

# Civil Society Code

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МАКЕДОНСКИ  
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CIVIL  
SOCIETY  
DEVELOPMENT  
NETWORK



**CIVOS**  
Centre for Information Service,  
Co-operation and Development of NGOs

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# CIVIL SOCIETY CODE

## INTRODUCTION

Freedom of association is a fundamental human right guaranteed in Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, stipulating that “citizens are guaranteed freedom of association to exercise and protect their political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and convictions.” This right allows us as citizens to freely organize and establish and participate in groups and associations of citizens, to join them and resign from them.

We are firmly convinced that the development of democracy largely depends on the respect and practice of this right. Through association, we are enabled to monitor the human rights situation and to support and promote development policies in society. Therefore, the state has an obligation to ensure free establishment and participation in associations of any type and to guarantee independence in their operation. As associations we are free to seek and receive financial resources from various sources in order to implement our programs and activities for the benefit of the citizens. In addition to the Constitution, in North Macedonia, the Fundamental Guarantees for our work are provided by the Law on Associations and Foundations, which clearly defines the basic principles of associations’ operation.<sup>1</sup>

In Macedonia, the process of democratization and economic liberalization has contributed to the growth of the number of civil society organizations in various sectoral areas and to the impact in the society. In our work, in addition to acting independently, we often associate in different platforms and networks of civil society organizations, in order to have a greater impact to improve various aspects of the lives of citizens.

Today, more and more often we have opportunities for cooperation with the public and the private sector. We are expected to show that we provide quality services, but also that we efficiently manage our organizations even in difficult and challenging circumstances. Undoubtedly, our legitimacy originates from the very quality of our work and the support given by the people we work with and for, by members, donors, the general public, state and international institutions. Therefore, it is imperative for us to show that we may and can establish a system of self-regulation through which we will ensure operation based on good governance, accountability, transparency and efficiency.

This Civil Society Code aims to strengthen the self-regulation system and to contribute to greater professionalism and accountability. One of the biggest challenges we face today is building trust with the citizens and the general public. As civil society organizations that operate at the local and national level, we need to ensure broader accountability for our work and thus confirm our public interest in the policy-making processes that benefit the citizens, for which we receive resources.

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<sup>1</sup> This Civil Society Code refers to each association, foundation, union, as well as each organizational form of foreign organization, as well as other form of association, registered in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Associations and Foundations (Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia no. 52/2010, 135/2011 and 55/2016).

The Code is voluntary, and every civil society organization that joins it assumes responsibility for complying with and practicing the commitments, values and standards set out in it. The Code is a living matter and it will be promoted and improved by the civil society organizations consistently and continuously.

## FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

Our fundamental value is respect for **human rights** as universal and inalienable rights of all citizens. In our work, we are guided by the human rights-based approach and we promote national and international standards for their protection. The fight against discrimination on all grounds is at the core of our social actions.

By advocating for **justice and equality**, we support people to know and fulfill their rights and to demand responsibility when they are not respected. Our goal is to build a society in which everyone enjoys the same rights and freedoms and freely decides about their lives regardless of their origin, nationality or ethnicity, religion or religious belief, socioeconomic status, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, political or other conviction or any other social status. In cooperation with all stakeholders, we strive to establish gender equality and remove obstacles to the development of women, girls and youth in our society.

**Accountability and transparency** are our supreme democratic values. In communication with all stakeholders we are open, honest and act with professional integrity, and the focus of our work is the public interest.

As civil society organizations, we make a special effort to establish **participation and inclusiveness** in all aspects of our work. We promote and practice active participation of all interested citizens (especially the marginalized and disadvantaged ones, as well as the youth and the poor) in the local community development. We advocate for a feedback-based decision-making process that reflects the rights of the people whose interests we represent and/or those who are affected by our work.

We comply with the laws. Not a single share of the profit we make is distributed to our members, employees or directors, but is reinvested in the achievement of our mission, goals and activities set by the Statute, guaranteeing our **not-for-profit** aspect.

We care about the protection of the **environment and the sustainability of our planet**. We implement our activities in an environmentally sustainable way. As part of the civil society, we motivate citizens to advocate for and promote systemic changes for a healthy planet where future generations can thrive and develop.

We always act with faith in **solidarity**, as a supreme civic relationship among different groups of citizens and classes that unite to fulfill a common interest and a sense of unity in encouraging social changes.

## 1. RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING AND TRANSPARENT ORGANIZATIONS

- 1.1 Civil society organizations are catalysts for positive social change with a clearly defined and publicly available vision, mission, target groups and beneficiaries.
- 1.2 The work of civil society organizations is based on a one-year or multi-year planning process. The strategic plans and projects arise from and are guided by the need to achieve the organizational mission and to meet the needs of the citizens for whom we act.
- 1.3 Employees, members, beneficiaries/constituents and supporters are actively involved in the strategic planning process and thus they have an impact on decision-making processes within organizations.
- 1.4 Civil society organizations have a practice of continuous monitoring and evaluation of the results and goals of their programs and projects. The results of the implemented programs and projects are aimed at creating lasting positive changes in the Macedonian society.
- 1.5 Civil society organizations have a practice of at least one-year reporting on the results achieved and activities implemented in the form of an annual organizational report. These reports are publicly shared and easily accessible for all stakeholders.
- 1.6 Civil society organizations possess and constantly develop skills and capacities needed to implement programs and projects.
- 1.7 Civil society organizations constantly strive to ensure quality in their work in accordance with the modern development trends of work approach in the non-profit sector.



## 2. GOOD GOVERNANCE

- 2.1 Civil society organizations that are signatories to this Code have adopted a Statute or other type of governing act which clearly defines the vision, mission and goals of the organization.
- 2.2 Civil society organizations have a clear organizational structure with clearly divided roles, rights and responsibilities between non-executive and executive bodies. The work of the civil society organizations is overseen by an independent non-executive body that meets regularly and reviews and approves the annual organizational reports (narrative and financial), reviews and decides on significant organizational policies and key financial decisions, work plans and programs.
- 2.3 The non-executive body that controls the work of the organization is an independent body with clearly regulated rules for election and re-election of its members.
- 2.4 The members of the non-executive bodies do not receive fees for performing their work except for the necessary expenses for holding the regular sessions, i.e. meetings.



- 2.5** The leadership in civil society organizations is visionary, innovative and encourages the creation of team spirit in the bodies of the organization.
- 2.6** Civil society organizations ensure independence in their operation from government, political parties and other powerful social actors. The members of the bodies put the interest of the organization above the personal interest, guided by the duty and responsibility to act in the best possible interest towards their beneficiaries, constituents and the general public.
- 2.7** Civil society organizations clearly regulate and declare potential and actual conflicts of interest in their work.
- 2.8** Information on employees, members, donors, as well as financial resources is publicly shared by the civil society organizations and easily available to all interested parties, and especially to the general public.
- 2.9** Civil society organizations establish equal gender representation in both non-executive and executive bodies of their organizations. The members of these bodies belong to different social groups and reflect the different cultural, multiethnic and social background of the environment in which they operate.
- 2.10** Decisions in the civil society organizations are made responsibly and are based on a continuous process of exchanging information and feedback with the beneficiaries and target groups.
- 2.11** Civil society organizations use digital technologies in the interest of greater integration of target groups and mission achievement by taking into account the respect for privacy. The personal information available to organizations is protected from misuse and unauthorized sharing with third parties.

### **3. ETHICAL FUNDING AND RESPONSIBLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

- 3.1** The fund raising and donations serve to achieve the mission and goals of civil society organizations. Organizations ensure reasonable and accountable management of financial assets and resources, by using them economically for the purpose for which they were intended in order to maximize mission achievement.
- 3.2** Civil society organizations continuously monitor costs and provide internal and, if necessary, independent financial control of their operations.
- 3.3** Civil society organizations comply with and apply legally established financial, accounting and administrative systems in order to reduce the risk of funds misuse and corruption.
- 3.4** Civil society organizations provide transparent reporting on the funds received and implemented in their annual organizational reports. The implemented funds are presented in a way that enables a clear understanding of the different categories of costs and funds received from different sources and donors.



## 4. STRONG LINKS WITH THE EMPLOYEES, MEMBERSHIP, SUPPORTERS AND VOLUNTEERS

- 4.1 As employers, civil society organizations ensure fair and transparent policies for hiring qualified staff with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies. Employment policies are based on non-discrimination and respect for the rights of marginalized and vulnerable categories of citizens.
- 4.2 Civil society organizations practice culture of accountability in their work, where employees and volunteers have a strong sense of responsibility for their actions and impact.
- 4.3 Civil society organizations are open to suggestions by their members, supporters and end beneficiaries and implement those suggestions to improve the operation and their involvement in the implementation and evaluation of programs and projects.
- 4.4 Civil society organizations invest resources in professional capacity building of employees and continuously measure their performance results.
- 4.5 Civil society organizations provide income for employees that is calculated according to the complexity of work processes and the income in the public and private sector.
- 4.6 Civil society organizations continuously cultivate and develop the spirit of volunteerism, and volunteers are a resource for organizations. Volunteering in the civil society organizations is always welcome and appreciated. Depending on the needs and conditions, the volunteers go through specific training necessary for proper performance of the tasks and they are monitored and mentored in their work.
- 4.7 Civil society organizations comply with the legal framework of labor law and ensure equal pay for equal work and decent working conditions.



## 5. RESPONSIBLE ADVOCACY

- 5.1 Civil society organizations actively and publicly advocate for important social issues, and advocacy is based on evidence (obtained from research that is verifiable and/or in constant communication with target groups) and the needs of people in the communities.
- 5.2 Civil society organizations advocate with integrity taking into account the truthfulness and honesty of the actions. In their advocacy methods, they do not expose their beneficiaries and groups of citizens to risk, and advocacy is done in accordance with the mission and goals and for the purpose of promoting the public interest.
- 5.3 Civil society organizations clearly declare whose interest they advocate for in the framework of their activities and in communication with all stakeholders.



## 6. AVAILABLE AND AFFORDABLE (SOCIAL) SERVICES AND BENEFICIARY CARE

- 6.1 Civil society organizations, while delivering (social) services, focus on their end beneficiaries and their real needs in order to improve their quality of life. Associations promote services that are equally and easily available to all beneficiaries.
- 6.2 Beneficiary care is based on the protection and promotion of human rights, guided by the principles of freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association, non-discrimination and capacity building of beneficiaries.
- 6.3 While delivering services, associations and foundations provide a feedback line in order to improve the services. The (social) service programs are subject to regular evaluations of the quality of the services and are constantly improved in accordance with the remarks received and the novelties in the social and economic context of the communities.
- 6.4 Through social service provision programs, we support the beneficiaries to take an active role in improving their lives as active actors in their transformation.



## 7. STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

- 7.1 Civil society organizations, in their work, build partnerships based on respect and support that contribute to mutual development.
- 7.2 Civil society organizations cooperate with various actors to achieve common goals and activities, provide participation in decision-making to address important social issues and problems, build lasting platforms for networking and collaboration.
- 7.3 Civil society organizations, objectively and impartially, share information, resources and knowledge and make important social decisions collectively.
- 7.4 Civil society organizations support citizens to take active roles and steps and engage in the change process at local and national level.



## 8. OPEN TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS

- 8.1 External and internal communication reflects the fundamental values and principles of the work of civil society organizations. In their activities and relations with third parties, civil society organizations respect the principles of two-way, clear, truthful and non-violent communication and promote a culture of reasoned dialogue.
- 8.2 Civil society organizations, transparently and timely, share information about their mission, goals, activities, finance, staff, members of non-executive bodies and contacts. The shared information is user-friendly and available to all interested parties, and in their work the organizations ensure personal data protection in order to protect against misuse. Civil society organizations always tend to adapt the communication to the needs of people with disabilities.



- 8.3** It is in the best interest of the civil society organizations and in the interest of the service beneficiaries to strengthen the spirit of open communication. The goal is to promote and consistently respect the standards set out in this Code, as a basic measure for our relations within the civil society and in communication with the public.
- 8.4** Civil society organizations enable two-way communication and encourage citizens and all stakeholders to express their thoughts, suggestions and comments on their work, in order to improve efficiency, effectiveness and impact in the performance.
- 8.5** Civil society organizations provide a grievance mechanism (external and internal), creating safe conditions and appropriate procedures for their resolution and further prevention.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**STATUTE:** is an act that regulates the activity, organizational set-up and functioning of the organization.

**EXECUTIVE BODIES:** are those bodies that are responsible for the day-to-day operations and work of the organization. In practice, you can find them named as: Executive Director or Board of Directors. The persons who are part of the executive bodies are the legal representatives of the civil society organizations and make and implement decisions for the day-to-day work of the organizations. The employees in the civil society organizations are accountable for their work to the director or to the board of directors.

**NON-EXECUTIVE BODIES:** are those bodies that govern the civil society organizations and monitor the work of the organization in relation to the stated mission, its short-term and long-term goals. In accordance with the Law on Associations and Foundations, the highest governing body in civil society organizations is the Assembly, but often, in practice, civil society organizations, in accordance with their founding acts as non-executive bodies, have a Governing Board, Council and/or Supervisory Board.

**ASSEMBLY:** as the highest governing body in the organization, adopts and regulates the Statute of the organization, and also adopts the work programs, strategy and annual reports. The Assembly also decides on the goals of the organization and the organizational structure of the association.

**GOVERNING BOARD:** is a general governing body that supervises the day-to-day governing of the organization. This body adopts policies for the functioning of the organization, provides clear guidelines for the implementation of these policies and monitors their implementation. It reviews and adopts the annual organizational reports.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** is a situation in which external interests impact or are perceived to impact the ability of responsible persons to make fair and impartial decisions on behalf of the civil society organization.

## PREPARATION OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY CODE

The preparation of this Civil Society Code emerged as an initiative of civil society organizations that are part of the informal network for transparency and accountability of civil society organizations that was established under the “Sustainable Civil Society - State Financing of CSOs” program. Within this program, 29 sub-grants were implemented to improve transparency and accountability. And, the grantees as a critical mass of civic associations working to improve their transparency and accountability were the basis for establishing the network. Additionally, the organizations that already cover the topic and work in the field of good governance and self-regulation have also joined the network.

The preparation of the Code was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the situation in the civil society sector in terms of transparency and accountability and ways to improve it were discussed through consultative meetings with grantees. Four workshops were also conducted, by which the organizations got acquainted with different self-regulation tools for civil society organizations that are present in the countries of the region but also globally (Slovenia, Croatia, Albania and South America). In accordance with the conclusions of these meetings and workshops, the need to create a Civil Society Code, which would affirm the commitment of civil society organizations to continuously improve and strengthen transparency and accountability was emphasized. In the second phase, internal workshops were organized to prepare the text of the Code. At the initial workshop, by dividing the participants into groups, the areas and standards that should be included in the Code were discussed and based on the minutes of the working groups, eight areas and a series of standards and principles divided according to the areas were proposed. According to what was discussed, the first draft text of the Code was prepared and shared, to which comments and remarks were submitted. A second workshop and several bilateral consultations were organized to summarize the comments and remarks to improve the text. As a result, a second draft was sent which was also shared for comments and remarks. The second draft text of the Code was shared with the grantees of Civica Mobilitas (who are part of the institutional, action and/or small action grants) for the purpose of wider involvement of civil society organizations in the preparation process. According to the comments on the second draft, the final version of the Code was prepared, supplemented by a Code Implementation Guide. The Code and the Guide will be continuously updated in accordance with the needs of the civil society sector for greater transparency and accountability. All interested organizations wishing to join the Code will be able to do so by filling in the following statement. The statements are deposited in the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation and they are reviewed within the regular meetings of the Network for Transparency and Accountability. Civil society organizations that will join the Code, need to report on the implementation of the Code in their annual organizational reports, announce on their social media and the like. The next steps in the development of the Code are the establishment of a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Code.



## STATEMENT

### for acceptance of the Code

<b>Name of organization</b>	
<b>Address</b>	
<b>Contact (mobile and/or email)</b>	
<b>Web site</b>	
<b>Person for contact (name and surname and email)</b>	

With this STATEMENT, as an authorized representative of the organization, I fully accept and undertake to apply the Code of Civil Society Organizations in the work of the organization, in order to strengthen the system of self-regulation and contribute to greater professionalism and accountability of the organization and the entire civil society sector.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name and surname and function of the authorized person

\_\_\_\_\_

Date



