

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT FOR 2025

INTRODUCTION

20 YEARS OF RESEARCH

IN ACTION

Reactor – Research in Action: A Story of Evidence, Change, and Vision

Twenty years. Two decades of asking bold questions, listening closely, and turning evidence into action. In 2025, Reactor marked this milestone not with quiet reflection, but with the energy and conviction that has always defined us — because the work is too important, and the moment too critical, to do otherwise.

This anniversary year was one we will long remember. We celebrated with our community, our partners, and our allies — and yes, we allowed ourselves a moment of joy, including supporting an arts exhibition that brought our values to life in a different register entirely. Culture, creativity, and civic courage belong together, and 2025 reminded us of that. We are proud of everything we accomplished — and we accomplished a great deal.

At the same time, we will not pretend that this was an easy year. The global landscape grew more turbulent: inequality deepened, democratic backsliding accelerated, anti-rights movements gained ground, and the climate crisis pressed harder on the communities we serve. Closer to home, the financial realities facing independent civil society organisations in our region remained demanding. We invested significant energy in sustainability planning and fundraising — and we are proud to say that we secured the resources needed to keep our work moving forward. The road required effort, creativity, and no small amount of determination. But we kept our eyes on the horizon and our hands firmly on the work.

Because that is who we are. We show up — for our research, for our partners, for the communities whose realities shape everything we do. We show up as if the resources were never in question, because we never hesitate in our mission.

In 2025, we continued to strengthen North Macedonia's path toward European integration, advance gender equality and women's rights, amplify youth voices, and build the civic ecosystem that lasting change requires. We brought local insights to regional and European platforms, contributed to critical policy debates, and deepened partnerships across the Western Balkans and beyond. Our

research remained rigorous, our advocacy remained grounded, and our commitment to intersectional, feminist, evidence-based work remained absolute.

None of this happens without people. The team at Reactor — researchers, coordinators, communicators, and the colleagues who hold everything together behind the scenes — gave this year everything they had. Their dedication, creativity, and resilience in the face of real challenges is the truest measure of what Reactor is. This report is theirs as much as it is ours. Thank you, sincerely and wholeheartedly, for everything.

As we close the twentieth chapter and open the twenty-first, we move forward with clarity, enthusiasm, and the unshakeable belief that evidence-based, community-rooted work can still change the world. The next twenty years start now. As we celebrate our milestone, we warmly invite our partners, allies, and supporters, longstanding and new, to walk with us into this next chapter.

Let's keep asking bold questions, sharing knowledge, and shaping a world where equity and justice are not distant aspirations, but lived and lasting realities.

Thank you!

THEMATIC AREAS AND PROGRAMMING ACTIVITIES (CURRENT PROJECTS)

GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

EU Advocacy: *EU Accession for Whom? - Women's Rights and Participation in the Western Balkans*

DURATION: JANUARY 2021 - DECEMBER 2026

DONOR: KVINNA TILL KVINNA FOUNDATION

Kvinna till Kvinna's regional EU advocacy programme "*EU Accession for Whom? — Women's Rights and Participation in the Western Balkans*", which covers all six pre-accession countries, aims to **secure women's rights and equal participation in decision-making in the Western Balkans, with a specific objective of gendering the EU accession process**. It is implemented in close cooperation with women's civil society organisations whose experience and efforts in areas such as peacebuilding, democracy, rule of law and inclusion of women in the EU accession processes in the Western Balkans are key for furthering the position of women in the region.

Reactor's multi-year [project](#) aims to advance gender equality in North Macedonia by strengthening the legal and strategic framework through evidence-based policy development, gender mainstreaming, and the use of sex-disaggregated data. It also seeks to increase the visibility of women's rights within the EU accession process and to bolster the meaningful participation of women's civil society organisations (WCSOs) in decision-making at both national and European levels.

In 2025, **Reactor remained a key actor in the national and regional gender equality landscape**, contributing actively to consultative and advocacy efforts targeting institutional stakeholders at local, national, and EU levels. Our work included regular engagement with officials from national government bodies, EU institutions, local self-governments, regional and international organisations.

One of the project's most impactful components continues to be the provision of **annual input and recommendations for the European Commission's Country Report on North Macedonia**. In 2025, we contributed during both the preparatory and follow-up phases—through written submissions, consultations at the national and Brussels level, and tailored advocacy materials. These documents formed the basis for various advocacy interactions throughout the year, highlighting key issues such as legislative stagnation in gender equality laws, challenges to participatory democracy,

especially women's participation in key decision making, overall democratic backsliding, and the influence of anti-right narratives.

Reactor also participated in **structured dialogues under the EU's Gender Action Plan III (GAP III)** framework, contributing to monitoring discussions and follow-up reports. Reactor supported other organisations in developing joint advocacy documents and coordinated efforts such as the **country-level submission to the Enlargement Package for 2025** and policy briefs on women's participation at the local level and civic engagement in decision and policy making. Relevant inputs were shared with key EU stakeholders, including MEPs, Commission representatives, and member state delegations. Reactor also took part in several high-level events and platforms. Notably, we participated in the **EU Advocacy Week in Brussels** and the **Global GAP Dialogue Forum**.

In 2025, Reactor also continued to represent and promote the **EQUAPRO Coalition**, a regional alliance of feminist organisations working toward gender equality, democracy, and rule of law in the Western Balkans. Although no new initiatives were launched under EQUAPRO due to the conclusion of its dedicated funding, Reactor ensured that the coalition remained visible and relevant by integrating its goals and narratives into broader EU advocacy efforts and also using new fundraising opportunities to shape our work together. Through strategic synergies with our ongoing EU advocacy project, we highlighted EQUAPRO's work in various meetings with EU institutions, partners, and member state representatives. Notably, EQUAPRO's vision and priorities were reflected in our participation in the **EU Advocacy Week in Brussels**, the **Gender Equality Forum and the Civil Society Forum within the Berlin Process** and where we engaged in discussions about the future of gender equality in the region. But also as main rapporteurs for the Gender and Diversity Working Group, for as second year. These encounters also provided an opportunity to consult with key EQUAPRO partners and explore potential avenues for reactivating joint advocacy in the future.

At the national level, we continued our active participation in EU accession-related structures and dialogues. Through the National Gender Equality Platform (NGEP), at least 27 WCSOs collaborated with Reactor, including on joint EU-focused initiatives. We provided extensive feedback to diverse consultative processes, including oral and written feedback to major strategic documents, advocating for stronger integration of gender perspectives. Despite our efforts and those of many allies, essential laws, including the **Law on Gender Equality**, the **Law against Workplace Harassment**, and the **Labour Law**, continued to face delays or institutional resistance but we are hopeful and persistent in our efforts to move forward in this area and push for the long-awaited changes. As noted in the EU Country Report, such stagnation is a direct consequence of the rise in anti-gender and anti-democratic sentiment, which continued to undermine progress in 2024 and prompted further mobilization of WCSOs.

In addition, Reactor completed its work on the development of a **Shadow Report on the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2022–2027)**. This is Reactor's fourth analysis of the country's strategic commitment to gender equality and the corresponding

national strategic framework and action plan, and it aims to offer a critical, civil society-led assessment of progress, gaps, and challenges in the strategy's implementation. It highlights issues such as insufficient institutional coordination, inadequate budgeting for gender mainstreaming, and lack of meaningful participation of WCSOs in monitoring and evaluation processes. The report serves as a key advocacy tool for guiding state actors and international partners to take corrective measures and align implementation with the strategy's stated goals and timelines. It will be published officially in the next reporting year.

Throughout the year, Reactor also used the updated [Local Gender Equality Index \(LGEI\)](#) and the **Rodov Reactor (Gender Reactor)** platforms, using their data to inform national and local-level advocacy efforts. These tools remain central to our evidence-based approach to tracking gender equality outcomes in municipalities and sectors across the country.

A number of other complementary activities were undertaken under the project to strengthen its objectives and enhance synergy with other programmes. These are documented in full in Reactor's internal reporting submitted according to the donor's timelines and budgetary guidelines.

WOMEN'S SAFETY IN ACTION: BUILDING GENDER-INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACES/ RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH FEMINIST URBAN ENGAGEMENT

DONORS: *The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation & UK International Development*

DURATION: 1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025; 1 AUGUST 2025 – 31 MARCH 2026

IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATIONS: Reactor – Research in Action, in partnership with Ladybug (Mollëkuqja) (part of a regional consortium of 18 organisations)

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) continues to be one of the most widespread and entrenched violations of human rights globally. In North Macedonia, despite legislative alignment with international standards and visible progress in institutional commitments, significant gaps persist in both implementation and enforcement. These include the lack of specialised expertise among law enforcement actors, limited public awareness—especially regarding newly recognised forms of VAWG—and systemic underinvestment in prevention and protection measures.

One particularly neglected area remains **VAWG in public spaces**, where threats to safety are often normalized or overlooked. Reactor has completed three distinctive waves of Reactor's **flagship study on women's safety in public spaces**, a research and advocacy initiative that has shaped national conversations on gender-responsive urban planning. The third edition published in **early 2025** marks an important milestone—not only because it continues to build longitudinal data—but also because it timely comes with a wider national initiative 'Safe Cities' (Ministry of Interior) and coincides with the momentum while allowing space for gender-sensitive conversations and dialogue with institutions. This time, the study included the city of Skopje (Centar municipality) and Tetovo (where a couple of years ago, the CSO Margini used Reactor's methodology to conduct a baseline scoping study). This expansion was made possible through Reactor's partnership with **Ladybug**

(**Mollekuqja**), a feminist organisation based in Tetovo, which brought valuable local knowledge, networks, and a commitment to gender justice to the initiative.

In the second half of 2025, Reactor launched a new phase of this project focused on **reclaiming public space through feminist urban engagement**. Urban design in many cities across the country continues to be gender-blind, failing to reflect the different experiences and needs of women, men, girls, and boys in public life. Streets, parks, transport hubs, and other shared spaces are rarely designed with a gender-sensitive lens, leaving many women and girls to navigate urban life with a sense of unease, exclusion, or outright danger.

This project phase responds to these challenges by combining feminist research, community-based methodologies and targeted advocacy. It places particular emphasis on **participatory engagement with women and girls**, as well as the development of a **gender-sensitive methodology for assessing public spaces**. Through these processes, the project amplifies lived experiences and translates them into **actionable evidence for institutional stakeholders**.

At the same time, the initiative advances advocacy at both local and national levels, promoting gender-responsive urban planning and improved institutional responses to GBV in public spaces. Efforts are also directed toward raising public awareness through media engagement and digital tools, including the further development and promotion of the **Reagiraj! Platform** – a website and mobile app for (anonymous) reporting of incidents of witnessed or experienced sexual harassment and violence across the country, launched in 2012.

Together, we are not only gathering new evidence but also working to **challenge the status quo** and advocate for urban environments that prioritise the safety, dignity, and agency of all citizens—particularly women and girls. By highlighting the **contextual factors** that contribute to public space insecurity, and by engaging diverse stakeholders—from law enforcement to local government to community leaders—we aim to drive concrete improvements in how cities are planned, managed, and experienced, and foster dialogue and cooperation between **urban planners, security institutions, feminist CSOs, and community actors**.

Key Publications (2025):

- **Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls in Public Spaces in Skopje and Tetovo** – Key Findings, and Main Report in Macedonian and English
- (early 2026) **A City for All? The Gendered Dimension of Public Space** – Main report in Macedonian and English

This project reflects Reactor's growing work at the intersection of **gender, urban policy, and institutional accountability**, and contributes to the broader feminist movement for **safe, equitable, and inclusive cities** for all.

BERLIN PROCESS - CIVIL SOCIETY AND THINK TANK FORUM

DONOR: *small contribution by British Council - FCDO, co-supported through the synergy EU Advocacy programme (Kvinna till Kvinna)*

DURATION: JUNE 2025 - April 2026

As part of its continued commitment to feminist, inclusive, and participatory EU integration, **Reactor – Research in Action** continued to play a key role in the **Berlin Process 2025**, with a strong focus on promoting **gender equality and diversity** as integral elements of the Western Balkans' EU accession journey. This participation was supported in part by the **British Council and the FCDO UK**, and through Reactor's synergy with its ongoing **EU Advocacy Programme**.

Importantly, **Reactor continued to serve as the lead organisation of the newly established Regional Working Group on Gender and Diversity**, a milestone achievement in the history of the Berlin Process. This working group was created for the first time on the occasion of the **10th anniversary of the Berlin Process**, following **sustained joint advocacy efforts** led by the **EU Advocacy Regional Network coordinated by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation**, which Reactor is part of. Its creation marked a historic shift toward recognising the strategic role of gender equality and intersectionality in peace, security, and democratic development across the Western Balkans.

The engagement began with **online preparatory workshops** held frequently among the rapporteurs and the core coordinator, and 6 different in-person events took place across all countries, with one happening in **Skopje in July 2025**, bringing together feminist and other policy-oriented CSOs and think tanks from across the region and the countries involved. The workshops aimed to consolidate regional advocacy positions, align messaging on gender equality priorities, and prepare contributions for upcoming high-level events.

In **September 2025**, Reactor participated in the **main Civil Society and Think Tank Forum (CSF) in Montenegro**, where regional civil society actors collectively refined policy recommendations and strengthened their partnerships with national and EU institutions. Again, Reactor played a valuable part in this event and presented the results from the forum to the diverse audiences from the Western Balkans and the EU.

The momentum was carried into a series of **high-level political events**, where gender equality and diversity were promoted as non-negotiable principles of democratic reform. Reactor also engaged in a **chain of high-level advocacy events** with EU and Western Balkan stakeholders, advocating for gender-sensitive reform agendas and stronger institutional partnerships with feminist civil society.

This multi-level engagement, grounded in the **leadership of the Regional Working Group on Gender and Diversity**, reflects Reactor's ongoing commitment to shaping a more equitable, inclusive, and democratic future for the region—one in which **gender equality is not an afterthought but a driving force** of sustainable and just EU integration.

As part of our continuing advocacy and involvement in the Berlin Process, we have foreseen more advocacy activities throughout 2026. Our focus on mainstreaming gender equality within the Berlin Process and reminding national and regional stakeholders that gender equality and diversity are essential to stability, democratic resilience, and EU integration in the Western Balkans [continued with the support of the British Council](#).

The project delivers practical and accessible advocacy recommendations to both national and regional, including EU, stakeholders. This has further positioned Reactor as a relevant voice in EU-level discussions on gender equality, democratic decline, and civic space, enabling a focused yet meaningful contribution within a complex policy environment through the strategic use of available resources.

Some of the latest activities (to be covered in the next reporting period), involve:

- Produced a one-pager (short brief) titled [“North Macedonia’s Reform Agenda \(2024–2027\) and the Berlin Process: What They Represent and Why They Matter”](#), integrating key insights from the Growth Plan and Reform Agenda analysis into more accessible and engaging advocacy messages.
- Developed a short online campaign (visual explainers) combining key findings with Berlin Process recommendations, titled [“From Regional Priorities to National Reforms: The Berlin Process and North Macedonia’s Reform Agenda Through the Lens of Gender Equality”](#) as well as a [timeline](#) highlighting North Macedonia’s participation in the Berlin Process and the importance of mainstreaming gender equality across all priorities.

These activities implemented in synergy with other projects, have contributed to increased regional visibility and to strengthening the narrative on gender equality during a period of rapid political change, including ongoing EU consultations and policy processes.

BREAKING THE SILENCE: GENDERED CORRUPTION, POWER AND MEDIA FREEDOM

DURATION: JANUARY 2026 - DECEMBER 2026

DONOR: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF LUXEMBOURG

Findings from the finalised research report from the previous cycle of the project (July 2025 – December 2025) point to several interlinked challenges confronting (local) journalism today. One of the most pressing issues is the precarious financial situation of local media outlets, combined with a chronic lack of human resources, which not only undermines the quality and sustainability of journalistic work but also increases vulnerability to political and economic pressures.

A further structural challenge is the declining interest of young people in journalism as a profession, particularly at the local level. Journalism is increasingly perceived as insecure, underpaid and politically constrained, raising concerns about the long-term future of independent and ethical reporting. The research also highlights persistent gender-based challenges within newsrooms, including unequal opportunities, gendered expectations and heightened exposure of women

journalists to online harassment and intimidation. These challenges are compounded by low levels of digital literacy, both among journalists and the wider public, as well as a significant erosion of public trust in the media.

Crucially, the findings confirm the prevalence of corruption as a central factor shaping media ecosystems, one which affects editorial independence, access to information and public perceptions of journalism's credibility and social role. Addressing these challenges requires not only institutional and policy-level interventions, but also sustained community engagement, youth-focused initiatives and public-facing communication strategies that reaffirm the value of ethical, gender-sensitive and people-centred journalism.

Building on the research findings and previous engagement with local journalists, the next phase of the project will focus on strengthening public awareness, community engagement and youth participation, with particular attention to young audiences as future media workers, critical media consumers and active citizens.

Overall Objectives:

- To increase public awareness of the structural challenges faced by local journalism, with a focus on how corruption, abuse of power and gendered dynamics undermine media freedom and public trust;
- To rebuild trust between journalists and local communities through people-centred storytelling and direct engagement;
- To strengthen young people's understanding of corruption as a systemic and gendered phenomenon, while equipping them with critical media literacy, ethical journalism skills and tools for responsible storytelling that support local accountability and public interest reporting.
- To promote gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches to media production and representation.
- Following the findings of the research study, this smaller component and last activity of the project will involve evidence-based advocacy and stakeholder engagement that allows for wider visibility of the project and the findings from the previous cycle.
- Collectively, these activities aim to open space for dialogue, strengthen institutional accountability, and encourage concrete follow-up actions, while remaining grounded in Reactor's role as a supportive, evidence-driven actor contributing from the outside rather than speaking on behalf of the media sector. More specifically, the aims are:
- To advocate for improved working conditions, safety and sustainability of local journalism, with particular attention to gender-based risks and corruption-related pressures;
- To strengthen institutional (and journalist unions') awareness and accountability regarding the structural challenges faced by local media;
- To ensure that policy recommendations are grounded in the lived experiences of local journalists;

- To contribute civil society input to national reform processes and EU monitoring mechanisms related to media freedom and freedom of expression, as well as broader anti-corruption and rule of law reforms.

LOCAL VOICES FOR DEMOCRACY: POWER, INFLUENCE AND EQUALITY IN PRACTICE

DURATION: 1 July 2025 – 31 March 2026

DONOR: CIVIL SOCIETY RESOURCE CENTRE, (on behalf of the EU Delegation) NORTH MACEDONIA

Women remain significantly underrepresented in local government in North Macedonia, with only 2 out of 81 mayors elected in 2021 being women. This reflects systemic barriers, including the lack of legal quotas for executive positions, limited political party commitment to meaningful gender equality measures, discriminatory candidate selection practices, and widespread sexist and online hate speech that discourages women from political participation.

This project directly addresses these challenges. Through establishing debate forums with women, monitoring the gender sensitivity of institutions and analyzing the electoral process, the project provides recommendations to overcome systemic barriers, creating a basis for stronger participation of women in local democracy.

Project objectives:

- To promote gender equality and women's political participation at the local level through analysis, monitoring, and public advocacy for a more inclusive electoral process in the 2025 local elections.
- To identify and document the gap between women's actual involvement in pre-election activities and their representation on electoral lists and among elected officials, as well as to foster institutional and public debate on overcoming this gap.

Key Activities Under This Project:

Local Women's Forums – 2 local discussions in the form of women's forums were organized in Bitola and Skopje to gather women's perspectives and experiences regarding their everyday needs and challenges, as well as their participation in local policymaking, with the aim of encouraging the participation of young women and girls, who are often marginalized in decision-making processes.

Mapping and analysis of the institutional and legislative framework for gender-responsive elections - The main objective of this analysis is to assess the existing legal and institutional framework's capacity to ensure gender-responsive elections in North Macedonia. More specifically, the analysis determines the extent to which the constitutional and legal framework incorporates the principles of gender equality in electoral processes; identifies strengths and gaps in electoral, anti-discrimination, and related criminal laws; analyzes the gap between normative solutions (de jure) and their practical implementation (de facto); assesses the roles of key institutions and political

actors in ensuring gender-responsive elections; and formulates specific and actionable recommendations for improving the legal framework and institutional practice.

To provide a comprehensive assessment, the analysis adopts a qualitative approach, combining multiple complementary methods: Research, including a systematic review of relevant constitutional and legal provisions, by-laws, strategies, official reports, and analyses from national and international institutions, as well as relevant research and policy papers; and Legal analysis assessing the content, consistency, and compliance of the Republic of North Macedonia's legal framework with international and European standards on gender equality and democratic elections, with a particular focus on electoral legislation, protection against discrimination, and sanctioning mechanisms. Combining these methods allows for an analysis that is not limited to the formal legal framework but rather considers its functionality and its effects on the actual political participation of women and men.

Monitoring political party programmes and candidate lists - This analysis is completed based on a qualitative content analysis of the election programmes of the political parties and coalitions that participated in the local elections in 2025. The methodology aims at a systematic identification, classification and evaluation of the commitments in the programmes concerning the gender equality and equal opportunities on a local level. The analysis focuses on: the presence and visibility of gender equality in the programme documents, the quality and specificity of the proposed measures, the scope of the key local policies and services with a gender dimension, the existence of mechanisms for implementation, budgeting and accountability.

The approach relies on the officially accessible election programmes of the political parties and did not analyze their implementation or the individual profiles of the candidates. The content analysis is complemented with a comparative approach to identify shared trends, risks and structural gaps in the approaches to gender equality in the programmes of the political parties. The analysis does not evaluate the institutional capacity, political will and feasibility of the proposed measures, nor their future implementation on a local level. The findings apply to the discourses, priorities and proposed policies as articulated in the election programmes.

Gender-responsive evaluation of election results - This publication provides a gender analysis of the 2025 North Macedonian local elections, examining women's representation and participation in local political decision-making. It reviews the electoral model, candidate lists, and confirmed women mayoral candidates by municipality and political party and analyzes election results related to the selection of mayors and council members. The publication also compares gender representation trends across the 2017, 2021, and 2025 local elections, highlighting progress and persistent gaps in women's political participation. The analysis provides key findings and recommendations for the legislative and executive branches, political parties, and civil society on how to strengthen gender equality in local governance and elections.

Advocacy and strategic communication of findings - The project's advocacy activities were grounded in direct engagement with women at the local level and evidence-based research aimed at influencing electoral reforms and public debate. Building on these insights, the project implemented

a series of advocacy activities focused on promoting gender-responsive elections in North Macedonia. The findings were translated into concrete recommendations targeting institutions, political parties, and civil society, strengthening advocacy efforts aimed at advancing more inclusive and gender-responsive local governance.

Key Results Achieved by the End of the Action:

- **Strengthened capacities of women's and civil society organisations for election monitoring and advocacy** through networking and the formation of coalitions for gender-responsive election observation.
- **Promoted institutional and public dialogue on advancing a gender perspective in electoral regulations and practices** through legal analysis, policy briefs, monitoring, and media education.

WE CARE: United we stand to fight against sexual and gender-based violence

DONOR: European Commission

DURATION: APRIL 2024 – SEPTEMBER 2026

WE CARE is a project led by the **National Network to end violence against women and domestic violence - Voice against violence**, which focuses on **victims of GBV**, with a focus on victims of all forms of sexual violence (including girls and young woman, LGBTI+, Roma women, women with disability, women from rural areas etc). The goal of this project is empowering CSOs to foster positive behavioral change for the effective protection of women from gender-based violence (GBV) in North Macedonia. So far, efforts have focused on building the capacities of local organizations, enhancing their knowledge, and supporting their transition toward impactful action.

As a co-beneficiary of this project, Reactor is tasked with creating a **monitoring report** that covers the national legal framework put in place to protect and support victims of GBV. The purpose of this component is **to strengthen the systematic reporting of cases of sexual violence, including online harassment, to competent authorities and to generate empirical evidence for assessing institutional responses and the implementation of the amended Criminal Code and related legal instruments.**

The conceptual framework for the monitoring report is rights-based and grounded in international standards (Istanbul Convention, CEDAW, ECtHR jurisprudence, and the Victim Rights Directive), as well as in compliance with national legislation and standards. This report covers data collected by 18 national institutions that work with cases of GBV, which will be used to find blind spots and oversights that allow victims to fall through the cracks of the legal system. The monitoring report also includes an overview of over 80 cases of GBV collected by project partners, and an in-depth monitored case that showcases our legal system in action when it comes to the persecution of perpetrators of GBV.

As a final activity, Reactor has been put in charge of organizing a round table event with all relevant stakeholders and target beneficiaries (such as the Commission for Protection and Prevention from Discrimination, National Coordination Body for Implementation of the Istanbul Convention, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and National Coordination Body Against Discrimination), during which experiences, good practices and lessons learned can be shared between women's CSOs and relevant institutions.

NATIONAL GENDER EQUALITY PLATFORM

DURATION: Continuous

DONOR: ACTIVITIES ARE CARRIED OUT ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS

As a result of the Gender Equality Council project, the National Gender Equality Platform (NGEP) was established in 2014, which has since been coordinated by Reactor. The NGEP aims to improve the overall climate for gender equality in the country, strengthen women's organisations, develop interactive knowledge-based data on gender equality, advance evidence-based advocacy, and raise public awareness on the issue.

Throughout 2025, Reactor actively engaged in regular coordination and strategy meetings with NGEP members, focusing on responding to the rise of anti-gender narratives, ongoing legislative processes and the shifting political context following local elections. The Platform played an important role in aligning joint advocacy positions, including contributions to policy processes such as the Draft National Education Strategy (2026–2032), as well as coordinated [public reactions](#) to the alarmingly rising number of gender-based violence and femicide cases.

One of the key activities of the NGEP is the Women's Rights March held annually on International Women's Day. On March 8th, 2025, the ninth march for women's rights took place, conveying a powerful message about the challenges faced by women in North Macedonia, emphasizing the lack of equality, freedom and safety. Reactor actively contributed to the coordination and strategic direction of the march by participating in the organising committee.

During 2025, Reactor also engaged in joint initiatives emerging from NGEP coordination, including involvement in the informal feminist initiative "Not One Woman More," reinforcing collective action and rapid response to gender-based violence and femicide cases.

YOUTH

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DIALOGUE

DURATION: Continuous

DONOR: ACTIVITIES ARE CARRIED OUT MAINLY ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS

In 2025, Reactor continued to advance its youth programme through the implementation of several strategic initiatives. Reactor stepped from its active engagement in the **National Youth Council of Macedonia (NMSM)**, where it serves as a **founding member**, but continued to promote youth priorities and foster cohesion among youth actors.

Reactor also participated in broader youth advocacy processes throughout 2025, particularly through synergy programmes and by collaborating with and supporting long-term and new youth CSO networks and partners.

In 2025, Reactor participated in an event organized by the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, dedicated to presenting the work of the Research Center on youth-related issues. The event focused on strengthening coordination and collaboration with organizations working in the field of youth, particularly those engaged in research.

In addition, we participated in the event “Platform for Joint Learning and Collaboration – Social Entrepreneurship and Public Policies: From Documents to Real Support,” organized by the Youth Union - Krushevo. The event brought together institutions, civil society organizations, experts, and practitioners to discuss how existing policies and measures in social entrepreneurship can be more effectively implemented, with a focus on strengthening collaboration and support for the sector.

ENHANCING CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

Although Reactor did not have a dedicated project or funding stream explicitly focused on this programme pillar in 2024, we remained strategically committed to advancing civil society participation as a cross-cutting priority. Our engagement continued through the integration of civil society strengthening components within ongoing initiatives, particularly through the **EU Advocacy Project** and the **Furthering Gender Equality through the EU Accession Process**. These projects provided a valuable platform for leveraging synergies and demonstrating Reactor’s commitment to fostering democratic engagement and participation beyond the constraints of project-based work.

In parallel, Reactor actively pursued new funding opportunities to further scale our involvement in this area, recognising the importance of long-term, sustainable investment in strengthening civic space, participatory democracy, and the enabling environment for CSOs—especially in the context of EU accession.

Throughout 2024, Reactor’s representatives maintained strong collaboration with **EU TACSO 3** and its regional peer community. We participated in diverse consultations, peer learning events, and thematic discussions relevant to civil society organisations (CSOs) across the Western Balkans and Turkey. These exchanges focused on best practices, lessons learned, and capacity-building needs—particularly in relation to implementing **EU-funded re-granting (FSTP) programmes**, a field where Reactor brings considerable experience.

Our participation contributed to broader efforts aimed at strengthening the role of civil society in the region's EU integration, particularly in supporting more transparent, participatory, and gender-sensitive policy processes. Reactor also contributed to knowledge-sharing efforts, providing input to TACSO's assessments and helping inform future guidance for CSOs planning to design or implement FSTP schemes.

This strategic engagement underscores Reactor's continued role as a connector, knowledge-holder, and advocate for meaningful CSO participation in democratic governance and EU accession processes, even in the absence of dedicated resources for this programme strand in 2024.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT (AND GENDER), JUST & GREEN TRANSITION

WOMEN'S SAFETY IN ACTION: BUILDING GENDER-INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACES

DONORS: *The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation & UK International Development*

DURATION: 1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

Implementing Organisations: *Reactor – Research in Action, in partnership with Ladybug (Mollekuqja)*

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) continues to be one of the most widespread and entrenched violations of human rights globally. In North Macedonia, despite legislative alignment with international standards and visible progress in institutional commitments, significant gaps persist in both implementation and enforcement. These include the lack of specialised expertise among law enforcement actors, limited public awareness—especially regarding newly recognised forms of VAWG—and systemic underinvestment in prevention and protection measures.

One particularly neglected area remains **VAWG in public spaces**, where threats to safety are often normalized or overlooked. Urban design in many cities across the country continues to be gender-blind, failing to reflect the different experiences and needs of women, men, girls, and boys in public life. Streets, parks, transport hubs, and other shared spaces are rarely designed with a gender-sensitive lens, leaving many women and girls to navigate urban life with a sense of unease, exclusion, or outright danger.

In 2024, **Reactor – Research in Action** launched the third wave of its **flagship study on women's safety in public spaces**, a research and advocacy initiative that has shaped national conversations on gender-responsive urban planning. The first study was conducted in **2012**, pioneering public

discourse on the everyday insecurity women face in cities. It was followed by a second, expanded edition in **2019**, which further deepened the evidence base and generated policy recommendations.

This third edition marks an important milestone—not only because it continues to build longitudinal data—but also because it timely comes with a wider national initiative ‘Safe Cities’ (Ministry of Interior) and coincides with the momentum while allowing space for gender-sensitive conversations and dialogue with institutions. This time, the study included the **city of Skopje** (Centar municipality) and **Tetovo** (where a couple of years ago, the CSO Margini used Reactor’s methodology to conduct a baseline scoping study). This expansion was made possible through Reactor’s partnership with **Ladybug (Mollekuqja)**, a feminist organisation based in Tetovo, which brought valuable local knowledge, networks, and a commitment to gender justice to the initiative.

Together, we are not only gathering new evidence but also working to **challenge the status quo** and advocate for urban environments that prioritise the safety, dignity, and agency of all citizens—particularly women and girls. By highlighting the **contextual factors** that contribute to public space insecurity, and by engaging diverse stakeholders—from law enforcement to local government to community leaders—we aim to drive concrete improvements in how cities are planned, managed, and experienced, and foster dialogue and cooperation between **urban planners, security institutions, feminist CSOs, and community actors**.

Key Publications (2024):

- **Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls in Public Spaces in Skopje and Tetovo**
– Key Findings, and Main Report in Macedonian and English
- **Who Cares? Advancing Maternal Mental Health Through Integrated, Multidimensional, Systemic Interventions – Position Paper**
Although focused on maternal mental health, this publication reinforces the intersectional vulnerabilities women face in both private and public spheres, further supporting the case for systemic change.

This project reflects Reactor’s growing work at the intersection of **gender, urban policy, and institutional accountability**, and contributes to the broader feminist movement for **safe, equitable, and inclusive cities** for all.

THE “SUNNY SCHOOLS” INITIATIVE: Advancing Renewable Energy and Environmental Awareness in Education

DONOR: OSF WB

DURATION: JULY 2023 – JUNE 2024, SEPTEMBER 2024 – JULY 2025

The ‘[Sunny Schools’ Initiative](#) is a regional programme aimed at supporting state schools and local self-government units in their transition to clean and renewable energy—specifically solar energy—

through the installation of **photovoltaic (PV) technology**. The initiative not only promotes environmental sustainability but also integrates a strong educational component to foster awareness and engagement among students, teachers, and communities.

The Initiative is jointly supported by the **Open Society Foundation in the Western Balkans** and the **Open Society Foundation in North Macedonia**, with the **National Youth Council of Macedonia (NMSM)** leading the educational outreach efforts. It is being implemented concurrently across five Western Balkan countries: **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia**.

In the earlier iterations of this initiative, **Reactor was leading the research component in North Macedonia**, focusing on the impact of solar energy interventions and related educational activities on school communities. The research was carried out in **12 schools (8 primary and 4 secondary)** across four municipalities: **Butel, Čair, Berovo, and Štip**. The study was designed in two waves—**before and after the installation of solar panels**—to assess whether the introduction of PV systems and accompanying awareness-raising efforts influence perceptions, satisfaction with the school environment, and attitudes towards renewable energy. It involved a broad sample of the school community, with up to **1,760 students, 1,320 parents, and 400 teachers** participating across both earlier phases.

- The **first wave** of data collection was conducted in **October–November 2023**, involving **880 students, 188 teachers, and 536 parents**.
- The **second wave** followed in **March–April 2024**, after the PV installations were completed.

Following the successful implementation of both research phases and strong collaboration among regional partners, a decision was made in **July 2024** to **expand the initiative** and include a new group of schools in **autumn 2024**. This expansion reflects the growing interest in green transition within the education sector and the positive reception of the initiative among participating stakeholders.

During the final phase (2025-2026), the **third phase**, Reactor took on the leading role for the whole region and showed once again its strengths and progress. During this phase all partners returned to the originally involved schools to conduct a **final round of assessment**. This final phase aims to evaluate the **long-term impact and sustainability** of the interventions—both in terms of energy transition and attitudinal change among students, parents, and school staff.

The final evaluation included a **quantitative analysis** of data gathered from both students and teachers involved in this project, as well as **qualitative data analysis** gathered from focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted with teachers, parents, as well as municipality representatives and head of schools. This data paints a clear picture of the effect the implementation of solar panels had on all groups regarding awareness and beliefs about green energy and a green energy transition.

As a lead on this project, Reactor is in direct communication and coordination of members of this consortium, and ensures all delivered technical, country reports and regional reports are up to standard. As part of reinforcing community and communication between partners, a **consortium**

meeting took place in Tirana in November 2025, and another one was scheduled to take place in Prishtina in April 2026, where all members of the OSF consortium (representatives from Serbia, Bosna & Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo & North Macedonia) shared their progress, challenges and future suggestions for research. The presented findings showed that knowledge from previous phases of project implementation were excellent learning opportunities for all involved parties.

The ‘Sunny Schools’ initiative stands as a promising example of how renewable energy, civic engagement, and education can come together to support systemic change at the community level, while also fostering climate awareness among future generations.

OTHER ORGANISATIONAL ACTIVITIES

ADVOCACY

In line with our mission and building on the momentum of previous years, **Reactor – Research in Action** continued in 2025 to serve as a **key resource centre** for high-quality, evidence-based research and policy advocacy. Our outputs—ranging from gender analyses and position papers to policy briefs and data dashboards—have been **consistently utilised by local, national, and international stakeholders** to inform policy, shape public dialogue, and support institutional reforms.

Reactor’s advocacy strategy continues to rely on a **two-pronged approach** that ensures both broad accessibility and strategic policy impact:

1. Online Advocacy and Digital Engagement

We invest in **user-friendly, accessible, and visually engaging online platforms** to present data, findings, and policy recommendations to diverse audiences. These include but are not limited to:

- **Rodov Reactor** – A curated platform for gender statistics and research-based insights, designed to support gender-responsive policymaking.
- **Youth in Numbers** – A dedicated space for presenting quantitative and qualitative data on youth, with dynamic visualisations and downloadable insights for policymakers, educators, and activists.
- **Gender Equality Index at the Local Level** – An interactive tool that allows users to explore gender equality progress across municipalities, offering a unique data-based perspective for both citizens and decision-makers.

- **Reagiraj – Bidi Bezbedna** – A digital space created to raise awareness and advocate for safer public spaces for women and girls, particularly focusing on gender-based violence in urban environments.

These platforms are maintained by Reactor and promoted through **targeted social media outreach**, infographics, videos, interactive dashboards, and storytelling formats (depending on availability of funding and current programme priorities). By using **modern data visualisation techniques** and **evidence-based messaging**, we aim to translate complex research into engaging, actionable content.

2. Offline Advocacy and Direct Stakeholder Engagement

Alongside our digital presence, Reactor continued to prioritise **in-person advocacy efforts**. These include:

- The **continuous production of research outputs**, policy briefs, and sectoral gender analyses or inputs;
- **Consultative meetings and working groups** with institutional stakeholders at national and municipal levels;
- Participation in **high-level advocacy events** such as the Berlin Process CS Forum and Ministerial Meetings;
- **Expert contributions to parliamentary sessions, strategy development processes, and EU-related dialogues**;
- **Local-level debates, workshops, and roundtables** designed to bridge the gap between civil society and institutions.

In 2024, we continued prioritising **connection between research and advocacy**, ensuring that all policy recommendations are grounded in field data and that advocacy messages are tailored for maximum policy relevance and impact. We also continued to **build alliances with feminist and civic actors** across the Western Balkans and the EU, strengthening our collective voice in regional processes such as the Berlin Process, EU accession dialogue, and national reform agendas.

Our growing portfolio of digital tools and field-tested research has positioned Reactor as a **trusted and effective advocacy actor**, able to connect institutional reform with grassroots realities—and turn evidence into impact.

20 YEARS OF REACTOR – RESEARCH IN ACTION: ARCHIVE OF CHANGE

In 2025, Reactor – Research in Action marked **20 years of existence**—a milestone that reflects two decades of continuous work at the intersection of **research, advocacy and social change**. Since its

founding, Reactor has grown into a leading independent research organisation in North Macedonia, shaping public discourse and policy across key areas including **gender equality, youth, urban development, democracy and human rights**.

Over the past twenty years, Reactor has remained committed to producing evidence that challenges inequality and informs institutional accountability, while working closely with communities, civil society and decision-makers. This anniversary is not only a moment of reflection on achievements, but also on the complex political and social contexts in which this work has evolved—often marked by resistance, backlash and shrinking civic space.

To mark this milestone, Reactor introduced a **refreshed visual identity that reflects both continuity and transformation**. Inspired by clean geometric forms, the new design symbolises movement, structure and stability—capturing the organisation’s commitment to rigorous research and long-term societal change. Alongside this, a **dedicated social media campaign revisited key milestones**, projects and thematic areas from the past two decades, while also introducing the team behind the work through a series of short video profiles.

The anniversary programme culminated in a **public event** held on 25 December at the Cultural and Information Centre (KIC), combining the celebration of Reactor’s anniversary with the opening of **the international Ex Libris Biennale “Traces of Equality – Imprints of the Inner Self.”** Inspired by Reactor’s work on gender equality, civic participation and social justice, the exhibition explored how identity, rights and memory are inscribed in both personal and collective spaces, and how marginalised voices shape culture—often from the edges of visibility.

Bringing together partners, collaborators, activists, artists and supporters, the event served as both **a celebration and a renewed call to action**. As Reactor enters its third decade, it does so with clarity and determination—continuing to respond to emerging challenges while working towards building systems grounded in justice, dignity and collective resilience.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2025, **Reactor – Research in Action** continued its internal transformation journey by consolidating earlier efforts toward **strengthening team capacities, refining strategic direction**, and enhancing operational effectiveness. We continued to monitor and guide our work through the **implementation of our new organisational strategy**, initially developed in 2023, adopted in 2024. This strategy reflects both the **external socio-political shifts** and **internal changes** that Reactor has undergone in recent years, prompting a necessary recalibration of the organisation’s **mission, vision, and priorities**. And, as all our action research work, it is also a continuous story in progress.

This strategy sets a clearer roadmap for achieving impact across Reactor's key programme areas, while also supporting more resilient, adaptive organisational practices in response to the evolving civil society landscape in North Macedonia and the Western Balkans

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

As part of Reactor's institutional commitment to **continuous learning, accountability, and effectiveness**, a dedicated **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)** framework was integrated into the organisational strategy, and we try to include this tool in all our project work and programmes.

While **project-level monitoring and evaluation** continues to be implemented regularly in line with donor expectations and reporting cycles, this organisational-level MEL effort reflects Reactor's aspiration to institutionalise reflective practice, strategic foresight, and evidence-informed decision-making.

TEAM AND STAFFING CHANGES

In 2024, Reactor's team continued through its **transitional phase**, shaped in part by the **completion of the large-scale EU-funded regional Action** on *Improving Gender Equality in the EU Accession Process*, which Reactor led and carried out with partners throughout 2020-2024. The conclusion of this four-year project resulted in a **downsizing of three team members**, reflecting a broader organisational recalibration and the external pressures of rising living costs, stagnant civil society salaries, and inflationary trends. So, in 2025, Reactor continued to strengthen its team and introduced new members to the team, that contributed to strengthening the youth and communications aspects of the organisation. New members experienced an on-boarding phase and they are now integrated in our research and advocacy team. And in the second half of the year, a former Reactor lead and strong ally joined the team back and took over a new position in Reactor – **Director for Research and Policy Impact**. This new senior role is also part of the foreseen organisational capacity development, part of our overall organisational strategy and action plan. This addition to the team strengthens Reactor's role and core values as well as strongly shaping Reactor's **gender mainstreaming and advocacy work**, particularly in the areas of **EU integration, gender mainstreaming and analysis**, and **sectoral working group and monitoring engagements**. Our teams rigour and gender sensitivity, will remain part of the foundation on which Reactor continues to build.

20 години
истражување
во акција
PEAK—OP
