

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT FOR 2024

INTRODUCTION

20 YEARS OF RESEARCH

IN ACTION

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

At Reactor – Research in Action, we believe that lasting change starts with understanding. And understanding begins with asking the right questions, listening closely to communities, and turning data into meaningful action.

Based in Skopje, North Macedonia, Reactor is an independent, non-profit feminist research organisation (think-thank) dedicated to strengthening the country's path toward European integration. But our work goes beyond that. We are driven by a deeper commitment – to help build a society that is just, inclusive, and sustainable, where people of all backgrounds and identities can live with dignity and participate fully in shaping the world around them.

Our story is rooted in evidence. In a region where public policies are often made without the necessary data or without listening to those most affected, we step in to fill the gaps. Our research isn't just about numbers – it's about stories, realities, and possibilities. We explore key issues like gender equality, youth engagement, and urban development, and we work to ensure that civil society has a voice at the table where decisions are made.

We're not alone in this. Over the years, we've built strong partnerships – with grassroots organisations, academics, institutions, and international allies – so that the insights we uncover translate into real-world impact. Whether it's providing timely policy recommendations, facilitating public debate, or helping shape reform strategies, our work is always guided by the people and communities we serve.

A vital part of our mission is also sharing what we know. Through workshops, trainings, and collaborative initiatives across North Macedonia and the region, we actively build capacities—not just within our own team, but among partner organisations, grassroots groups, and public institutions. Whether we're facilitating knowledge exchanges, training local partners, or co-developing advocacy strategies, our goal is to strengthen the ecosystem of civic actors working toward social change. This collective approach ensures that knowledge doesn't stay siloed, but flows freely – fuelling new ideas, reinforcing solidarity, and multiplying impact where it's needed most.

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Networking and international cooperation is at the heart of what we do. We regularly engage with EU institutions, UN mechanisms, embassies, and other international actors to bring local voices to global forums and support democratic development on the ground. With continued support from our donors, especially the European Union and Sweden (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) we're exceptionally proud to contribute to initiatives that improve the position of women and youth and centre them as drivers of just transition, smart and inclusive growth.

At Reactor, we don't just research the world as it is—we work toward the world as it should be. A world where data drives better policies, where every voice counts, and where equality isn't a dream, but a lived reality.

As we approach a major milestone—**20 years since Reactor's founding**—we pause to reflect on a journey shaped by vision, resilience, and the belief that change is possible when rooted in evidence and community. While our official registration took place in January 2005, the ideas, energy, and community that gave life to Reactor began a year earlier. Reactor's story began in 2004, sparked by a small group of changemakers determined to reimagine how research and civic engagement could shape a better future. Today, two decades later, that spirit lives on as we continue to evolve, collaborate, and push for a society where everyone can thrive equally. The initial spark has grown into a vibrant organisation driving meaningful change across North Macedonia and the region.

This anniversary is more than a celebration of our journey—it is a renewed call to action for the critical work that lies ahead in increasingly turbulent times. We mark 20 years amid a global landscape shaped by deepening inequality, democratic erosion, the rise of authoritarianism and anti-rights movements, and a worsening climate crisis. As threats to human rights and social justice grow more acute, our mission—to anchor policy in evidence, amplify the voices of the marginalized, and champion inclusive and sustainable societies—has never been more urgent.

With two decades behind us, we move forward with clarity and conviction, prepared to navigate the challenges of our time and contribute to building systems rooted in equity, dignity, and collective resilience.

As we celebrate this milestone, we warmly invite our partners, allies, and supporters—longstanding and new—to walk with us into the 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 2024, **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 2024, 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,

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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 2024** 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 **Gender Equality Forum in Berlin**, where gender was placed on the Berlin Process agenda for the first time in its 10-year history. This achievement reflects sustained joint advocacy by Reactor and partner organisations, underscoring the growing recognition of gender mainstreaming as an essential element of EU enlargement policy.

In 2024, 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. 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** and the **Gender Equality Forum within the Berlin Process**, where we engaged in discussions about the future of gender equality in the region. 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. At national level, 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. 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.

Among the national-level key achievements in 2024, we can mention **Reactor's gender analysis of political party programmes** in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections. This analysis assessed how (and whether) party platforms addressed key gender equality commitments, the inclusion of

intersectional issues, and the framing of women's rights in broader social and economic agendas. Funded by Sweden within the EU Advocacy programme, the analysis not only provided an evidence base for media and public discourse but also offered concrete recommendations to political parties for improving gender-responsiveness in their platforms. The findings were disseminated through briefings, infographics, and used during campaign monitoring to hold parties accountable for their commitments.

In addition, Reactor continued 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.

Furthering Gender Equality through the EU Accession Process

DURATION: MARCH 2020 - FEBRUARY 2024

DONOR: EUROPEAN COMMISSION, SWEDEN

This [Action](#) aims to further gender equality in the WB through the EU Accession Process.

The overall objective of this four-year Action (2020-2024) is to enhance and broaden existing regional cooperation, to strengthen participatory democracies and to bring about an inclusive gender-sensitive EU Approximation process. Towards this aim, the Action's specific objectives include:

- To **enhance WCSO capacities to effectively engage with governments, EU Delegations and Office (EUD/ EUO), local CSOs and other CSOs in the region**, making all involved actors aware of the gender dimensions of the EU Accession process.

- To **improve accountability of governments and EUD/EUO in implementing commitments to gender equality and women’s rights during the EU Accession process.**

This project is funded by the European Union and co-financed by Sweden, and partner organisations for its implementation are:

- Republic North Macedonia: [Reactor – Research in Action](#) (lead organisation), and
 - The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation - office in North Macedonia (partner organisation)
- Kosovo: [Kosovo Women's Network](#) (Partner Organisation)
- Albania: [Albanian Women's Empowerment Network \(AWEN\)](#) (Partner Organisation)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: [Rights for All](#) (Partner Organisation)
- Montenegro: [Women's Rights Centre](#) (Partner Organisation)

Key Activities Under This Project (including those conducted in 2024):

- **Networking and experience exchange meetings and events** were organised regularly to reinforce the cohesion and effectiveness of the regional network of women’s civil society organisations (WCSOs). These gatherings enabled over 50 WCSOs from across the Western Balkans to share strategies, lessons learned, and tools for advocacy. They also created opportunities for new members to join and contribute, effectively expanding the network and strengthening its collective voice in the EU accession process.
- **Capacity building and awareness-raising sessions** were delivered to a diverse group of CSOs across the region. These sessions focused on increasing understanding of gender mainstreaming within the EU accession framework, improving knowledge of key policy instruments like GAP III and IPA III, and equipping organisations with practical tools to advocate for more inclusive and gender-sensitive reforms at national and regional levels.
- **Two high-level regional events – the Gender Equality Forum (2023) and a closing advocacy event (2024)** - were held, bringing together civil society, government representatives, EU stakeholders, and experts to reflect on the project’s achievements and to reinforce the importance of evidence-based advocacy for gender equality. Both events served as a platform to present the findings of the monitoring reports and gender analyses, and use the opportunity to disseminate evidence to wider audiences at once, while gathering together key actors and offering space for valuable exchange, and fostering dialogue and encouraging further political commitment to gender mainstreaming in EU accession.
- **Gender analyses for previously unanalysed sectors** were produced in each country, addressing existing knowledge gaps in policy areas where a gender perspective had been lacking. These included sectors such as agriculture, digitalisation, green transition, and education. The analyses were developed using participatory methods and were disseminated in local languages to maximise accessibility and impact.
- **Collaboration with local WCSOs** was central to the Action’s success. POs worked closely with these organisations to build their capacities in monitoring and reporting on governmental implementation of gender equality commitments. This included mentorship,

joint data collection, and guidance on preparing impactful reports and policy recommendations.

- **Monitoring and reporting on the EU accession process** was a core pillar of the project. Partners systematically collected data and produced regular reports aimed at informing and gender mainstreaming the EC Country Reports and broader political dialogue. These efforts ensured that gender concerns were reflected in EU policy assessments and planning related to the Western Balkans.
- **Advocacy initiatives** were implemented at national and regional levels, targeting governments, EU delegations, and institutions. The project's advocacy work contributed to raising the visibility of gender equality as a political and development priority within EU accession dialogues, often in synergy with other initiatives such as the Kvinna till Kvinna programme.

Key Results Achieved by the End of the Action:

- **Improved networking and participation** of WCSOs in the regional advocacy network has enabled stronger collective engagement in the EU accession process. The network evolved into a vibrant platform for exchange, mutual support, and joint action, allowing WCSOs to operate with greater strategic coordination and visibility.
- **Meaningful contributions to policy and decision-making** processes were achieved by ensuring the direct involvement of CSOs in consultations, national working groups, and regional advocacy forums. Through structured participation, WCSOs were able to influence policies and challenge gaps in gender sensitivity within EU accession frameworks.
- The **sub-granting scheme** successfully supported **30 CSOs across 6 Western Balkan countries**, enabling grassroots initiatives to thrive and ensuring local ownership of gender equality advocacy. The grants—amounting to **€438,143**—strengthened regional solidarity and empowered smaller organisations with resources and mentoring.
- **Over 1,300 women** directly benefited from the project through a wide range of interventions, including legal aid, capacity-building workshops, advocacy training, and community mobilisation activities. These interventions supported women from various backgrounds, including rural, Roma, and LGBTQI+ communities, as well as women with disabilities.
- The **capacities of diverse local women's rights groups** were significantly strengthened, enabling their more active and informed participation in the EU accession process. Many of these organisations reported increased confidence and credibility when engaging with public institutions and EU stakeholders.
- The project **enhanced the capacities of CSOs** to engage in policy dialogue with governments and EU institutions. As a result, stakeholders became more aware of the gender dimensions of EU accession and the critical role that civil society plays in ensuring inclusive reforms.
- **Government institutions and EUDs/EUOs demonstrated improved accountability** in implementing their gender equality commitments. This was evidenced through institutional responses to monitoring reports, participation in consultations, and policy adjustments that incorporated gender perspectives.

- **More than 30 baseline and endline monitoring reports** were produced, generating robust evidence to track and analyse gender mainstreaming across various stages of the EU accession process. These reports helped shape political dialogue and served as advocacy tools for further action.
- **Over 20 national gender analyses** were developed across the region, targeting unanalysed sectors. Published in two languages per country, these analyses have been instrumental in filling critical data gaps and informing both civil society and government actors on how to better integrate gender equality into sectoral reforms linked to EU accession.

As a key legacy of this Action, the [EQUAPRO Coalition](#)—**The Coalition for Gender Equality in the European Union (EU) Accession Process**—was formally established. EQUAPRO is an informal, yet strategically significant, regional coalition composed of women’s rights and feminist civil society organisations (WCSOs) across the Western Balkans. Its primary aim is to ensure that gender equality is not sidelined in the EU accession discourse but is instead treated as a central pillar of democratic reform, governance, and external EU support.

EQUAPRO advocates for increased visibility and prioritisation of gender equality in all stages of the EU accession process. This includes advancing the integration of gender across policy frameworks, reform agendas, and EU-funded programming, while also calling for the **greater inclusion of women and WCSOs** in formal political dialogue, consultative processes, and monitoring mechanisms. The Coalition also seeks to influence the EU and Western Balkan governments to create more enabling conditions for WCSOs to contribute meaningfully to shaping the future of their countries within the EU.

In February 2024, a **high-level regional working event** was organised as a culmination of EQUAPRO’s work under this Action. Held online, the event served as a strategic forum to **present and reflect on the latest monitoring findings, gender analyses, and evidence-based advocacy outputs** produced through the Action. It brought together a diverse group of stakeholders—including representatives from WCSOs, national governments of the Western Balkans, EU Delegations, and EU institutions—to reflect on the current status of gender mainstreaming in the accession process.

The event placed gender equality at the forefront of the EU accession-related political debate. Participants engaged in a dynamic exchange on the role of gender in political dialogue, shared both successes and persistent challenges, and explored how CSOs can better advocate for structural inclusion in EU-led processes. The discussions were rooted in data and evidence gathered throughout the four-year Action, which provided a solid foundation for analysing gaps, identifying patterns of progress, and formulating strategic recommendations for the future.

Crucially, this event reaffirmed the importance of **civil society’s watchdog role** and the value of structured dialogue between feminist CSOs and institutional stakeholders. It demonstrated the added value of EQUAPRO as a sustainable platform for amplifying regional voices and ensuring continuity in gender-responsive EU accession advocacy—beyond the lifespan of the Action itself.

All **publications, data, and key updates** resulting from the EQUAPRO Coalition's work and the broader Action are available at the following [link](#).

BERLIN PROCESS - CIVIL SOCIETY AND THINK THANK FORUM

DONOR: *small contribution by Aspen Institute, co-supported through the synergy EU Advocacy programme*

DURATION: JUNE 2024 - JUNE 2025

As part of its continued commitment to feminist, inclusive, and participatory EU integration, **Reactor – Research in Action** played a key role in the **Berlin Process 2024**, 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 **Aspen Institute** and through Reactor's synergy with its ongoing **EU Advocacy Programme**.

Importantly, **Reactor served 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 a **three-day preparatory workshop** held in **Skopje in July 2024**, bringing together feminist CSOs and think tanks from across the region. The workshop aimed to consolidate regional advocacy positions, align messaging on gender equality priorities, and prepare contributions for upcoming high-level events.

In **September 2024**, Reactor participated in the **Gender Equality Forum** hosted by the **German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)** and supported by the **Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation**. The forum brought together over 75 stakeholders—including ministers, MPs, mayors, international organisations, and civil society representatives—and placed gender equality at the centre of political dialogue related to the EU accession process.

Reactor's President, Tania Ivanova, spoke on the panel "*Women's Inclusion in Decision-Making for EU Accession*," emphasising the role of women's civil society organisations (WCSOs) as agents of change and essential contributors to inclusive and effective EU accession. She underscored the importance of an **intersectional approach** to policymaking and highlighted persistent barriers to women's political participation, such as systemic inequalities, exclusion from decision-making spaces, and digital and offline harassment.

Reactor's engagement continued at the **main Civil Society and Think Tank Forum (CSF) in Berlin**, held in **September 2024**, 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 participated in the **Ministerial Meeting (Foreign Affairs)**, ensuring civil society perspectives, especially on gender and civic space, were integrated into political dialogue.
- Reactor contributed to the **Berlin Process Leaders' Summit**, where gender equality was featured in the summit's final communiqué as a result of coordinated advocacy.
- Throughout the reporting period, 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, culminating 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.

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, and raise public awareness on the issue.

Throughout 2024, Reactor maintained collaboration with member organisations of the NGEP, particularly related to rapid response reactions on emerging [issues](#). There were at least a dozen joint reactions addressing various concerns in relation to women's rights in the country. One of the key activities of the NGEP is the Women's Rights March held annually on International Women's Day. On March 8th, 2024, the eighth 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.

Additionally, Reactor initiated two separate strategic and coordination meetings with NGEP members, both of which were successfully conducted. Throughout 2024, Reactor actively participated in several initiatives and activities agreed upon during these meetings.

YOUTH

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND DIALOGUE

DURATION: Continuous

DONOR: ACTIVITIES ARE CARRIED OUT MAINLY ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS

In 2024, Reactor continued to advance its youth programme through the implementation of several strategic initiatives. As in previous years, Reactor remained actively engaged in the **National Youth Council of Macedonia (NMSM)**—where it serves as a **founding member**—participating in regular council meetings and supporting activities that promote youth priorities and foster cohesion among youth actors.

Building on its longstanding commitment and the work carried out in 2023, Reactor again played an active role in the development of the **National Youth Mental Health Strategy 2024–2026**, which was officially adopted by the Parliament in January 2024. As a member of NMSM, Reactor contributed to shaping the strategy’s direction, ensuring that it reflected the realities and mental health needs of young people across the country.

Reactor also participated in broader youth advocacy processes throughout 2024, particularly through the “**Incubator for Youth Empowerment**” project. As part of this initiative, Reactor took part in a **consultative meeting on January 23, 2024**, held at the Youth Hub, which focused on strengthening youth participation and representation at both national and European levels. The meeting highlighted the need for introducing the **EU Youth Dialogue** (formerly Structured Dialogue) as a key mechanism for ensuring meaningful youth engagement in policy and decision-making processes.

Additionally, Reactor contributed to NMSM-led efforts to promote **youth political participation during elections**, in cooperation with **UNICEF**. These efforts included the signing of a **memorandum of cooperation** and joint work on advancing several youth-focused initiatives, such as the **Youth Standard, Virtual Internships**, and the **Youth Guarantee**—all aimed at improving youth inclusion, employment prospects, and active citizenship.

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.

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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**.

As part of this initiative, **Reactor is leading the research component in North Macedonia**, focusing on the impact of solar energy interventions and related educational activities on school communities. The research is being carried out in **12 schools (8 primary and 4 secondary)** across four municipalities: **Butel, Čair, Berovo, and Štip**. The study is 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.

The study involves a broad sample of the school community, with up to **1,760 students, 1,320 parents, and 400 teachers** participating across both 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.

Looking ahead, the project is set to enter its **third phase in 2025**, during which all partners will return 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 '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.

JUST TRANSITION THROUGH COORDINATED ENERGY SECTOR, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND FISCAL REFORMS

Gender and Energy Reforms: Qualitative Assessment for a Just Transition in North Macedonia

DONOR: OECD (SWEDEN)

DURATION: APRIL – JUNE 2024

As part of its work on integrating gender perspectives into structural reforms, **Reactor – Research in Action** was commissioned by the **OECD Development Centre** to conduct a **qualitative assessment in North Macedonia**. The objective of this research is to better understand **gender-differentiated impacts and perceptions** of energy reforms at the household level, providing deeper insight into lived experiences that complement existing quantitative data.

The study is part of a broader OECD initiative across the **Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia)**, focused on enabling a **Just Transition** through integrated energy sector, social protection, and fiscal reforms. The aim is to ensure that energy reforms are **fair, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of households**, particularly those at risk of energy poverty and marginalisation.

Through a series of **focus group discussions (FGDs)**, Reactor is exploring the gender dynamics that shape how households interact with energy systems, and how they experience and adapt to energy reforms. Key areas of inquiry include:

- **Household energy consumption patterns**, disaggregated by gendered roles and usage;
- **The financial burden of energy payments**, including the impact of past tariff increases on household budgets and consumption choices;
- **Coping strategies** adopted by households to manage rising energy costs—such as reductions in spending on basic needs, mobility, or social participation—and whether these differ by gender;
- **Access to and perceptions of support programmes**, such as social assistance, energy subsidies, or other safety nets, and their perceived effectiveness in mitigating hardship;
- **Experiences with energy service providers** (electricity and district heating), particularly regarding transparency, accountability, and clarity of tariff-setting procedures, as well as household responses to issues such as arrears and disconnection;
- **Public attitudes toward energy reforms**, levels of trust in institutions, and preferred approaches to communication and engagement around energy sector changes.

This assessment was designed to amplify the voices of those often excluded from policy discussions and to inform more equitable reform strategies that **prioritise social inclusion and gender equality** within the energy transition.

As part of the knowledge-sharing and policy dialogue component of this work, a **high-level multi-stakeholder workshop** was held in **Skopje in September 2024**, gathering representatives from national institutions, civil society, international organisations, and energy sector stakeholders. The event provided a platform to discuss preliminary findings, identify policy entry points, and reflect on the implications of the research for designing socially just and gender-responsive reforms.

Looking ahead, the **final results of this regional initiative will be presented in Paris in May 2025**, where the OECD Development Centre will host a **multi-country policy dialogue** and launch the official report. This event will bring together decision-makers and stakeholders from the Western Balkans and beyond, with the aim of strengthening coordinated policy responses that ensure no one is left behind in the green and energy transitions.

OTHER ORGANISATIONAL ACTIVITIES

ADVOCACY

In line with our mission and building on the momentum of previous years, **Reactor – Research in Action** continued in 2024 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 Bežbedna** – 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 focused on reinforcing the **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. We also worked to **build alliances with feminist and civic actors** across the Western Balkans and the EU, amplifying our 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.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2024, **Reactor – Research in Action** continued its internal transformation journey by consolidating earlier efforts toward **strengthening team capacities, refining strategic direction,** and enhancing operational effectiveness. A key milestone this year was the **finalisation and implementation of the new organisational strategy**, initially developed in 2023. 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.**

The restructuring process, which began in 2022 and continued into the first half of 2023, included the engagement of an **external expert** tasked with evaluating Reactor’s organisational dynamics, methodology, and strategic direction. The outcome of this collaboration was a comprehensive diagnostic report and a draft strategic framework, both of which laid the groundwork for the new organisational strategy adopted in 2024.

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 new organisational strategy. In October 2024, a **two-day strategic workshop** was held with the full Reactor team to operationalise and reflect collectively on the organisation’s progress and priorities.

During the workshop, the team applied the MEL framework to:

- Assess Reactor’s current positioning and impact across its areas of action;
- Revisit and refine the **Theory of Change** guiding the organisation’s research and advocacy work;
- Identify concrete steps and roles needed to improve internal systems for learning and accountability;
- Define processes for monitoring outcomes and adapting ongoing and future activities.

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.

The workshop also reaffirmed the **updated Reactor's core strategic and internal policy documents**, in alignment with legal changes such as those relating to personal data protection and confidentiality. As part of a renewed organisational ritual, the team committed to reinstating this previously interrupted (due to Covid-19) two-day annual strategic retreat.

TEAM AND STAFFING CHANGES

In 2024, Reactor's team underwent a **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. 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.

Toward the end of the year, Reactor's **legal expert and chief legal analyst**, announced her departure to pursue opportunities in the private sector. She played a key role in shaping Reactor's **gender advocacy work**, particularly in the areas of **EU integration, legal analysis, and sectoral working group engagement**. Her contributions, marked by a rare combination of legal rigour and gender sensitivity, will remain part of the foundation on which Reactor continues to build.

As the year closed, Reactor launched **several open calls for new staff**, aiming to bring in fresh expertise aligned with its evolving strategic direction. By early 2025, the **recruitment process was finalised**, and the organisation proudly welcomed **two new researchers**—one junior and one senior—thus reinforcing its research and advocacy capacities for the year ahead.

