

to the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the multi-country multiannual action plan on an EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023

Action Document for “EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme for the Republic of North Macedonia 2021-2023”

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

Title	EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme for the Republic of North Macedonia 2021-2023 Multi-country multiannual action plan on an EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023			
CRIS/OPSYS number	IPA III/2021/043-102/06			
Basic Act	Financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)			
Team Europe Initiative	No			
Zone benefiting from the action	North Macedonia			
Programming document	IPA III Programming Framework			
PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION				
Window and thematic priority	Window 1: Rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy			
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Main SDG: SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals Other significant SDG's: SDG 01: No Poverty SDG 05: Gender Equality SDG 08: Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities SDG 13: Climate Action SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions			
DAC code(s)	99810-Sector not specified 100% allocated			
Main Delivery Channel	20000 – Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's) and Civil Society			
Markers (from DAC form)	General policy objective	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Disaster Risk Reduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nutrition	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	RIO Convention markers	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Biological diversity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Combat desertification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change mitigation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change adaptation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internal markers	Policy objectives	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Digitalisation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BUDGET INFORMATION				
Amounts concerned	<p>Budget line : 15.020101.01</p> <p>Total estimated cost: EUR 9 800 000.00</p> <p>Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR: EUR 9 000 000.00</p> <p>The EU contribution is for an amount of EUR 3 000 000.00 from the general budget of the European Union for 2021 and for an amount of EUR 3 000 000.00 from the general budget of the European Union for 2022 and for an amount of EUR 3 000 000.00 from the general budget of the European Union for 2023, subject to the availability of appropriations for the respective financial years following the adoption of the relevant annual budget, or as provided for in the system of provisional twelfths</p>			
MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION				
Type of financing and method(s) of implementation	Direct management through: - Grants			
Relevant priorities and flagships from Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans	Priorities: "Green Agenda", "Digital Transition", "Human Capital Development", "Governance, Rule of Law", PAR"			
Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements,	<p>Final date for concluding procurement and grant contracts is:</p> <p>For 2021 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2022</p> <p>For 2022 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2023</p> <p>For 2023 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2024</p>			

procurement and grant contracts	
Indicative operational implementation period	72 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision

1.2. Summary of the Action

The overall objective of the Action is to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU integration of North Macedonia, through a strengthened contribution by civil society and media.

The Action will contribute to the achievement of the specific objective of the **IPA III thematic priority 5. Fundamental rights and thematic priority 7. Civil society within the Window 1: Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy**, which is: to align the legal framework with the EU and international standards and to establish a solid track record in respecting fundamental rights; to strengthen the legal and policy environment and enhancing the enabling environment for CSOs and media; to increase CSOs' inclusion in decision and policy making through a structural partnership with public authorities, based on trust and mutual recognition and around common interests of the citizens; to strengthen CSOs and media skills and capacities; and to improve public awareness for CSOs being the citizens' voice in addressing their needs and improving living conditions.

Moreover, moving forward in the EU accession process will increase the need for informing, objectively and promptly, the citizens on this process and its real impact on their daily lives. In order to obtain a continuous support for the citizens on this important matter, one of the crucial instruments is enhanced enabling environment for civil society and media in order to be effective in their work and accountable actors towards the citizens.

Therefore, **further empowerment of the civil society and media remains one of the core focuses of the EU support in IPA III**. This assistance envisions further strategic and tailor-made support for civil society and media, and for improved enabling environment for their work that will be provided through the **IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in the period 2021 to 2023 year**. The Action will support the civil society and media organisations in North Macedonia, in line with the objectives and expected results from the *Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries 2021-2027* and the *Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and integrity in enlargement countries 2021-2027*¹, further strengthening their involvement in policy and decision making, including in the EU key sector reforms and the accession negotiation process. The Action will strengthen the participatory democracy by enhancing the space and capacities of civil society and media to efficiently address and contribute to the key priorities for further democratisation of the society.

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context Analysis

An empowered civil society and media is a crucial component of any democratic system and continues to be recognised as such by the state institutions. Civil society and media organisations have already played an important role in preparing the society in North Macedonia for accession into the European Union. They are constantly contributing towards progress in the necessary key reforms and democratisation of the society, ensuring compliance with the fundamental rights and international standards, good governance and rule of law, policy advocacy and other activities at the level of sectors. By performing stronger monitoring of policies and decision making and playing the role of watchdog, civil society and media contribute to raise accountability and transparency of the institutions.

The climate in which civil society organisations operate in North Macedonia has improved in the recent years, and the **government has shown commitment to dialogue and increased CSOs structural inclusion in the policy development and legislative drafting**. The **2021 North Macedonia Report**² concluded that civil society

¹ Guidelines for EU support to Civil Society and Media in the enlargement region were in place for the period 2014-2020, and are currently being updated for the period 2021-2027. The actions under the 2021 - 2023 CSF are aligned with both documents. https://ec.europa.eu/eas/eas-headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52526/guidelines-eu-support-civil-society-enlargement-countries-2014-2020_en

² SWD(2021) 294 final

organisations continue to operate, overall, in an enabling environment. They continued to be active and have an important role to play in the reform process. Further efforts are needed to ensure a more a timely, meaningful and transparent consultation process with civil society.

The **2021 Report** assessed that the environment in which media operates was generally favourable to media freedom and allows for critical media reporting, although there have been increased tensions during the COVID-19 crisis. Self-regulation efforts need to resumed and followed by concrete results for the advancement in professional standards of journalism. Furthermore, greater transparency should be ensured regarding media advertising by state institutions and political parties. It is essential to continue supporting media pluralism, promoting professionalism, unbiased reporting and investigative journalism, and building resilience to effectively combat disinformation. The financial sustainability of independent media and working conditions of journalists remain a challenge.

The outbreak of **COVID-19 pandemic** and its negative impact on the economic and social spheres have contributed to increase the existing vulnerabilities of the society. The CSOs have demonstrated their solidarity and urgently reacted in providing support to the most affected communities with increased socio-economic needs. Number of organisations have efficiently managed to adopt to the new situation and redirected part of their regular activities to meet the urgent needs to people facing with consequences of COVID-19 crisis. In these difficult times, CSOs demonstrated an adequate capacity, knowledge and professionalism, acquired through the years of implementing different assistance (including EU at large) to efficiently and effectively provide response and services to the citizens in need. In this context, **the EU partnerships with media and civil society in North Macedonia is furthermore crucial to maintain social cohesion, and strengthen the policy dialogue for shaping the socio-economic recovery toward a more equitable, gender responsive and environmental-friendly society.** The support to be provided to CSOs and media organisations needs to focus also on actions for improving accountability systems and achieving better policies, enhanced access to information and properly informed citizens on the EU related, sector reforms in order to obtain a continuous support for and from them for the enlargement process of North Macedonia.

The **IPA CSF and Media programme 2021-23** will support civil society and media actors through a combination of funding modalities (operating grants, action grants and technical assistance). It will contribute to build capacities for independent oversight of institutions, support reforms, and social and economic development. While specific issues or themes will be identified during the implementation through stakeholders consultations, the priorities of the assistance will focus on sectors which are not adequately or partially supported by public institutions or other donors (e.g. anti-corruption, social inclusion, youth, anti-discrimination, green deal, journalism, etc.), where technical or organisational capacities are still developing, and/or are not adequately represented in dialogue and consultation platforms (e.g. gender equality, social/green economy, climate change or EU standards).

The **Action is complementary and supports the regional dimension of the Civil Society Facility and Media programme.**

2.2. Problem analysis by areas of support

Civil Society

Civil society continued to play a constructive role in supporting democratic processes and ensuring greater checks and balances in North Macedonia. The civic dialogue on issues important for the civil society development in North Macedonia is recently growing but still needs improvements in practice, including institutional dialogue on public policy. The legal, financial and policy framework guarantees the freedoms of association, assembly and expression. Yet, full implementation of the legal, financial and policy framework is still needed to strengthen an enabling environment for civil society.

The Law on Associations and Foundations specifies that organisations may receive funds from the state budget and the budgets of the municipalities. However, an adequate administrative capacity and proper organisational set-up is needed in the Government unit for NGO Corporation, including sufficient state funding to ensure proper

implementation of the 2018-2020 Strategy for cooperation with civil society i.e. the Strategy action plan for the period 2021-2023. To ensure financial sustainability and improve the institutional framework of civil society organisations, the focus should continue to be on establishing a fully functional legal framework, by implementing the strategy and harmonising the related fiscal legislation. Thus, the legal and financial frameworks still need to be improved and implemented in practice, as it is recommended by 2021 Report on North Macedonia.

The financial sustainability becomes a greater challenge for a number of CSOs as they operate with insufficient funds. The annual State funding for civil society is approximately EUR 1 million in 2020, but it is not sufficient to cover the needs of civil society. Civil society mostly relies on foreign donations. The individual and corporate donations are still low mainly due to complex legal procedures. Corporate donations remain a modest source of funding and are often provided on ad-hoc basis, as they do not create direct added value for companies or lasting impact. Such funding does not contribute to developing a long-term partnership, where both entities share resources in pursuing common goals. CSOs act rarely as providers of services to the business community or strategic partners in development efforts. There is a need to establish sustainable cooperation between civil society and business community in a way that diversifies CSO funding sources by offering services to the private sector and addressing issues of common interest, such as the consumer protection, fair market relations, etc.

The recent few years have seen a growing trend of civil society establishing or strengthening networks that also extend to CSOs from the Western Balkan region, Turkey and the EU. CSOs are increasingly willing to cooperate, communicate, and coordinate with each other in order to achieve results and avoid duplication of assistance. In terms of networking, civil society is increasingly recognising the benefits of cooperation, particularly in relation to the growing interest in advocacy and policy dialogue. In this context, stronger donor coordination is needed in order to ensure complementarities.

There are common shortcomings that need to be further addressed regarding the capacities of the CSOs in North Macedonia. There is a strong need for capacity building, need for networking, and cooperation with well operating CSOs in EU member states to learn from their good practises, experiences, which could serve as a basis for capacity building of the CSOs. In regards to CSOs' internal capacities and operational structures, a series of common shortcomings needs to be further addressed, including as follows: a) Quite number of CSOs lack a functional organisational structure, strategic planning and long-term institutional development; lack of professional staff; insufficient accountability; and weak financial management. b) CSOs working on local and grass-root level comparatively have weaker capacities and have less funding possibilities, unfavourable socio-cultural context, weak cooperation with local government and small support from the community. There are still no mechanism to systematically transfer knowledge from bigger and more experienced CSOs to newer CSOs.

CSOs have limitations in their visibility and external communication practices with stakeholders including developing relationships with members, constituencies and citizens; mobilising support from the business community and individuals; effective public communication; cooperation with the media, creating a positive public image and building trust. According to certain local surveys, the public has significant trust in CSOs, especially those working in the areas of environment, women and gender, social care, but this can improve further if CSOs regularly inform the public about their activities and ensure cooperation with different media outlets.

Considering the above, there is a need to further empower civil society in order to fulfil their following key roles:

- Creating stronger links to citizens by engaging in public policy processes, reaching out to society as a whole including youth, marginalised groups and grass-root communities and encouraging civic activism and public participation in policy-making across all areas;
- Becoming professional and reliable partners in the policy-making and reform process through evidence-based advocacy across all sectors and close monitoring of the EU related reforms;
- Contributing to enhancing responsible and inclusive leadership in the political, economic and social spheres and providing early warning in case of societal change,
- Strengthening social and economic development and create better links with business by promoting entrepreneurship, social innovation and job creation.

The above analysis explains the comprehensive range of challenges that need to be addressed in order to further support the enabling environment for civil society in North Macedonia. In situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs actions were very important to respond to the immediate needs of citizens and in some cases they were filling the gaps and provided support through humanitarian and social services for the most vulnerable categories in society. Thus, the role of CSOs need to be further reinforced to remain the watchdogs and ensure further transparency and accountability.

Media

Democracy cannot thrive without the media playing a vital role in monitoring and exposing wrongdoings in the society. It is important to strengthen role of independent media, watchdog groups and civil and media associations, committed to support democratic values and freedoms, opening up government budgets and policies for public review and discussion.

In addition to invested efforts so far, further support to protect freedom of expression, media freedom and pluralism, independent and investigative journalism are needed in the media landscape of North Macedonia.

The 2021 Freedom House Report³ assesses the “global freedom statuses” in North Macedonia as “partly free”, also finding that while the media and CSOs are taking part in a 'vigorous public discourse, journalists and activists face pressure and intimidation'. During 2020, the association of journalists registered two physical attacks and 12 various forms of verbal life-threats and intimidation against journalists. The European Commission’s 2021 Report notes that law enforcement authorities and the Public Prosecutor’s Office follow up incidents involving journalists, but better coordination between different institutions to act faster on reported violations and prevent impunity of perpetrators is needed. The authorities/judicial system should demonstrate a more proactive and systematic condemnation of attacks. Only a small percentage of the perpetrators of physical attacks against journalists have been brought to justice.

The legislative framework encompassing work of media needs to be harmonised with the 2018 Media Directive⁴. Government advertising on commercial channels is banned. However, several challenges continue to be of concern to media associations, especially over possible amendment of article 102 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services to allow state funded campaigns of public interest. Furthermore, the possibility for political parties to use state funding for advertisement in the media continue to cause concern among media associations about possible political influence on editorial lines.

The financial sustainability of media, including independent media and working conditions of journalists, especially their labour and social rights, remain a challenge. Finally, the authorities should make the necessary efforts for the implementation of the strategy for reforming the public broadcaster, and finalise appointments for the public service broadcaster's programme council and the media regulator's council

The Report on North Macedonia also notes that disinformation, hate speech, disrespect of professional standards and violations of intellectual property rights are among the frequent challenges, especially in online media.

Following the EU’s own efforts related to elections, the code of practice on disinformation and the European Democracy Action Plan⁵, there is a need for development and improvement of the electoral observation methodology to monitor and assess the use of social media and other digital technologies during election campaigns against international standards. Further support is needed in the development of policy and regulatory frameworks that apply offline rules on elections and democratic processes to the online context, and assistance is needed to build capacities to implement them. Furthermore, capacity-building and other support is needed to enable authorities to develop and implement relevant international standards effectively in the online space (e.g. protection of children, disinformation, etc.).

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia>

⁴ DIRECTIVE 2010/13/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32010L0013>

⁵ COM/2020/790 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A790%3AFIN&qid=1607079662423>

The analyses of the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services demonstrated that advertising budgets are shrinking, while North Macedonia's media landscape includes a pretty high number of media outlets considering the rather small media market. Media experts point out that the imbalance between media outlets and available funding creates concerns on the financial viability of media outlets and over media integrity and independence. Efforts are needed in strengthening of competitiveness of the audio-visual media market and media digital transformation as a key for unlocking the economic potential of the media sector. Additionally, respect of intellectual property rights and effective enforcement of IP rights, and of copyright in particular, are essential for the media sector. Further support is needed in terms of legal enforcement, but also awareness raising.

Respect of human rights, diversity and pluralistic opinions of the society should be appropriately reflected by the media sector, that should strive to be more inclusive and increase equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised (both content related and/or as part of the media sector).

2.3. Relevance and complementarity with strategies supported by key national stakeholders

The action is centred on the specific objective to enhance the contribution of civil society and media organisations in addressing the key sector priorities of North Macedonia and further support the enlargement process.

Since 2017, North Macedonia has made significant progress in introducing the **sector approach**. Civil Society for the parts related to fundamental rights and Media is embedded in the Sector Working Group (SWG) on Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, while for all the other aspects is spread in all the other SWGs.

The **strategic framework** on the civil society consists of few strategies as described above. There is a **Performance assessment framework (PAF)**, based on a set of impact and outcome indicators, targets and baseline values, available under <https://paf.vestelglobal.com/PAF/>. Indicators included in the PAF were selected in consultation with the CSOs and the outcome and impact indicators of this AD are included in the PAF.

In relation to civil society, the below list of documents are relevant for the Action:

- Code of Good Practice for Financial Support to Citizen Associations and Foundations, from 2007,
- Decision on the Criteria and Procedure for Allocating Financial Support from the Budget of North Macedonia for the Program Activities of Associations and Foundations, from 2009,
- Code of Good Practices for Participation of the Civil Sector in the Process of Policy Making, from 2011,
- Government Programs for Financial Support to Program Activities of Associations and Foundations,
- Strategy of the Government of North Macedonia for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Sector 2018-2020 (Strategy),
- Action Plan for Implementing the Government of North Macedonia for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Sector 2018-2020 and 2021-2023.

In relation to media, the below list of laws/documents is related to the Action:

- Law on Media, Law on audio and audio-visual media services, Electoral Code, the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, etc.
- Challenges in the media sector were addressed as part of Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues published in spring 2015 and in autumn 2017.
- October 2019, Report from the Peer-review mission on media in North Macedonia was published, providing overview of challenges and recommendations for the media reforms.

Annual and thematic reports published by domestic and international media associations are also a basis for monitoring and assessing the situation on freedom of expression and media.

2.4. Relevance and complementarity with EU policy and EU and other donors' assistance

The Action is designed to contribute to the achievement of the specific objective of **the IPA III thematic priority 5. Fundamental right and thematic priority 7. Civil society** within the **Window 1: Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy**, which are: to ensure the alignment of the legal framework with EU and international

standards as well as to establish a solid track record in respecting fundamental rights; to strengthen the enabling legal and policy environment and support the basic needs of CSOs, to increase CSOs' role in decision and policy making in partnership with public authorities based on trust and mutual recognition and around common interests, to strengthen CSOs skills and capacities, as well as to increase public awareness for CSOs being the citizens' voice in addressing their needs and improving living conditions.

Furthermore, the Action will address the following EU/international strategic documents:

- EU guidelines for support to civil society in the enlargement region 2021-2027
- EU guidelines for support to media freedom and integrity of media in the enlargement region 2021-2027
- European Commission “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”
- Enlargement strategy
- European Commission Strategic Plan 2020-2024 – Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations⁶
- Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025⁷
- EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027⁸
- United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁹
- Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans¹⁰
- Enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution of North Macedonia¹¹

The action will also consider, when applicable, the country's involvement into the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps programmes for the new programming period (2021-2027) on an equal footing with EU Member States. In particular, will consider that the Erasmus+ support mobility and cooperation at all levels of education (schools, vocational institutions, universities, adult education organisations, youth organisations, sport association), where CSOs may be involved in the EU funded projects strengthening their links to European peers and modernising their working methods. North Macedonia is also involved in the European Solidarity Corps, which finances volunteering projects in Europe and beyond.

2.5. Lessons learned and links with previous financial assistance

The most important **lessons learnt** from the previous actions are that civil society cooperation programmes have proven to be a particularly useful tool in:

- Sharing best practices;
- Creating networks of experts among the enlargement countries but also with the Member States' experts;
- Strengthening the thematic networking among CSOs and their increased responsibility in involving grass rooting organisations;
- Improving the regulatory environment;
- Promoting CSO's access to EU funding;
- Improving the dialogue with the European Commission and with various stakeholders in North Macedonia.

Furthermore, the use of action and operating grants to support civil society have proved to be an efficient tool to strengthen capacities of CSOs working in sectors of strategic importance. This include also the continuation of the actions towards more CSOs' structured dialogue with public authorities and supporting the EU related key reforms and structures for EU accession negotiations. It is important to encourage and strengthen creative synergies between civil society, media and other stakeholders (private sector, academia, and local government) to ensure effective communication, regarding the EU perspective, gender equality, inter-cultural dialogue and green transition.

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/system/files/near_sp_2020_2024_en.pdf

⁷ COM(2020) 152 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN>

⁸ 2018/C 456/01, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL&from=EN>

⁹ https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

¹⁰ SWD(2020) 223 final, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-10/green_agenda_for_the_western_balkans_en.pdf

¹¹ [https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/The%20Republic%20of%20North%20Macedonia%20First/Macedonian%20enhanced%20NDC%20\(002\).pdf](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/The%20Republic%20of%20North%20Macedonia%20First/Macedonian%20enhanced%20NDC%20(002).pdf)

Thus all the above listed positive experience in the last years has been adequately considered in the preparation of this action.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Planned results and intervention

The **overall objective of the Action** is to strengthen the participatory democracy and the EU integration of North Macedonia, through a strengthened contribution by civil society and media.

The **main outcome** of the action is enhanced contribution of civil society and media in efficiently addressing the key priorities of North Macedonia, through an enhanced enabling environment for CSOs and media, enhanced cooperation between CSOs and the government, and through increased capacity and resilience of CSOs, media outlets and media professional organisations. The following three (3) outputs are expected in line with the outcome:

Output 1. Improved capacities of civil society and media organisations to deliver services to citizens and actively participate in the accession process

Under this output, further capacity building is foreseen to be delivered for the representatives of CSOs and media organisations in order to enhance their knowledge, skills and operations to be able to deliver appropriate services to citizens and actively participate and contribute to the accession process. Also, CSOs and media organisations by implementing the EU grant projects in different sectors, will get opportunities to work in cooperation with CSOs from EU member states in order to transfer the know-how, learn about the good practises in the EU member states and creates new synergies and networks for increased Europeanisation of the society. The CSOs will be also able to provide efficient and sustainable community-based services and make them available for the local communities.

Output 2: Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media

Under this output new laws are expected to be prepared, and amendments of existing ones to be made, including proper procedural and implementation practices, in order to improve the operational environment for the CSOs and media organisations in North Macedonia.

Output 3: Improved public support, transparency and visibility of the CSOs and Media

Under this output it is expected CSOs to extend their services to private sector and having improved support by corporate and individual donors. The visibility of CSOs/media work will be increased vis-à-vis their constituencies and citizens, in general. In order to achieve this, CSOS will elaborate and release different communication products, but also improve their transparency and accountable towards citizens.

3.2. Indicative type of activities

Activities related to Output 1: *Improved capacities of civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and actively participate in the accession process*; and Output 2: *Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media*

- **Activity 1: Framework Partnership Agreements with associated operating grants.**

The programme will continue supporting the strategic plans of civil society partners in the programming period 2021-2023) identified through a call for Framework Partnerships under the civil society Facility Programme 2020. The assistance in the form of operating grants will support organisations' annual work plans (year 2, 3 and 4) contributing to actions, oversight and advocacy in various areas. Operating grants will be awarded after the evaluation of relevance and quality of Framework Partners' annual work plans and quality of implementation from the previous year of the operating grant. A mid-term evaluation of ongoing partnerships will be conducted during the third year of implementation.

- **Activity 2: Call for Proposals for Civil society and Media action grants**

Calls for proposals will be launched to support the work of civil society and media organisations through action grants for interventions in various priority sectors. In particular, these calls will include support to thematic coalitions and networks of civil society and media organisations operating in North Macedonia with the aim to unleash the potential and effectiveness of a more integrated and collective approach to advocacy

and watchdog function as relevant. Specific priority sectors or themes to be targeted on each of the calls will be identified through stakeholders' consultations prior to the publication of the call, and/or through the consultation and need assessment support of the civil society resource centre. Indicative sectors or themes may include but not limited to: green economy and transition, economic governance, social entrepreneurship, fight against organised crime and corruption, freedom of speech, media literacy and integrity, gender equality and women empowerment, social inclusion, antidiscrimination of marginalised groups, youth, education, and climate change.

One specific priority of the call for proposals, programmed for 2022, will be to support actions for Civil society Dialogue Platform/s to further strengthen the effectiveness of civil society and media organisations to be organised in sectoral networking platforms for supporting the sector policies' reforms and future negotiations of North Macedonia, e.g. in relation with the European Green Deal aiming to join the European Climate Pact and facilitate a swift alignment with the EU climate legislation. The experience from the EU funded grant project for Civil Society Dialogue Platform, where CSOs are sectorally structured and coordinated to provide a watchdog function of sector reforms, and producing annual shadow reports for specific sectors, proved to contribute immensely to the process and structures for the EU chapter negotiations. The call will support activities of sectorial networks for structuring their sectorial communication and coordination, from local towards central level, and advocating to responsible institutions evidence based sector needs of different geographical regions and different citizens' living environment.

The action grants will also include financial support to third parties for the benefit of small CSOs/ grassroot/community based organisations, with a focus on youth, green and circular economy and women's rights organisations. This funded small grants projects will be matched with mentoring and a capacity building programme for enabling them to directly contribute to the local development priorities, in effective partnership with local governments. This part of the assistance should contribute to the sustainability of civil society and media organisations through innovative approaches to promote participatory democracy and partnerships, strengthening cooperation with business community, media outlets, academia and local governments.

Activities related to Output 1: *Improved capacities of civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and participate in the accession process*; and Output 3: *Improved public support, transparency and visibility of the CSOs/Media, (including support and cooperation with private sector, constituencies and citizens of North Macedonia in general*

- **Activity 3. Civil society resource centre phase II.** A direct award will be provided to the present National Civil Society Resource Centre for civil society (phase II), for duration of 4 years. Currently, the Civil Society Resource Centre operates under the ongoing EU funded grant (phase I) and is managed by the CSOs consortium comprised of three CSOs with a good territorial coverage of North Macedonia (*Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation Skopje* – Central part of North Macedonia; *Association for Democratic Initiative, Gostivar*- Western part and the *Media Plus, Shtip* – Eastern part). The project will continue to address the capacity building needs of the civil society, based on regular consultations and sectorial needs assessment. The Resource Centre will strengthen the effectiveness of civil society work through a mix of CSOs support: services, capacity building, support to consultations and advocacy initiatives at central and local level.

The grant project will focus on regulatory (self) standards for internal procedure, transparency and accountability of organisations, including through effective feedback mechanisms for constituency/members. The activity shall include financial support to third parties for the benefit of small CSOs/ grassroots /community based organisations and support additional antennas of the Civil Society Resource Centre to provide services to more civil society organisations including informal citizens initiatives.

Activities related to Output 2: *Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media:*

- Activity 4. Technical assistance.** A contract will provide further support for the enabling environment for civil society and media organisations, supporting the present and future government structures for dialogue and cooperation with civil society and media organisations (Government Council for cooperation with CSOs, State funding reforms and eventual new government bodies/structures for management, systematic monitoring mechanism for enabling environment, etc.). This assistance may include support through a standardised mechanism/s for in-kind support activism of civil society on local level, in order to effectively address the needs of local communities and improving the citizens' living conditions (social, economic, culture).

The assistance will include component for capacity building and tailored made trainings of institutions, civil society and media organisations where needed, components for direct support for improved legal and procedural frameworks, enhanced visibility and transparency of the CSOs work and monitoring of the action and operating grants contracted under this IPA CSF and Media Programme 2021-2023. Additional components of assistance may be added after stakeholders' consultations prior to the publication of the service tender and also taking in consideration the outcomes and lesson learnt from the ongoing EU funded technical assistance to civil society that will be finalised in Q1 2023.
- Activity 5.** In addition, a FWC service contract will provide for the EU Delegation support in **evaluating** calls for proposals by engaging assessors and also providing services for support of the monitoring of the grant projects.

3.3. Risks and assumptions

Risks	Risk level (H/M/L)	Mitigating measures
Risk 1. Lack of political commitment to strengthen the civil society and actively involve them into the policy dialog.	M	To engage in continuous policy dialogue between CSOs and public institutions, authorities
Risk 2. Insufficient willingness and support from the private sector to support and regularly cooperate with civil society	L	Communication materials will be produced and distributed for external partners of the CSOs, such as other measures will be taken to properly distribute relevant information for the private sector and benefits of cooperating with civil society.
Risk 3. the EU procedures for the award of grants, including complex application documents and financial rules as well as co-financing requirement may affect the motivation of the CSOs and media organisations, especially those with limited capacities, to participate in the action	L	EUD will make sure that capacity building opportunities and information days will be available for potential applicants in a timely manner.

Assumptions (to be reflected in the Logical Framework Matrix above) – grouped by outputs and outcomes

The below assumptions is applicable to all outcomes and outputs related to civil society:

- Social and economic development of North Macedonia allows stronger support to the Civil Society agenda
- Interest on behalf of the Government to support financially, institutionally and legally the development of a vibrant civil society

The below assumptions is applicable to all outcomes and outputs related to media

The pluralistic media environment does not deteriorate, and freedom of expression is not restricted or limited by new restrictive measures/legal acts/regulations.

3.4. Mainstreaming

How does this Action contribute to Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment (in line with the EU gender equality strategy 2020-2025)?

North Macedonia has put in place the legal framework to ensure gender equality through the adoption of the Law on equal opportunities for women and men and the Law on prevention of and protection from discrimination. The current legal framework actually prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation and prescribes that equal representation of men and women exists when one sex is represented with at least 40% per cent in bodies at all levels (parliament, state, municipal and other institutions). In this respect, an effective gender mainstreaming will be taken into account at all stages and aspects during the implementation of the Programme activities. The EU support to civil society and media will enhance capacities of civic actors to engage diverse women and girls, enhance participation of women organisations in policy dialogue, and adopt a gender responsive approach throughout their activities. Besides ensuring mainstreaming of gender issues, specific projects will directly target gender aspects through gender analysis and use of a gender perspective in all activities and advocacy initiatives, for example in the areas of social rights of workers and labour law for the inclusion of maternity leave, or in the area of journalism for reporting on non-discrimination in employment, social policies or human rights. The diverse needs of women, girls will be prioritised and a reasonable distribution of resources will be sought accordingly.

The Programme will also contribute to the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III¹² and should include gender sensitive indicators to the extent possible. At least one specific objective and one indicator in each proposal should be aimed at gender equality. Further, the Programme will contribute to several Sustainable Development Goals¹³ related to gender equality and women's empowerment, including SDG 1, SDG 5, SDG 8 and SDG 10.

How does this Action address Environment and Climate change?

The programme envisages activities directly targeting environment, climate change and transition to green and circular economy (through framework partnerships, thematic coalitions and support to local activism and volunteerism). Activities will increase the public awareness on climate change, environmental issues and impact on the eco-system and public health such as soil, water and air pollution. All capacity building activities to CSO or to the media will sensitise on the need to assess the potential impact to the environment and to climate change of public policies. At the same time, the programme will promote civil society activism and participation in decision making in sectors directly linked to environment and climate change such as energy, transport, mobility, employment and industrial policies.

How does this Action address the Rights Based Approach?

North Macedonia is committed to being a reliable partner in the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024¹⁴, which sets out the priorities of the EU and its Member States in this area in relations with all third countries. As well, North Macedonia is committed to achieve the objectives of the EU Action Plan through the political, human rights and sectoral policy dialogues with the EU institutions.

This Action Document is centred in the Rights Based Approach. Each financed project will directly or indirectly support the Rights Based Approach. The programme will contribute to increase participatory democracy by enhancing capacities of civil society to represent and advocate for the rights, needs and positions of their constituencies within policy and decision making. In this regard, all civil society and media activities will put an emphasis on engaging, representing and reporting on the rights of most disadvantaged groups, including people living in poverty, vulnerable women, children, persons with mental and/or physical disabilities, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Non-binary, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) people, Roma and other minority groups. At project level, the Rights Based Approach will be included in the design of the Guidelines for individual Calls, assessed during the evaluation of proposals, and implemented throughout the programme including through specific capacity building activities.

How does this Action promote the systematic engagement with Civil Society?

This action is directly addressing the needs of the civil society in North Macedonia, and addressing them by all the activities of the project. The civil society organisations have been engaged in the discussions of the North Macedonia sector priorities, primarily during the preparation of the relevant strategic documents. The main forum for the engagement of the CSOs is as usual represented by the Sector Working Groups of the different sectors. The SWGs of the numerous sectors are involved in the programming and monitoring of the different development projects in North Macedonia.

The design of the programme has been consulted with civil society and media organisations and with other relevant stakeholders in North Macedonia such as representatives of government, international organisations and the donor community. The programme encompasses several layers of engagement with civil society. At programme's level, regular consultations are organised by TACSO and the resource centre in order to assess the needs of civil society and

¹² SWD(2020) 284 final, https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/swd_2020_284_en_final.pdf

¹³ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/about-us/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-and-disability.html>

¹⁴ JOIN(2020)5, [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=JOIN\(2020\)5&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=JOIN(2020)5&lang=en)

media actors, and measure the impact of the EU assistance against the indicators of the EU Guidelines for support to civil society for the period 2021-2027. Framework partners and grant beneficiaries, as well as other civil society and media organisations, will be encouraged to strengthen the dialogue with the EU, particularly in relation the programming of IPA assistance, as well as for the European Commission Reports. Further consultations will take place during the implementation of the different programmes' activities in order to identify specific sectors, themes or other issues to be targeted by call for proposals.

Others (such as Resilience and Conflict Sensitivity, Roma, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups)

The proposed activities will always take in consideration the rights of any individuals, including children, women, minorities, people with disabilities and vulnerable groups; on the contrary, it will support vulnerable communities. It will support minorities and vulnerable groups also, as the Action will create a healthier environment for all the citizens, it will contribute to the improvement of living standards and health, learning, working and mobility conditions for citizens, especially in the affected areas, including minority, vulnerable groups and other disadvantaged groups.

3.5. Conditions for implementation

Not applicable.

3.6. Logical Framework

Results	Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10)	Indicators (at least one indicator per expected result)	Baselines (year)	Targets (year)	Sources of data (1 per indicator)	Assumptions
Impact	To strengthen the participatory democracy and the EU integration and approximation process in North Macedonia, through a strengthened contribution by civil society and media.	Civil Society Participation Index	5 (2018)	8 (2027)	World Bank ¹⁵	<i>Not applicable</i>
		Percentage of people who believe that CSOs can effectively scrutinise the authorities	45% (2019) ¹⁶	55% (2027)	Balkan Barometer ¹⁷	
		% of people employed by the CSO sector	0.21% (2018)	1% (2027)	Employment Agency and State Statistical Office	
		% of volunteers in the CSOs	30% (2018)	50% (2027)	State Statistical Office	
		Revenue of CSOs (by grants, business activities and donations)	90% -100% (grants from bilateral and international donors)	60%-70% (2027)	PRO Office	
Outcome 1	The contribution of civil society and media in addressing the key priorities of North Macedonia is enhanced, through an enhanced enabling environment for CSOs and media, enhanced cooperation between CSOs and the government, and through increased capacity and resilience of CSOs, media outlets and media professional organisations.	Number of CSOs actively participating in the Sector policy dialogue (sector working groups meeting)	23 (2019)	90 (2027)	Attendance lists of the SWG	Social and economic development of North Macedonia allows stronger support to the Civil Society agenda
		Number of CSOs' opinions on the proposed laws and strategies i.e. extent to which laws/bylaws, strategies, other acts of public interest and policy reforms are effectively* consulted with CSOs	15% (2019)	43% (2027)	ENER statistics and respected procedures EUCSG Monitoring Matrix Reports	

¹⁵ Source: https://tcdata360.worldbank.org/indicators/hab8090ea?country=BRA&indicator=28738&viz=line_chart&years=2006,2018

¹⁷ Source: https://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCC_BalkanBarometer_PublicOpinion_2019.pdf

		Number of selected CSOs in policy/law drafting working groups, based on public call, equal treatment and clear criteria ensuring diversity (incl. gender) and balance between quality and quantity representativeness of CSOs	10% (2019)	25% (2027)	Ministry of Justice, Council for Cooperation with CSOs, related Ministries and bodies	
		Number of CSOs actively engaged in the negotiation process including involvement in the Sector Working Groups	0 (2020)	50 % (2027)	SEA negotiation structure	
		Number of CSOs (and proportion of CSOs to all providers of services), delivering community-based social services i.e. contribution of CSOs to public services measured in percentage of CSOs engaged in public services contracts such as social, educational, health, economic, and environment.	0 (2020)	At least 50 CSOs (30% of all service providers)	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare Annual report on social services	
		Number of environment-focused activities/services, run by the CSOs	30 (2019)	300 (2027)	Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Local Governments, ZELS	
Output 1 related to outcome 1	Improved capacities of civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and participate in the accession process	Number of CSOs trained to deliver services and participate in the accession process	IPA III 0 (2020)	IPA III 850 (2027)	Project reports	Interest on behalf of the CSOs to develop and grow and provide benefits to the society
		Number of CSOs involved in implementation of EU grants	0 (2020)	200 (2027)		

		Number of CSOs working in cooperation with EU CSOs and subject to enhanced transfer of know-how	0 (2020)	100 (2027)		Interest on behalf of the Government to support financially, institutionally and legally the development of a vibrant civil sector
		Number of community-based services (of sustainable nature) established by CSOs	0 (2020)	50 (2027)		Public considers civil society an important vector of democracy
		Number of beneficiaries of the established services	0 (2020)	700 (2027)		
Output 2 related to outcome 1	Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media	Number of new laws adopted/amended improving the operational environment for CS	0(2020)	2 (2027)	Official Gazette	
		Value of state funding for CS sector	1 MEUR (2020)	5 MEUR (2027)	Report of the Council Cooperation with CSOs	

		Number of CSOs receiving state funding	20 (2020)	100 (2027)	EUCSG Monitoring Matrix Reports	
		Clear and operational legislation for Favourable tax benefits for financing non-profit activities including for public benefit organisations (PBOs)	0 (2020)	2 (2027)		
Output 3 related to outcome 1	Improved public support, transparency and visibility of the CSOs/Media, (including support of private sector, constituencies and citizens of North Macedonia in general	Number of volunteers attracted by the CSOs in implementing EU projects	0 (2020)	100 (2027)	Civicus report Project reports	
		Percentage of private donations compared to the total income of CSO	18% (2018)	25% (2027)	EUCSG Monitoring Matrix Reports	

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1. Financing agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not foreseen to conclude a financing agreement with the government of North Macedonia.

4.2. Implementation modalities

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures¹⁸.

4.2.1. Direct Management (Grants)

Activity 1: Framework Partnership Agreements

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

The purpose of the grants is to support the annual work programmes for year 2023, 2024 and 2025 of Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) launched in 2021 through a call for proposals (publication reference: EuropeAid/171328/DD/FPA/MK) with the yearly grant for 2022 (calendar year) being covered by the allocation from CSF 2020. It is expected that civil society organisations with this support will provide a strategic, targeted and expert contribution in addressing the key reform priorities of North Macedonia. The grants will contribute to achieving *Output 1: Improved capacities of civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and participate in the accession process* and *Output 2: Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media*.

(b) Type of applicants targeted

For the operating grants supporting the Framework partnership agreements to be signed in 2021 the applicants targeted are civil society and media organisation selected under the Call for Proposals for Framework Partnership Agreements and associated annual operating grants contracted in 2021 with publication reference: EuropeAid/171328/DD/FPA/MK.

Activity 2: Call for Proposals for action grants for Civil Society and Media

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

The purpose of the action grant(s) is to support the sustainability and resilience of civil society and media organisations in various sectors and key priorities to contribute through innovative approaches to a participatory democracy in North Macedonia. These would include actions for enabling environment for civil society and media professionals and to protect civil activism and journalists from any form of intimidation and attack. Based on the political context and society needs this action will be launched through three Call for Proposal (one per each year). Priority sectors may differ, based on the consultations with the stakeholders and assessments of the current state of play when the Calls will be launched. The grants will contribute to achieving *Output 1: Improved capacities of civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and participate in the accession process* and *Output 2: Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media*.

The grants will support partnerships and sectorial networks of civil society and media organisations operating in North Macedonia for an effective and more integrated and collective approach to advocacy and improving life of the citizens. This may also include support to sustainability of non-mainstream media representing minority and/or vulnerable groups with a focus on investigative reporting, access to public information, alternative culture, social/green economy, youth activism, gender equality and other human rights issues.

(b) Type of applicants targeted

The applicants targeted have legal personality, are non-profit making, non-governmental, civil society and/or media professional organisations. Details for eligibility and specific requirements of such potential applicants/co-applicants will be defined in the Call for Proposals documents.

¹⁸ www.sanctionsmap.eu Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

Activity 3: Civil society resource centre phase II

(a) Purpose of the grant

The purpose of this direct award grant is to further strengthen the effectiveness of civil society work through a mix of support services, capacity building, support to consultations and advocacy initiatives at central and local level. This grant contributes to achieving a structured and consolidated approach for support of the needs of civil society to be proactive and strong independent actor in North Macedonia. The grant will contribute to achieving Output 1: *Improved capacities of civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and participate in the accession process*; and Output 3: *Improved public support, transparency and visibility of the CSOs/Media, (including support and cooperation with private sector, constituencies and citizens of North Macedonia in general.*

(c) Justification for direct award as per Art 195 (f):

Under the responsibility of the Commission's Authorising office responsible, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals to grant beneficiary, selected using the following criteria:

a) Administrative and financial capacity:

- Be a Local Civil Society Organisation or Local Association of CSO's established in North Macedonia according to the Law on Associations and Foundations;
- Be free of any political affiliations or membership;
- The Local Civil Society Organisation or the Local Association of CSO's have a four year strategic plan in place;
- In-country (regional, countrywide) experience, financial and administrative capacity;
- The entity selected for direct award must have access to financial resources outside EU funding to cover at least the first year of the EU-financed direct grant;
- The entity selected for direct award must have experience in managing a grant of at least half the size of the direct grant awarded under this programme.

b) Technical Capacity

- Proven experience in implementation of EU funded projects;
- The Local Civil Society Organisation or the Local Association of CSO's have implemented action grants and/or partnership frameworks for grass root organisations in the period 2018 and/or 2019 and/or 2020;
- The Local Civil Society Organisation or the Local Association of CSO's have experience in implementing similar projects in assisting the start-up and management of resource centres in North Macedonia.

c) Quality of the Concept Note

- Relevance of the proposal to the particular needs and constraints of the CSO sector in North Macedonia;
- Consistency with the overall CSF and Media programme objectives 2021-2023;
- Expected impact in terms of delivering capacity and sustainability beyond donor contributions to the programme, in particular awareness raised among grass root CSO's about the National Resource Centre;
- Sustainability including sources of revenue for covering all future operating and maintenance costs; local 'ownership' of the results of the activities; likelihood of having multiplier effects, including scope for replication, extension, capitalisation on experience and knowledge sharing;
- Cost-effectiveness in terms of ratio between the estimated costs and the results for each activity and leverage of EU grant with own funds and contributions.

This is done in accordance with Article 195 (f) of the Regulation (EU) No 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union.) for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals.

4.2.2. Direct Management (Procurement)

Procurement will contribute to achieving Output 2: Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media.

The procurement will further support the enabling environment for civil society and media organisations, including existing and future structures for dialogue, cooperation and support of civil society (Government Council for cooperation

with CSOs, State funding reforms and eventual related new bodies/structures, systematic monitoring mechanism for enabling environment, etc.). This assistance may include support for a structure and standardised mechanism/s of cooperation and funding with civil society in local governments in order to efficiently address the needs of local communities and improve their living conditions (social, economic, culture) at local level.

4.3. Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act and set out in the relevant contractual documents shall apply.

The Commission's authorising officer responsible may extend the geographical eligibility on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of services in the markets of the countries or territories concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where application of the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult.

4.4. Indicative budget

	EU contribution (amount in EUR) 2021	EU contribution (amount in EUR) 2022	EU contribution (amount in EUR) 2023	Indicative third party contribution, (EUR)
Output 1: Improved capacities of civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and actively participate in the accession process; and Output 2: Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media, composed of:				
Direct management (Grants) – cf section 4.2.1 : <i>Activity 1: Framework Partnership Agreements with associated operating grants – Output 1 and Output 2</i> Total 2.1 MEUR (0.7 MEUR per each year 2021,2022,2023)	700 000.00	700 000.00	700 000.00	0.00
Direct management (Grants) – cf section 4.2.1 : <i>Activity 2: Call for Proposals: Civil society and Media Actions – Output 1 and Output 2</i> Total 5.0 MEUR (1.1 MEUR in 2021, 1.6 MEUR in 2022 and 2.3 MEUR in 2023)	1 100 000.00	1 600 000.00	2 300 000.00	0.00
Output 1: Improved capacities of civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and participate in the accession				

<i>process; and Output 3: Improved public support, transparency and visibility of the CSOs/Media, (including support and cooperation with private sector, constituencies and citizens of North Macedonia in general, composed of:</i>				
Direct management (Grants) – cf section 4.2.1 : <i>Activity 3: Civil society resource centre phase II – Output 1 and Output 3</i> 1 MEUR (2021)	1 000 000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Output 2: <i>Improved legal, procedural and financial framework for the operation of civil society and media, composed of:</i>				
Direct management (Procurement) – cf. section 4.2.2 <i>Activity 4 Technical Assistance – Output 2</i> 0.7 MEUR (2022);	0.00	700 000.00	0.00	0.00
Direct management (Procurement) – cf. section 4.2.2 <i>Activity 5 Framework Contract for monitoring (assessors) – Output 2</i> Total 0.2 MEUR (Activity 5 0.2 MEUR in 2021)	200 000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Grants – total envelope under section 4.3.1	2 800 000.00	2 300 000.00	3 000 000.00	800 000.00
Procurement – total envelope under section 4.3.3¹⁹	200 000.00	700 000.00	0.00	0.00
Totals	3 000 000.00	3 000 000.00	3 000 000.00	800 000.00

4.5. Organisational set-up and responsibilities

The action will be implemented on the basis of calls for proposals launched and fully managed by the EU Delegation under the control of the Civil Society Programme Officer. The grants resulted from the calls for proposals will be managed by the relevant programme officers for each specific sector, including monitoring of grants' implementation. Site visits and on-the-spot checks will be organised in coordination with Finance, Contracts and Audit section of the EU Delegation.

¹⁹ In order to avoid details on budgets for individual contracts, it is sufficient to indicate the total envelop for procurement. If budgets for individual contracts are public, tenderers tend to orientate themselves on them and not on the terms of reference.

The supported projects will be helped establish links with similar initiative, as well as other relevant institutions and donors, if needed. In particular, coordination will be ensured by the sectoral programme officers and the civil society programme officer.

5. PERFORMANCE/RESULTS MONITORING AND REPORTING

5.1. Internal monitoring

The performance will be measured against the indicators set out in the log frame matrix and the specific indicators laid out in the *Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries 2021-2027* and *Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and media integrity in enlargement countries 2021-2027*.

The main means of measurement is the level of alignment of North Macedonia with the European standards in the area of fundamental freedoms, civil society, freedom of speech and media. Apart from the compliance level indicator, other sources of monitoring can also give a qualitative assessment, such as: the enlargement package, reports from the contracts and grants, sector evaluations, etc. In addition, the Action might be subject to external monitoring in line with the European Commission rules and procedures set in the Financing Agreement.

Monitoring of grants awarded to civil society organisations will be assisted with inputs from on-sites visits and reporting conducted by external consultants.

The impact of the Programme will be monitored also against the indicators related to the implementation of the government strategy and action plan for cooperation with civil society for the period 2021-2023. The Strategy and its action plan pursue enabling environment for CSOs, civic participation and engagement of civil society for better governance. The Council for Government Cooperation with Civil Society is the main mechanism that coordinates the cooperation between government and civil society. The council also provides opinion on the annual reports on distribution of public funds for supporting sustainability of CSOs programs and projects. The CSOs sectorial mechanism i.e. platform for sectorial dialogue, regularly monitor the implementation of different pillars of the strategy and sector policies in general, including the sector working groups that will be responsible for EU chapters' negotiations.

5.2. Roles & responsibilities for data collection, analysis & reporting

The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this EU financial contribution will be a continuous process and part of the grant beneficiary's responsibilities. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system and elaborate, within the framework of each successive grant, regular reporting, including progress (if considered relevant) and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the corresponding work programme, difficulties encountered, changes introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its results (outputs and direct outcomes) as measured by indicators.

The reports shall be laid out in such a way as to allow monitoring of the means envisaged and employed and of the budget details for the implementation of the successive work programmes. The final reports, narrative and financial, will cover the entire financial year of the corresponding work programme.

5.3. Evaluation

Having regard to the importance of the action, a mid-term evaluation will be carried out for this action or its components contracted by the Commission.

It will be carried out for problem solving and learning purposes, in particular with respect to the programming of next Civil Society Facility and Media Programmes on 2024 and onwards.

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 1 month in advance of the dates foreseen for the evaluation missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts, and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises and activities.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partner beneficiary and other key stakeholders. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the partner beneficiary, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

The financing of the evaluation shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

6. AUDIT

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audits or expenditure verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

The financing of the audit shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Visibility of EU funding and communication about objectives and impact of Actions are a legal obligation for all Actions funded by the EU, as set out in the EU communication and visibility requirements in force.

In particular, the recipients of EU funding shall acknowledge the origin of the EU funding and ensure its proper visibility by:

- providing a statement highlighting the support received from the EU in a visible manner on all documents and communication material relating to the implementation of the funds, including on an official website and social media accounts, where these exist; and
- promoting the actions and their results by providing coherent, effective and proportionate targeted information to multiple audiences, including the media.

Visibility and communication measures shall be implemented, as relevant, by the public administrations (for instance, concerning the reforms linked to EU budget support), entrusted entities, contractors and grant beneficiaries. Appropriate contractual obligations shall be included, respectively, in financing agreements, delegation agreements, and procurement and grant contracts.

The measures shall be based on a specific Communication and Visibility Plan, established and implemented in line with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force. The plan shall include, inter alia, a communication narrative and master messages for the Action, customised for the various target audiences (stakeholders, civil society, general public, etc.)

Visibility and communication measures specific to this Action shall be complementary to the broader communication activities implemented directly by the European Commission services and/or the EU Delegation. The European Commission and the EU Delegation should be fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities, notably with respect to the communication narrative and master messages.

If the Action includes Union programmes, visibility and communication measures shall be implemented in accordance with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force and the specific rules of each Union programme. The relevant programme managing entity shall be responsible for monitoring the visibility and communication activities.

The European Commission and the EU Delegations and Offices should be fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities.

8. SUSTAINABILITY

The financial and technical assistance activities supported through this Facility will produce results on the short run since all relevant structures are in place and the support provided would increase the capacities to meet the challenges ahead of the administration. The assistance will be delivered in an appropriate mix of funding instruments to respond to different types of civil society and media organisations in a flexible, transparent, and cost-effective and results focused manner.

This approach will entail: action grants to civil society and media organisations to support long-term partnerships based on mission and shared objectives and structural means to reach out to and strengthen community based local organisations.

The sustainability of the programme's output will be achieved also through strengthened civil society and media coalitions with capacities to implement long-term advocacy actions based on shared goals in cooperation between media, civil society and other actors, such as private sector to promote innovative and sustainable approaches to advocacy and participatory democracy; capacities for more effective engagement of citizens including through communication, provision of services, volunteering and facilitating access to public information.