



# ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023

ASSOCIATION FOR EMANCIPATION, SOLIDARITY AND EQUALITY OF WOMEN



## ABOUT ESE

ESE is a civil society organization that works to improve the implementation of the social and economic rights of vulnerable groups by strengthening them, mobilizing, and engaging in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public policies and services in the Republic of Macedonia.

ESE's driving force is its commitment to the resolution of problems. By promoting and improving human rights, we improve social and economic justice, keeping in mind that human rights are an indivisible collection of standards that all should enjoy. We are particularly devoted to work in the field of promoting and improvement of health rights and women's rights. Therefore, we are focused on two goals, those being to address the urgent needs of citizens, in particular the needs of vulnerable groups of citizens, and to influence the creation of sustainable and long-term changes. We do much more than documenting, reporting, and publically condemning injustices in society. We provide legal and paralegal assistance, allowing citizens to exercise their rights and change their living conditions. Moreover, we advocate for changes in legislation and policies that affect exercise of health rights and women's rights. We advocate at national and international levels. We draft and submit „Shadow reports“ and other documents to competent international bodies concerning the degree of implementation of international treaties on human rights.

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# 1

## **ENGAGING CITIZENS IN THE PROCESS OF PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF LEGAL REGULATIONS, BUDGETS AND SERVICES IN AREAS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS**



## **OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN 2023**

In 2023, the same barriers and problems were noted in relation to women's access to health services for women's reproductive health. The problem of an insufficient number of gynecologists on the primary health care level and their inadequate territorial distribution still persists. The only improvement is noted in the municipality of Shuto Orizari, where a clinic with a primary health care gynecologist started working. However, regular monitoring of the situation is necessary because in the past years, although this clinic was opened several times, Roma women are still facing problems with access to gynecological health care since all the gynecologists who worked in the clinic left the municipality after a short period of time.

Regarding the Cervical Cancer Screening Program for 2023, the trend of insufficient funding of the program continues, and once again, coverage of only 25,000 women per year is predicted. In addition, in the Program for 2023, it is foreseen that women should self-initiatively apply for screening through the electronic platform for this purpose, skringing.mk. This represents a serious barrier to the access of women, especially from vulnerable groups, to this Program, because the ESE survey conducted in the second half of 2022 showed that only 5% of rural women are familiar with this way of registering for screening, while only 24 % of rural women have the opportunity to self-register for screening through an electronic platform. The situation is more unfavorable among Roma women because only 5% of them are familiar with this way of registering for screening, while only 16% of them have the opportunity to register for screening independently through an electronic platform. In addition to that, the Association ESE also identified problems in the functionality of scheduling examinations with a Pap test through the electronic platform. Namely, from the pilot research we conducted in 2023, we found that out of 20 women who registered on the electronic platform skringing.mk, not one was called for a gynecological examination by the end of the year. Also, although it was announced that HPV typing will replace the Pap test as a more reliable screening method, this method is still at the pilot screening level and is only performed at the University Hospital of Gynecology and Obstetrics in Skopje. Progress has been noted in the Cervical Cancer Screening Program. Namely, the age limit for screening coverage from 24 years was reduced to 21 years, which is in line with the new internationally accepted standards. It is also positive that the program foresees activities for a mobile gynecological clinic, through which women in rural and hard-to-reach areas should be covered. However, significant financial resources from this Program are allocated to the engaged medical and non-medical personnel, as well as to the coordinators of the activities, although all these persons are employed in public health institutions. For example, a monthly fee of 18,000 denars is provided for the coordinator of doctors, and a monthly fee of 9,000 denars is provided for the coordinator of nurses. Taking into account the insufficient amount of the budget for the entire program, it is necessary to use the maximum of the available funds for greater coverage of women with a gynecological examination with a PAP test.

Regarding the Program for Active Health Care of Mothers and Children for 2023, the most notable setback is that the budget for this Program has been reduced by 2 million denars compared to 2022. This situation clearly indicates that improving the health of mothers and children is not a priority. Also, the 2023 program does not include funds for examinations during pregnancy and childbirth for women who are not covered by health insurance, although this measure was part of the Program until 2022, when it was abolished. This situation represents a risk that pregnant

women from the vulnerable categories who do not have health insurance will remain without adequate health care during pregnancy. Also, in the budget of the Program for Health Protection of Mothers and Children, a budget item for remuneration of the members of the State Commission for Biomedical Assisted Fertilization in the amount of 1,000,000,000 denars is foreseen, although the work of this Commission is not in accordance with the objectives of the Program, nor with the narrative description of the program. So, instead of these funds being used for preventive health services for mothers and children, they are being used for the remuneration of the members of this Commission. The only improvement in the Program is that a budget item is foreseen for the Roma population from Shuto Orizari by providing funds to subsidize the work of the gynecological clinic with a gynecologist on the primary health care level in this municipality.

In 2022, the Government adopted the strategy for the Roma for the period 2022-2030, but only at the end of 2023 the National Action Plan for Improving the Health of the Roma 2023-2025 was published. The previous National Action Plan for the Health of the Roma referred to the period 2015-2020, so according to this data, for three years, the Government did not have a plan for the implementation of activities that should lead to the improvement of the health of the Roma in Macedonia (2020-2023).

At the same time, for the citizens of Shuto Orizari, the health services from specialist-consultative health care, as well as diagnostics (laboratory and X-ray) within the framework of the Polyclinic in Shuto Orizari are not available. Polyclinics in other municipalities within the City of Skopje provide these health services for citizens.

The infant mortality rate in 2022 was 3.2 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, which is historically the lowest rate in Macedonia. Fluctuations in the infant mortality rate have been observed in the past decades, and after a decline, a significant increase in the mortality rate was also observed. Hence, continuous monitoring of the situation is needed. .

**MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS**

**In 2023, we worked on building the capacities of the CSO network from the country and the region, i.e., the European Network of Practitioners for Social Accountability and Legal Empowerment, whose secretariat is led by ESE**

- We prepared a communication strategy for the European network in cooperation with the member organizations of the network from R. of N. Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Albania.
- We prepared and published the second Newsletter of the European Network of Practitioners.
- We held online training in order to strengthen the capacities of organizations for the application of methodologies for assessing the impact of environmental factors and housing conditions on the health of the population, with a special focus on vulnerable groups of citizens.
- We organized two webinars for the exchange of experiences between the member organizations of the European Network based on the needs of the organizations. The first webinar was on the topic of „Creating opportunities for the participation of various stakeholders in response to crisis situations in the region“, while the second webinar was on the topic of „Strategic Litigation.“
- We organized two regional meetings for the member organizations of the European Network. At the first meeting, we finalized the communication strategy of the network, we discussed the problems faced by the marginalized communities in the Republic of N. Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Romania, and Greece, and we prepared a draft plan for joint action in order to improve the position of marginalized communities. At the second regional meeting, the organizations from N. Macedonia, Romania, and Montenegro exchanged experiences regarding their work with vulnerable groups of the population, including the Roma population, the rural population, and victims of human trafficking; the organizations also exchanged experiences regarding reporting processes to international human rights bodies; also on the meeting the methodology for measuring the basic health indicators in the countries of the region was prepared.
- We participated in the consultative process for the preparation of the Strategic Work Plan of the Global Network of Social Accountability Practitioners (COPASAH).

**We dedicated this year to the promotion of the health of the population through the application of methodologies for social and behavioral change for practicing healthy lifestyles and increased vaccination uptake of the adult population.**

- We trained 200 health professionals (doctors, nurses, and pharmacists) to apply social and behavioral change methods in their work in order to promote healthy lifestyles and vaccination uptake of their patients. At the same time, through the trainings, we strengthened the communication and interpersonal skills of health workers with the aim of improving the quality of their services.

- We conducted health education for 843 citizens for practicing of healthy lifestyles and the importance of vaccination of the adult population through the application of methodologies for social and behavioral changes.
- We distributed 2,043 health educational materials in the form of mini-posters in order to educate the population about healthy lifestyles and the need for vaccination of the adult population.
- We sent 7,966 SMS messages to citizens and health workers with informative and educational content for the promotion of healthy lifestyles and vaccination of the adult population.
- We participated in a webinar where we shared the experiences of working in this field with colleagues from Moldova who are starting to implement the same methodology.
- We organized a workshop with representatives from health institutions in order to determine the barriers to vaccination coverage, both for children and the adult population, and to prepare a proposal for measures to improve vaccination coverage.

#### **We continuously monitored the implementation of preventive health programs**

- We conducted a pilot study on the functionality of the electronic system for scheduling gynecological examinations with a PAP test within the Program for Cervical Cancer Screening .
- We prepared three media articles and one video, in which we emphasized the inconsistencies in the implementation of preventive health programs and we emphasized our demands for the improvement of the programs.

#### **We worked to improve health and health care for the Roma population**

- We provided expert support to partner Roma organizations in the process of preparation for the Community Scorecard from the Roma community in terms of access to and quality of primary health care and preventive health care for women, mothers and children.
- We provided expert support to the partner Roma organizations for the preparation of a Local Advocacy Strategy with the aim of improving Roma communities access to primary health care and improving women, mothers and children's access to preventive health care.
- We advocated for the improvement of health care for citizens in the municipality of Shuto Orizari by implementing a petition and submitting requests to the relevant institutions for increasing the number of health services within the polyclinic in Shuto Orizari, including family doctors, specialist-consultative health care, x-ray cabinet, and laboratory.
- We strengthened the capacities of the partner Roma organizations for conducting research in the Roma communities through conducted training on this topic..



**We participated in a number of significant national and international events and processes and provided our contribution.**

- We prepared a shadow report for the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations (UN) regarding the right to health and access to health care for the Roma population, women, and the rural population.
- We contributed to the process for the preparation of the Program for Active Health Care of Mothers and Children for 2024.
- As members of the European Roma Health Network, we participated in the preparation of Recommendations for advancing the implementation of Roma inclusion strategies in EU member states and candidate countries in the area of health.
- We participated and contributed to the conference aimed at the improvement of the Program for Cervical Cancer Screening and to the conference aimed at improvement of the health care system in R. N. Macedonia. .



# 2

## **ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN THE FIELDS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS**

## **OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN 2023**

During 2023, no essential measures were taken to facilitate access to justice, nor has there been an improvement in the economic, political, and social circumstances related to the human rights of vulnerable groups of citizens. The negative practice of not allocating financial and human resources for the implementation of the adopted laws and policies in the field of gender equality and protection against discrimination and violence against women continues. The competent ministries and Units of Local Self-Government (ULSG) still do not implement the legal obligations for providing budget funds in the field of prevention and protection from domestic violence (art. 17-21 of the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Official Gazette of RSM No. 24 of 2021).

Although a positive step was taken with the adoption of changes and amendments to the Criminal Code in order to comply with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, not all proposals of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) regarding incrimination and criminal prosecution of separate forms of violence against women were accepted. The criminal act „Physical injury“ during domestic violence (Art. 130 para. 2 of the Criminal Code) continues to be prosecuted at the proposal (consent) of the victims, despite the reasoned representation of CSOs and practitioners for initiating criminal proceedings ex officio without the consent of the women who suffered domestic violence. It is the most common crime as a result of domestic violence., and the only crime for which criminal prosecution requires the consent of the victim herself, which results in „withdrawal“ of women who have suffered domestic violence from further proceedings and impunity for the perpetrators of domestic violence. An additional drawback is the lack of familiarity of the general public as well as vulnerable groups of women with the adopted criminal legislation, which represents a continuation of the previous „neglect“ of the State's preventive function in dealing with violence against women and domestic violence.

Despite the expanded competencies of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD), the Ministry of Finance and the Parliament continue to disobey the legal provisions for the financial independence of this body, which prevents the effective implementation of activities toward raising public awareness, as well as improving the application of the international and national legal framework for the protection of human rights.

## **MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS**

**We continued to strengthen the capacities of CSOs for the resolution of problems in access to justice for vulnerable groups of citizens.**

- We contributed to the development of the Grassroots Justice Network - NAMATI, by facilitating meetings with representatives of CSOs at the national and regional levels (Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia), where we discussed the priority areas for improving the factual situation of women, opportunities for joint learning (building capacities) and advocacy at the national, regional and international level.

- In cooperation with the Macedonian Association of Young Lawyers (MAYL), we contributed to strengthening the capacities of CSOs working in rural areas on the United Nations (UN) Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by organizing training and providing mentoring support during the preparation of the Shadow report on the actual position of women living in rural areas.

**We have provided evidence on citizens' needs in terms of facilitating access to justice.**

- We prepared a written submission (Shadow report) to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence and access to primary health care for vulnerable groups of citizens, such as women, Roma, and the population from rural areas.
- We prepared a written contribution to the Report „The Promise of Legal Empowerment to Expand and Transform Access to Justice“ of the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.
- We contributed to the preparation of the World Bank's annual report „Women, Business and the Law 2023“ through a written submission regarding the position of women in the area of gender-based violence, marriage and family, property relations, the labor market, etc.
- We have prepared an analysis of the Costs and benefits of providing free legal aid to women who have suffered domestic violence for 2022, thus completing the cycle of preparing annual analyses of this kind launched in 2017.
- We have prepared an analysis of the different types of costs that women incurred as a result of domestic violence, such as lost work and reduced income for women, health costs, relocation costs, and all other costs.
- We have collected data from women who have led civil court proceedings for child support, which will be used to prepare an analysis of the adjudication, the amount of child support compared to the needs of the children, and the payment of child support.

**We continued to provide the necessary legal and psychological assistance for women who suffered domestic violence with**

- We provided legal aid to 150 persons, organized 374 meetings, and provided psychological counseling to 45 people.
- We provided court representation for five women in initiating and conducting the necessary court proceedings.

**We worked to strengthen the capacities of the formal institutions of justice.**

- Through the national process of Open Government Partnership, we advocated for the adoption of a special goal in the new National Action Plan for OGP (NAP) for 2024-2026 for intensifying the activities of the competent ministries in the field of prevention and improving understanding among the general and expert public About the nature of domestic violence and legal mechanisms for protection.

- We organized forums at the local level with practitioners from the Basic Civil Courts, the Centers for Social Work (CSW), the regional departments for free legal aid of the Ministry of Justice, and CSOs from Kumanovo, Prilep, and Bitola and discussed the specific needs of women survivors and opportunities for improving the effectiveness of civil court procedures involving women.
- We organized training for police inspectors and uniform police officers to improve their proceeding in domestic violence cases.
- We contributed to a regional initiative to reduce the misuse of firearms in cases of domestic violence.

**Together with women who suffered domestic violence, we worked on their economic empowerment and provided funds for legal assistance through the social enterprise POGON.**

- We managed to reach 410 producers of local handicrafts from North Macedonia and five countries of the region with the offer of POGON, and we signed a cooperation agreement with 15 of them.
- POGON includes 46 producers of handicrafts, with 394 different types of products.
- We achieved an income of over 100,000 denars, which represents an increase of 4 times compared to 2021.
- The POGON brand and the products marketed through POGON, including those made by women who have suffered domestic violence, reached 484,885 people from North Macedonia.
- POGON - contributed to the economic empowerment of 16 women who suffered domestic violence. Five women who suffered domestic violence attended a tailoring and sewing course, and 11 women were involved in continuous training to learn jewelry-making techniques and engaged in making a unique line of jewelry for POGON.
- As a result of research conducted among the target groups of the social enterprise POGON (270 women aged 25 to 55 years), POGON got the opportunity to adapt its offer to the needs of consumers, as well as to position itself in relation to the competition.
- We developed a special line of jewelry, „POGON - Unique products."



# 3

## **PROMOTION OF FISCAL TRANSPARENCY OF INSTITUTIONS IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS**



## **OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION IN 2023**

In the first quarter of 2023, the 2022 Report of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the US State Department was published, which notes that the country is taking steps that are not sufficient to address the entrenched problems of corruption, violations of human rights and security of citizens. The Report states that in the Republic of North Macedonia, the following problems are of particular concern: the inhuman and degrading treatment of the prison services and overcrowding in certain prison wards, violence and threats of violence against journalists, serious government corruption, the lack of responsibility for gender and family violence and violence and threats towards the LGBT population.

The Report of the European Commission on R. North Macedonia shows regression in the key areas by which the State's progress is measured in relation to 2022. A significant setback, according to this Report, is noted in the judiciary and the fight against corruption, which in turn are key to the overall course of negotiations with the country.

North Macedonia is ranked 85th out of 180 countries and territories according to the perception of corruption in the public sector in 2022 with 40 index points, which is one point more than last year.

Results of the annual assessment of the level of proactivity and reactivity of public institutions of interest to ESE for 2023 show stagnation and regression of the situation in relation to 2022.

The assessment of the level of proactive transparency, which is conducted by ESE every year, shows that in 2022, only one (the Delchevo local government) out of 25 institutions was proactively transparent. From being proactively non-transparent in the period from 2014 to 2021, Delchevo local government is the only transparent institution this year, and it publishes more information than the Ministry of Finance, which in the past two years was in first place in terms of proactive transparency.

In 2022, the number of non-transparent institutions increased from 15 to 18 compared to 2021. Deterioration of the level of transparency in relation to 2021 is noted in four institutions, that is, the Government of R. North Macedonia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the local self-governments of Kocani and Pehcevo. They went from partially proactively transparent to non-transparent institutions.

Continuous monitoring of the availability of 16 key documents and information on the websites of public institutions from 2014 to 2022 showed that only one in 25 institutions is making progress. Four out of 25 institutions that have shown some improvement in the past have stagnated in recent years, and eight have seen a decrease in the number of documents/information they publish. The largest number of institutions (12 out of 25) do not show any changes, and after nine years, they are still included in the category of proactively non-transparent institutions.

Only a small part of the measures created within the framework of the Open Government Partnership, which refers to the improvement of access to public services and access to justice, have been implemented.

## **MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS**

### **We provided support to citizens and public institutions to promote fiscal transparency and achieve bigger and longer-lasting changes.**

- We encourage public debate and activism by providing information and educational materials in the area of fiscal transparency and priority-based budgeting.
- We provided support to more than 20 members of COPASAH Europe working to promote fiscal transparency and accountability in the area of economic and social rights by building their skills and encouraging and supporting joint advocacy activities;
- We continued cooperation with SEA, MLSP, and the Ministry of Health in the direction of providing mechanisms for civil participation and strengthening the capacities of employees in these institutions. In addition, we started working with the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning.

### **We worked on building trust and sustainable development of initiatives to promote fiscal transparency.**

- We promoted the concept of openness in public procurement procedures at 62 institutions that provide services to citizens in the area of social and economic rights by monitoring the public procurement procedures of these institutions and preparing recommendations for the improvement of the identified challenges;
- We worked to improve access to public information, with a particular focus on information that is important for measuring gender equality and the enjoyment of human rights of vulnerable groups of citizens, through the implementation of procedures for access to public information, citizens and institutions education for requesting and providing information, proposing measures and activities for public institutions that will contribute to increasing the amount of information that is available to the public, as well as measuring the level of proactive and reactive transparency of the institutions and preparing annual reports for the assessments.
- We co-chaired the OGP Council 2021-2023.
- We coordinated the process of co-creating measures and activities for citizen participation within the framework of AP for the 2023-2026 OGP.
- We participated in a series of public events at the national and international level, where we presented our findings in the field of fiscal transparency and citizen participation.
- We have become part of the group of leaders in Europe who have shown a significant contribution to the advancement of civil participation in the country and who will continue to work together to advance civil participation at the European level (within the OGP).
- The digital platform for the publication of real-time information on the implementation of the active employment measures and employment policies of SEA developed by ESE is publicly available.



# FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2023



ESSE



<b>Revenues</b>	<b>Amount in MKD</b>
<b>Transferred surplus of revenues from the previous year</b>	<b>21,188,389</b>
<b>Income from interest rates and exchange rate discrepancies</b>	<b>1,163</b>
<b>Income from donations, membership fees, and gifts</b>	<b>12,234,040</b>
- European Commission	241,617
- Kvina Till Kvinna	1,854,459
- JSI Mrite - USAID	7,139,453
- UNDP	629,339
- HERA (CIVICA)	729,661
- Other income	1,639,511
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,423,592</b>

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>Amount in MKD</b>
- Material expenditures, services, and depreciation	3.115.217
- Capital and other assets	
- Assistance, donations, and other grants	294.000
- Salaries and social benefits	9,577,365
- Expenditures for the implementation of program activities	6.103.675
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.090.257</b>



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