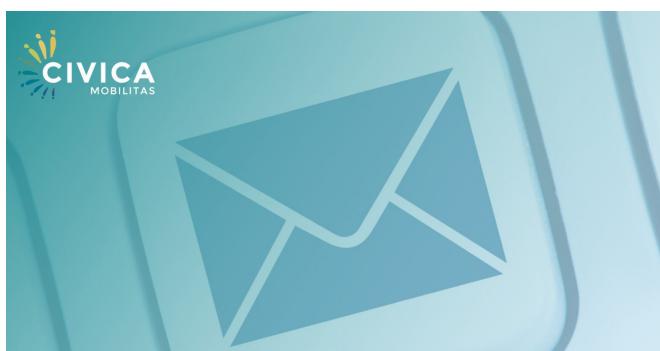


The **proposals** of CSOs supported by Civica Mobilitas reached the addresses of the candidates for mayors and municipal council members today (12.09.2025).

They were put together and discussed by the current grantees during the latest Networking Meeting, held at the end of June this year. This participatory process gathered the representatives of around 70 CSOs from the whole country.

Civica Mobilitas encouraged its grantees to submit specific

Civil Society Organizations Propose Solutions for Better Local Policies and Services



Civil society organizations—grantees of the Civica Mobilitas program—have formulated and [submitted their proposals to the candidates in the 2025 local elections](#). The proposals focus on improving transparency, accountability, citizen participation, the quality of local public services, and securing funding for civil society organizations.

Each of these aspects is elaborated below, with concrete proposals and recommendations derived from the organizations' experience in local communities.

1) Citizen Participation

Most of the proposals call for more systematic citizen involvement in decision-making: regular public hearings at an early stage (draft documents), quarterly neighborhood forums, functional councils (youth, culture, safety), surveys/online consultations, and clear procedures for responding to submitted initiatives. Municipalities are urged to

propose on their municipalities to the candidates that would run for office in their local self-government units.

This is part of the advocacy processes that CSOs pursue for the interest of the citizens. We believe that the improvement of the quality of life of the citizens in all areas of work in Macedonia is of common interest of CSOs and other social stakeholders, including the candidates for mayors and municipal council members. Therefore, we hope and we expect that these proposals will find their place in the programmes of the candidates.

CSOs supported by Civica Mobilitas will continue as before to work at all levels as correctors, supporters and implementors of activities that will make social changes for the benefit of everybody.

publish consultation plans and timelines in advance, along with summaries of received feedback and explanations of what has been accepted.

2) Public and Social Services

Organizations call for more accessible and integrated services for vulnerable groups: local social centers and “one-stop-shop” approaches, community-based services (home care, day centers), health mediators and mobile teams, and better coordination with social work centers and schools. A frequent message is the need for small but stable municipal budget lines for these services, along with transparent criteria for their allocation/contracting.

3) Culture, Youth and Sports

Proposals emphasize open spaces for youth and culture (youth/cultural centers, club programs, micro-grants for local initiatives). They highlight the importance of continuity (year-round programs, not just “projects”) and joint planning with youth organizations, sports clubs, and the cultural sector. Safe and accessible locations and timely public calls are also underscored.

Read the complete [news](#).

What Do the 2025 Local Elections Candidates Talk About? #1

The public discourse analysis reveals three different communication strategies that the candidates apply to shape their public presentation. Each of these strategies has a different weight and generates different response by the citizens.

The first approach is based on the current environmental challenges. The candidates that follow this direction use the everyday environmental problems – such as air quality, waste management and greenery preservation – as a central point of their campaigns. They stress the direct connections between the environmental situation and the daily life of the citizens, presenting the environmental issues as urgent and relevant for the local community.

The second approach is focused on direct services and improvements that the citizens can see and feel. This approach includes topics such as the situation in the schools, traffic safety, accessibility of health care protection and public infrastructure maintenance. The candidates that communicate in this way position themselves as



practical problem solvers, focused on specific results that directly influence the quality of life.

The third approach combines a vision for sustainable development with specific economic benefits. This profile stresses the advantages of the renewable energy sources, energy efficiency and green technologies not only as environmentally responsible solutions, but also as ways to economic progress and creation of new jobs. The candidates that follow this direction try to position themselves as carriers of progressive and economically viable solutions for their communities.

These different approaches do not only reflect the priorities of the candidates, but they also indicate various segments of the votes that impose their expectations in the public discourse.

Read the complete [news](#).

Smaller Municipalities Leaders in Transparency: Digital Tools Improve the Trust between Citizens and Local Government

Is the municipality where you live really open to you? The answer to this question is given by the 2025 [Transparency Index](#), which reveals that some of the smaller municipalities are among the best examples of transparency and accountability.

The top of the list is Kriva Palanka (71%), Berovo (69%) and Demir Hisar (68%), while the least transparent are Demir Kapija (8%), Sopishte (10%) and Lozovo (13%). Although there was a 3-percentage point improvement of the average transparent of the municipalities in 2025 (40% in 2025 as opposed to 37% in 2024), it is clear that this is modest transparency and that there are big challenges in achieving it.

These finds were presented by "Metamorphosis" Foundation, Rural Coalition and "Blink 42-21" Center for Social Innovation at the thematic forum "Open Municipality – Active Community", which took place on 24th September in Skopje, with the support of the Swiss Government via Civica Mobilitas.

"Improving the trust in the local self-government via transparency is crucial in dealing with corruption at local level", said Danche Danilovska-Bajdevska, Programme Director of "Metamorphosis" Foundation. She explained that the Transparency Index does not only measure transparency, but also accessibility, consultations with citizens, integrity and efficiency of the local government. "If transparency needs to be increased in order to prevent corruption, we think that this should be done via digital tools and transformation," she stressed.

The project "Digital Transformation at Local Level (DIGILOC) – Involved Community for Resilience to Corruption", provided mentorship support to nine municipalities: Kriva Palanka, Kochani, Shtip, Aerodrom, Demir Hisar, Struga, Valandovo, Negotino and Gostivar. The results show that this has led to transparency improvement from 2% to 13%.

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