

NORTH MACEDONIA

Capital: Skopje
Population: 2,128,262
GDP per capita (PPP): \$16,479
Human Development Index: High (0.774)
Freedom in the World: Partly Free (66/100)

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.6



The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had a profound effect on social, economic, and political developments in North Macedonia, including the work of CSOs.

In parallel to the outbreak of the pandemic, the country faced a political and institutional crisis. Prime Minister Zoran Zaev resigned in January and parliament was dissolved on February 16. A technical government was then constituted with the task of organizing early elections. Because of the pandemic, the elections were postponed from April 12 to July 15, 2020. When the elections were finally held, the previous governing alliance of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) again received the most electoral votes, enabling them to form a government.

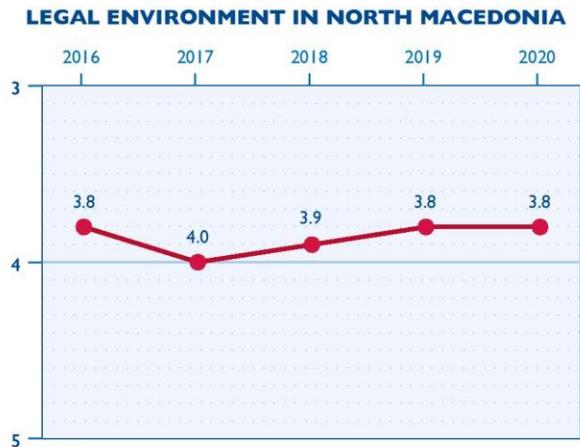
As a result of the political crisis, the country was ruled by the technical government, which did not have a clear political mandate, during the early stages of the pandemic. On March 18, 2020, the President of North Macedonia signed a decree instituting a state of emergency, which enabled the technical government to rule by decree through June 13, 2020. To contain the spread of the virus, restrictive measures including curfews, limitation of non-essential movement, and closure of borders and air traffic, were introduced. Special permits were provided to CSOs and activists providing humanitarian and social services to the most vulnerable communities, allowing them to travel around the country despite the bans. Measures were also introduced against individuals who spread disinformation about COVID-19 on social media.

In 2020, North Macedonia made some progress but also experienced a significant setback in its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. After signing an accession protocol in 2019, the country became the twenty-ninth member state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on March 27, 2020. However, the country's long-standing attempts to join the European Union (EU) were once again stymied, when Bulgaria vetoed the start of accession talks in November 2020, demanding that negotiation talks include bilateral issues between the two neighboring countries related to the Macedonian identity, language, and history.

Overall CSO sustainability improved slightly in 2020, mainly due to CSOs' abilities to adapt to and mitigate the effects of the pandemic. Organizational capacity within the CSO sector improved driven by advances in constituency building, volunteerism, and the use of technology, while CSOs quickly adjusted to the new circumstances presented by the pandemic and provided new services to address their constituencies' needs, resulting in an improved score in the service provision dimension. The sector's public image also improved, due to the positive media coverage and citizens' recognition of CSOs' positive role in society, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. At the same time, the sector's financial viability deteriorated slightly due to the reduction of state funding for CSOs from both the central and local budgets. The legal environment, advocacy, and sectoral infrastructure dimensions remained stable.

The number of registered CSOs decreased in 2020. Data from the Central Registry of North Macedonia (CRNM) indicates that there were a total of 10,812 registered CSOs by the end of 2020, down from 15,476 in 2019. However, challenges related to the precision, usefulness, and timeliness of the data regarding the civil sector available from CRNM persist.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 3.8



The legal environment governing CSOs in North Macedonia remained unchanged during 2020, affected by both positive and negative developments.

The 2010 Law on Associations and Foundations (LAF) continues to provide a relatively clear and enabling framework for the operation of associations and foundations, outlining requirements for organizational governance, reporting obligations, and other aspects of CSOs' work. The process for registering a CSO is generally fast and easy to complete. Although there was an effort in 2019 to waive registration fees for CSOs, these remained in place in 2020.

CSOs must register EU-funded projects in the Secretariat of European Affairs. The procedures for doing so were lengthier and more burdensome in 2020,

causing CSOs administrative obstacles in project implementation.

CSOs generally operate free from state harassment, although isolated incidents do occur. For example, a CSO providing humanitarian, medical, and legal assistance in migrant camps reported that a police officer arbitrarily obstructed its work by limiting access to the camp to their legal team and medical associate without providing any official document describing such a decision.

Rapidly changing restrictions to the freedoms of movement and assembly in the first half of 2020 that were introduced as part of the government's measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 affected the work of CSOs. Some CSOs had to postpone their field activities or terminate aspects of their projects.

There were also some positive developments in the legal framework affecting the work of CSOs in 2020. Most notably, in January, the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies was adopted. The new law—the first in the country to regulate these issues—defines youth organizations and establishes a National Advisory Body for youth policies and a Registry of Youth Organizations. The Law on Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination, which will promote and improve equality and prevent discrimination in the country, was once again adopted in October 2020 after the Constitutional Court repealed the 2019 Law because it was passed without the required majority. The law is important for CSOs working in the field of human rights and equality and was adopted with significant support and involvement of the civil society sector.

The 2018 Law on Money Laundering and Financing Terrorism continued to be an issue for CSOs in 2020. Banks continued to treat CSOs as high-risk subjects and therefore imposed burdensome procedures for opening bank accounts and performed rigorous monitoring of CSOs' bank accounts and transactions. In 2020, thanks to strong cooperation between CSOs and the authorities, a targeted risk assessment was initiated to evaluate the concrete risks of terrorist financing by CSOs and determine an appropriate methodology to conduct such assessments in the future.

CSOs face no legal restrictions to their ability to access various funding sources, including through income generation and economic activities, organizing fundraising campaigns, accepting funds from foreign donors, or competing for government procurements.

The Law on Donations and Sponsorship in Public Activities provides CSOs with exemptions from value-added tax (VAT) on foreign grants and domestic donations. Income derived from sources other than economic activities is exempt from profit tax. CSOs' economic activities are subject to a preferential tax rate of 1 percent of the total

generated revenues from economic activity in the calendar year on amounts that exceed MKD 1 million (EUR 16,260). Volunteer costs are also exempt from the personal tax.

There were no specific training programs on CSO-related law in 2020. However, the Civil Society Resource Center and the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) have active legal support programs. As long as they have access to information technology (IT) tools, CSOs from all regions of the country can access legal advice.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.6

Organizational capacity within the CSO sector improved slightly in 2020 due to improvements in constituency building, volunteerism, and CSOs' use of technology

CSOs were among the first to recognize the urgency of the pandemic and they quickly adapted their project activities to meet the needs of people most affected, including marginalized groups and vulnerable communities. CSO constituency building improved, as CSOs, especially those providing humanitarian assistance and those working on the grassroots level, engaged extensively with constituents to respond to their needs.

CSO staffing, on the other hand, further worsened in 2020 due to the crisis. According to research conducted by Association Konekt about the effects of the pandemic on CSO financial viability, 36 percent of CSOs surveyed responded that they faced challenges maintaining their current staff. Data from CRNM indicates that the number of people employed in the sector increased slightly from 1,645 in 2019 to 1,677 in 2020. However, it declined as a percentage of total employment in the country from 0.29 percent to 0.2 percent. CSOs, especially those working outside the capital, report growing challenges in obtaining skilled staff due to ongoing emigration.

CSOs reported an increase in the number of volunteers engaged amid the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, LGBTI United Tetovo reported a 30 percent increase in the number of volunteers it engaged in the provision of food and groceries to the local community. An informal group of volunteers from different sectors, including medical doctors and private companies, came together under the name 3D Print Medical Equipment to produce and distribute protective equipment to more than 20,000 doctors and frontline workers across the country. Nevertheless, CSOs continued to face administrative barriers in developing volunteer programs, and greater challenges when it comes to accepting and working with foreign volunteers.

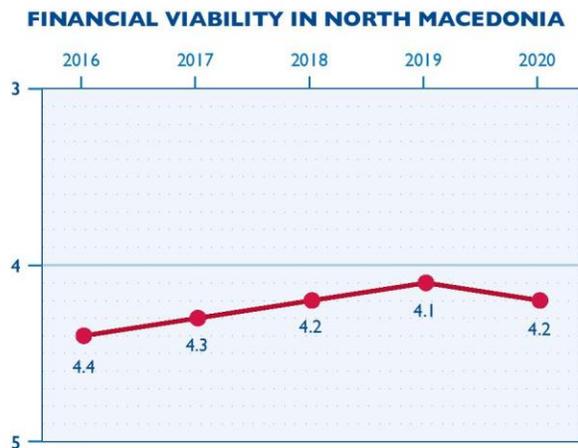
According to the *Report on the Governance Practices, Transparency and Accountability of Civil Society Organizations for 2019* by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), nearly three-quarters of CSOs (73 percent) have strategic plans. However, almost half of them (49 percent) do not have a monitoring and evaluation plan for their strategies. These practices did not change significantly in 2020, as strategic planning was not a priority for CSOs in 2020. Instead, CSOs were focused on adapting their programs to the new reality of the pandemic, ensuring the continuation and achievement of results, and responding to the needs of their beneficiaries in light of the pandemic mostly through short-term projects. According to the *TACSO Report on the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society 2019*, many organizations also lack a clear division of roles for their governing bodies.

Technical advancement accounted for the biggest improvement in organizational capacity in the sector in 2020. Most CSOs have access to the internet, as well as state-of-the-art technical office equipment, which allowed them to adapt quickly to the use of online tools for their daily work. The Civil Society Resource Center provided CSOs with free use of Zoom's videoconferencing platform from July through the end of December 2020. At the same time, CSOs expressed concerns that they had inadequate knowledge and practices concerning privacy and online security, especially with the way information is stored and exchanged.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN N. MACEDONIA



FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.2



The financial viability of the CSO sector deteriorated slightly in 2020 due to the reduction of state funding for CSOs from both the central and local budgets. The research conducted by Association Konekt on the impact of the pandemic on the financial viability of CSOs found that 62 percent of CSOs faced financial difficulties; 64 percent indicated that they need more funding in order to respond to the urgent needs of citizens; and 44 percent responded that they have had grants or other sources of funding temporarily stopped. These trends were confirmed by the findings of an electronic questionnaire distributed to CSO representatives to collect more representative input into the *CSO Sustainability Index*; according to this survey, 57.7 percent of respondents indicated that the CSO sector's access to various sources of financial support declined in 2020.

In general, larger CSOs have access to longer-term funding from a few donors, while the majority of CSOs depend on one or two donors for short-term funding. CSOs continue to rely heavily on foreign donors for funding. According to the *Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development - Country Report for North Macedonia 2020*, almost 80 percent of surveyed CSOs receive funding from foreign donors.

According to the *Monitoring Matrix*, 82.4 percent of CSOs believe the public funding to CSOs is insufficient and not commensurate to the needs of CSOs. At the beginning of the pandemic, the government eliminated more than a half-million Euros in funding allocated for support to CSOs from the 2020 Budget. This funding would have been provided through the General Secretariat of the Government and a number of different ministries. As this decision was made without any consultations with the Council for Cooperation and Development of the Civil Society Sector or the public, CSOs called on the government to reconsider its decision following this reaction from civil society, the General Secretariat published a call to provide financial support to CSOs to implement measures focused on COVID-19. Through this program, a total of MKD 29.5 million (around USD 581,000) was awarded to forty CSO projects. In February 2020, the Ministry of Justice published a call under the newly adopted Law on Free Legal Aid to provide financial support to authorized CSOs and legal clinics to provide primary legal aid services. However, no information was available as to whether any funds were awarded under this call during the year. In addition, no specific measures were created for CSOs in any of the four packages adopted by the government to overcome the negative economic impacts of the pandemic in 2020.

There were also few public calls for support to CSOs on the local level in 2020, as many municipal governments reallocated their funds for CSOs to other purposes. In addition, most of the funding for CSOs distributed by the municipalities is awarded to sports clubs rather than CSOs, both of which are funded from the same budget line.

The level of foreign funding remained generally the same in 2020, although many donors reoriented their funding to react to the COVID-19 crisis. Under the *Civica Mobilitas* program for 2019 to 2022, which is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by MCIC, approximately CHF 5.6 million (approximately USD 6.3 million) will be awarded as grants to CSOs over a four-year period. In 2020, *Civica Mobilitas* awarded a total of MKD 60 million (approximately USD 1.2 million) to fifteen CSOs to support their institutional development and strengthen their capacities. In addition, *Civica Mobilitas* awarded MKD 31.2 million (approximately USD 612,000) in ad hoc grants to allow CSOs to address immediate needs related to the COVID-19 crisis. The Foundation Open Society Macedonia (FOSM) awarded USD 779,600 for projects focused on COVID-19 support.

In January 2020, the Delegation of the EU launched a call to support civil society networks and platforms with total funding of EUR 2.5 million. However, CSOs that had served as the lead implementer of an EU-funded project over the past five years were not eligible for this funding, excluding most of the well-established CSOs in the country. Many CSOs expressed concerns that such a practice might harm the many CSOs for which the EU has been a key source of funding.

USAID's new country development cooperation strategy for North Macedonia for 2020-2025 identifies three development objectives: greater economic growth through improved competitiveness; fostering economic opportunities attractive to youth, strengthening their job competencies, and empowering youth to take an active role in the country's development; and supporting the critical need for accountability of government institutions and citizens to increase their actions to counter corruption. Other donors, such as the British Embassy, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and some smaller bilateral donors, are also still present in the country.

CSOs' fundraising capacity continues to be limited and there were no notable developments concerning online giving in 2020. Although the Law on Donations and Sponsorship in Public Activities provides tax incentives for donations and sponsorships, the procedures to claim these benefits continue to be burdensome, so they have little effect on individual and corporate donations especially by small and medium enterprises. In April 2020, urgent changes were made to the law that introduced a facilitated procedure for donations to institutions dealing with COVID-19 and established a Solidarity Fund. CSOs were not included in the new procedure prescribed by the law, despite the fact that they also collect donations and address pandemic-related needs. CSOs were also not recognized as potential recipients of the fund, which received significant funding from companies.

In 2020, companies provided significant support for COVID-19 pandemic response activities. Most of this support went directly to public institutions, although some valuable support was also provided to CSOs, in particular by producers and retailers of food and household products.

The extent to which CSOs engage in income-generating activities did not change significantly in 2020. According to the Monitoring Matrix survey, 48.8 percent of CSOs engage in economic activity. Changes to the Law on Public Procurement in 2019 allow the state to provide preferential treatment or reserved procurement of certain services from CSOs. This was seen as an opportunity for CSOs to tap into this financial resource. However, there are no known examples of this provision being used in 2020.

CSOs' financial management systems must comply with donors' requirements and national legislation and facilitate transparent reporting. No significant changes were recorded in CSOs' financial management practices in 2020, as the pandemic made it difficult for CSOs to devote resources to the development of policies and procedures in this area.

ADVOCACY: 3.2

CSO advocacy remained unchanged in 2020. Despite the difficult circumstances during the year, including the restrictions to movement and freedom of assembly adopted as part of the state of emergency and the obstructed functioning of the parliament for nearly half the year, CSOs were able to achieve some positive results through their advocacy initiatives and efforts. CSOs contributed to relevant policy-making processes, such as the drafting of the Law on Lobbying, the preparation of the National Strategy for the Fight against Corruption, and the election of candidates to the Commission against Discrimination. Moreover, many politicians participated in CSOs' online events, demonstrating their willingness to cooperate on issues of common importance.



The Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society, which was established in 2018, continued to promote cooperation between CSOs and the government and to encourage further development of the civil sector. Nine sessions were organized in 2020 to discuss policies relevant to CSOs, such as public funding of CSOs, cross-border cooperation programs, and civil society involvement in anti-crisis bodies. CSOs submitted five times more proposals to the Council's call to support civil society's contribution to the preparation of the government program for 2021 than in previous years.

Despite persistent challenges, CSOs remained engaged in policy-making processes at the local and national levels in 2020, and some of their initiatives were accepted by the authorities. Although CSOs were not initially involved in the anti-crisis management bodies created to tackle the pandemic, in response to CSO advocacy, the government eventually included two CSO representatives in the General Body for Crisis Management, although they were not given voting rights. Cooperation between the government and CSOs was better at the local level. A CSO representative in the municipality of Gostivar, for example, is the president of the local anti-crisis body.

During 2020, CSOs were involved in many initiatives in the field of transparency. After a series of meetings organized with CSOs on the national level, the government adopted the Strategy for Transparency of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia 2019-2021 and the Action Plan in December 2019 and officially published them in January 2020. As a result of advocacy led by the Center for Civic Communications, the State Audit Office introduced notable changes in the preparation and publication of reports that contribute to a wider outreach and greater understanding of the oversight and audit processes by the media and the public.

CSO representatives also contributed their expertise as members of working groups that prepared various laws and policies, including the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Polices, which was adopted in January 2020, and the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, adopted for the second time in October 2020. CSOs also served on working groups for the Law on Equal Opportunities, Law on Gender-Based Violence, and Law on Compensation of Victims of Crime, all of which were under development during 2020. Association Konekt, together with Youth Cultural Center (YCC/MKC) Bitola, and Coalition of Youth Organizations SEGA from Prilep, are involved in preparing a new Strategy for Volunteering and amendments to the Law on Volunteering. Furthermore, a group of CSOs led by FOSM proposed a model for the participation of CSOs in sectoral working groups in order to enhance the structural dialogue between institutions and civil society in twelve different sectors.

After Bulgaria obstructed North Macedonia's entry into the EU, a network of CSOs strived to push the country's EU agenda within the international community and to mitigate the negative outcomes of the process.

A group of CSOs cooperated effectively with the Ministry of Justice to exempt CSOs from the draft Law on Lobbying, in which they were initially included, noting that such legislation is in conflict with the LAF, which states that CSOs are free to initiate and participate in public opinion and policy making. The final version of the law has yet to be adopted by the parliament.

A number of CSOs supported by the USAID-funded Civic Engagement Project worked with municipalities around the country. The Local Community Development Foundation – Stip worked with municipalities in the eastern region to establish and strengthen local advisory bodies in various areas (including ecology, urbanism, and tourism) and provided recommendations to improve the municipal councils, as well as solutions to specific municipal problems. Functional advisory bodies were established in Stip, Probistip, Delchevo, Kocani, Zrnovci, and Berovo. Most of the provided recommendations were adopted by municipalities, and in some cases their implementation was integrated as part of the projects implemented by the CSOs. Finance Think worked with eleven municipalities to include civil society, businesses, citizens, and local media in the municipal budgeting processes. Municipalities accepted 45 percent of citizens' proposals as part of the participative budgeting process.

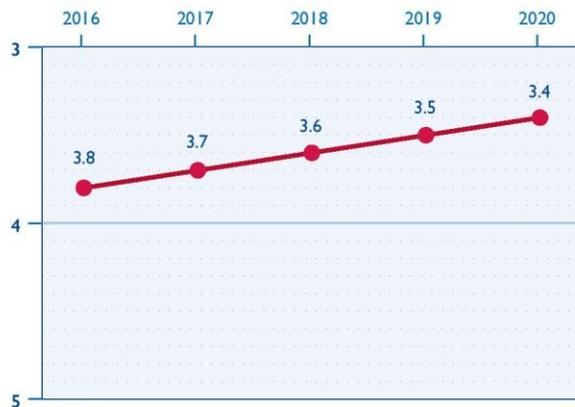
In 2020, the Council for Coordination and Monitoring of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Process was established to co-create the new National OGP Action Plan. The Council consists of fourteen members, with an equal number of members from government institutions and civil society. The Council will develop the government's future responsibilities and commitments to promoting openness, encouraging civic participation, and contributing to a greater change in society.

SERVICE PROVISION: 3.4

CSO service provision improved slightly in 2020 due to CSOs' abilities to provide services to the most vulnerable communities amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the survey conducted by Association Konekt, around 66 percent of organizations offered their services during the year. By receiving special permits, grassroots organizations were allowed to address local needs and the priorities of their constituencies during the curfews and state of emergency.

SERVICE PROVISION IN NORTH MACEDONIA



During the crisis, CSOs provided humanitarian services to people in need, such as the distribution of food and protective equipment, help to victims of domestic violence, and educational and language programs for children. Shelters or safe houses in Skopje, Bitola, Strumica, and Struga, which were financed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy in cooperation with the Red Cross, provided services for homeless people. Open Gate/La Strada provided safe accommodation, psycho-social support, and basic necessities to victims of trafficking and sexual violence. Health Education and Research Association – Skopje (HERA) engaged unemployed Roma women to provide basic services such as food, medicine, and household support to the elderly and single parents of children with disabilities. In addition to humanitarian services, CSOs were also recognized as

service providers for digital tools and software during 2020. For example, the First Family Center provided online counseling during the pandemic for victims and perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence, while Eurothink – Center for European Strategies created a comprehensive digital tool to enable education, monitoring, and sharing of knowledge related to the EU accession process.

In 2020, MYLA continued to provide free legal aid to vulnerable groups and support for advocacy-related activities (for example, legal research related to a particular environmental problem). In December 2020, MYLA signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Legal Chamber, which includes training, research, and analysis for effective advocacy, and lobbying to improve laws and policies on access to justice and protection of human rights. During the crisis, registered legal clinics and associations, such as Healthy Options Skopje (HOPS), HERA, and the Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women (ESE), provided free legal aid.

CSOs offer their services to citizens, other organizations, government institutions, and academia free of charge and without discrimination with regards to race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

CSOs rarely receive funding from service recipients. A large part of their services are funded by foreign donors. During the unprecedented circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the government acknowledged the positive role of CSOs as service providers in local communities in 2020. However, as described above, the government provided little financial support to CSOs to deal with the consequences of the pandemic.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.0

The infrastructure supporting CSOs did not change significantly in 2020. However, CSOs did form some important partnerships with other societal groups and increased the availability of online training. While CSOs have access to a number of different facilities to increase their capacities, this infrastructure is largely funded by foreign donors, which makes its long-term sustainability questionable.

In 2020, national and local CSOs had increased access to numerous, cost-free trainings. With support from the EU, the Civil Society Resource Center provided information, consultations, training, free legal advice, and event management services to other CSOs. FOSM continues to provide vital support to two resource centers in the municipalities of Struga and Stumica. CSOs in other municipalities, however, still lack infrastructural support.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN N. MACEDONIA



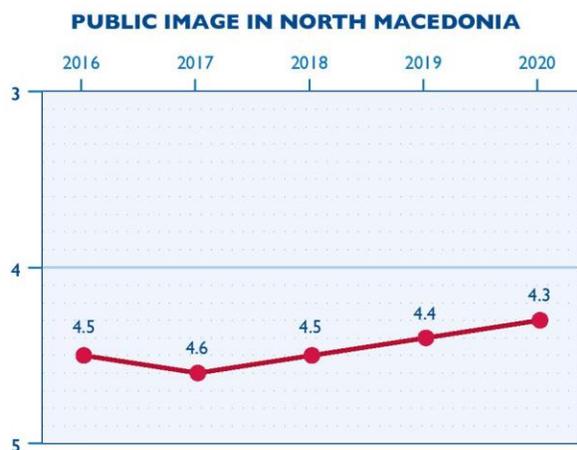
The switch to remote modes of work in 2020 resulted in an increase in the availability of training offered to CSOs. The new phase of the EU-funded Technical Assistance for CSOs (TACSO 3) program, which started in 2019, provided regional workshops and training in which CSOs from North Macedonia also participated. These training programs addressed research and evidence-based advocacy, volunteering for social change, digital tools, and emergency response. The Civil Society Resource Center provided training related to networking and coalition building, CSO management practices, institutional development and capacity building, and fundraising.

Several local organizations provide financial support to local CSOs under foreign-funded projects, thereby encouraging activists and small organizations to address local problems. The Civica Mobilitas program implemented by MCIC is the only locally-managed program that provides institutional grants to CSOs working on different sectors, including human rights, health care, agriculture and rural development, the rule of law, gender issues, communications and media, culture, people with disabilities, and poverty.

Cooperation between CSOs exists in many areas. Several coalitions work together towards common aims in the area of rule of law. Nine CSO networks representing more than 100 CSOs joined together to advocate for the priority adoption of the Law for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination; the Blueprint Group for Judiciary Reforms and the CSO Platform for Fighting Corruption worked together on several issues; and nine CSOs active in the area of rule of law, transparency, and good governance recently established the Probation Coalition. CSO coalitions are also active in the areas of environment and health, and CSO networks have come together to respond to challenges related to COVID-19.

CSOs are also involved in joint initiatives with different actors. Association Konekt continued to enhance cooperation with the business sector through the Club of Responsible Businesses, which brings CSOs and companies together to conduct activities of common interest. In 2020, the Macedonian Banking Association, Financial Intelligence Unit, and Financial Sustainability Network of CSOs established a Platform for Dialogue focused on terrorist financing risk, which is crucial for making recommendations to relieve the burden on CSOs imposed by various regulations. In 2020, upon the initiative of and with support from the EU and the Council of Europe, CSOs, the Macedonia Bar Association, and the Ministry of Justice established a National Coordinative Body for implementation of the Law on Free Legal Aid in order to improve access to legal aid.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.3



The sector's public image improved slightly in 2020 due to the positive media coverage of CSOs' actions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. While there have been notable improvements over the past few years, the sector's public image remains low as a result of negative trends in the past, particularly the previous government's negative rhetoric.

CSOs received significant media coverage during 2020. Civil society representatives participated in informative programs and TV debates, and TV documentaries reporting on CSOs' role during the crisis helped improve the sector's image.

These media appearances allowed the public to increasingly recognize CSO activism and the positive change CSOs bring in society, both through their

advocacy and service provision. CSOs were regarded as representatives of citizens' voices and a channel to get in touch with government institutions. However, a part of the population still criticizes CSOs for receiving a lot of money in a non-transparent manner.

The government's perception of CSOs is satisfactory. Many public institutions recognize CSOs' role and participation in public affairs and CSOs are consulted when important public decisions are made. In its program, the government commits to cooperating with CSOs. During 2020, there were no orchestrated attacks against CSOs by the state. However, there is still a lack of understanding of CSOs' work among government officials, the

business sector, and a significant portion of society. Some political parties spread negative messages about CSOs in 2020. Of particular note was hate speech spread on the official Facebook pages of two political parties. The rhetoric included calls for public lynching and even threats to the lives of employees of the Metamorphosis Foundation, a CSO running a fact-checking site in partnership with Facebook in order to combat fake news. The official program of one of these political parties, Levica, which entered parliament for the first time and recorded the biggest increase in support in 2020, calls for measures for the “de-Sorosization” of the country's civil society sector and sanctioning the spread of “propaganda” by think tanks and NGOs funded by foreign donors.

CSOs demonstrated good public relations skills, and widely promoted their work on social media in 2020.

There is no clear information on the amount of public funding provided to CSOs versus that provided to political parties, both of which are funded through the same budget line “469 transfers to CSOs.” This lack of transparency regarding the amount of public funds distributed to CSOs might have a negative effect on public trust towards CSOs.

Self-regulation within the sector did not change notably in 2020. Under the program Sustainable Civil Society – State Financing of CSOs, implemented by MCIC in partnership with the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), grant support was provided to five CSO networks to improve their internal policies; strengthen their organizational capacity, transparency, and accountability; enhance CSO self-regulation; and increase awareness of good governance practices. CSOs still do not have an established joint code of conduct or other self-regulation mechanisms.

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