Center for Research and Policy Making

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Code of Civil Organizations

Introduction

Freedom of association is a fundamental human right guaranteed in Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, which states that "citizens are guaranteed the freedom to associate in order to realize and protect their political, economic, social, cultural, and other rights and beliefs." This right allows us as citizens to freely organize, establish, and participate in groups and associations, and to join or leave them at will.

We firmly believe that the development of democracy largely depends on the respect for and practice of this right. Through association, we are able to monitor the human rights situation and support and enhance development policies in society. Therefore, the state has an obligation to ensure the free formation and participation in associations of any kind and to guarantee their independence in operation. As associations, we are free to seek and receive financial resources from various sources in order to implement our programs and activities in the interest of citizens. In addition to the Constitution, the Law on Associations and Foundations in North Macedonia also provides basic guarantees for our work, clearly defining the fundamental principles of association activities.

In Macedonia, the processes of democratization and economic liberalization have contributed to the growth of civil organizations across various sectors, increasing their influence in society. In our work, in addition to acting independently, we often join various platforms and networks of civil organizations to amplify our impact in improving various aspects of citizens' lives.

Today, we increasingly have opportunities to collaborate with both the public and private sectors. We are expected to demonstrate that we provide quality services and manage our organizations efficiently, even in difficult and challenging circumstances. Undoubtedly, our legitimacy derives from the quality of our work and the support we receive from the people we work with and for, including our members, donors, the wider public, and state and international institutions. Therefore, it is imperative for us to show that we can establish a self-regulation system that ensures good governance, accountability, transparency, and efficiency.

This Code of Civil Organizations aims to strengthen the self-regulation system and contribute to greater professionalism and accountability. One of the greatest challenges we face today is building trust with citizens and the wider public. As civil organizations operating at both local and national levels, we need to provide greater accountability for our work and confirm our public interest in policy-making

processes that affect citizens and for which we receive resources.
This Code is voluntary, and any civil organization that joins it assumes responsibility for respecting and practicing the commitments, values, and standards outlined within it. The Code is a living document and will be consistently promoted and improved by civil organizations.

Core Values

Our core value is the respect for human rights as universal and inalienable rights of all citizens. In our work, we follow a human rights-based approach and promote both national and international standards for their protection. Fighting discrimination on all grounds is central to our societal actions.

By advocating for justice and equality, we support people in understanding and exercising their rights and holding others accountable when those rights are violated. Our goal is to build a society where everyone enjoys the same rights and freedoms and is free to make decisions about their lives, regardless of their origin, national or ethnic affiliation, religion, belief, socio-economic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, political or other beliefs, or any other social status. In cooperation with all stakeholders, we strive to establish gender equality and remove barriers to the development of women, girls, and youth in our society.

Accountability and transparency are our highest democratic values. In our communication with all stakeholders, we are open, honest, and act with professional integrity, with a strong focus on the public interest.

As civil organizations, we make a concerted effort to establish **participatory and inclusive** practices in all aspects of our work. We promote and practice active participation from all interested citizens (especially marginalized and disadvantaged groups, as well as youth and the poor) in the development of local communities. We advocate for a decision-making process based on feedback, which reflects the rights of those whose interests we represent and/or those affected by our work.

We respect the law. None of the profit generated is distributed to our members, employees, or directors, but is reinvested to fulfill our mission, goals, and activities outlined in our Statute, ensuring our **non-profit status.**

We are committed to protecting the **environment and ensuring the sustainability of our planet.** We carry out our activities in an environmentally sustainable manner. As part of civil society, we motivate citizens to advocate for and promote systemic changes to create a healthy planet where future generations can thrive and develop.

We always act with a belief in **solidarity,** as the highest form of civic engagement between different groups and classes of citizens coming together to fulfill a common interest, fostering unity in promoting social change.

Commitments, Standards, and Principles

1. Responsible Decision-Making and Transparent Organizations

1.1 Civil organizations are catalysts for positive social change, with a clearly defined and publicly accessible vision, mission, target groups, and beneficiaries.

1.2 The work of civil organizations is based on a one-year or multi-year planning process. Strategic plans and projects arise from the need to fulfill the organization's mission and meet the needs of the citizens we serve.

1.3 Employees, members, beneficiaries/constituents, and supporters are actively involved in the strategic planning process, thus having an influence on decision-making within the organization.

1.4 Civil organizations engage in continuous monitoring and evaluation of the results and goals of their programs and projects. The outcomes of these programs and projects are aimed at creating lasting positive changes in Macedonian society.

1.5 Civil organizations provide at least annual reports on the achieved results and activities carried out, in the form of an organizational annual report. These reports are publicly shared and easily accessible to all stakeholders.

1.6 Civil organizations possess and continually develop the skills and capacities necessary for the successful implementation of programs and projects.

1.7 Civil organizations consistently strive to ensure quality in their work, in line with current development trends and best practices in the non-profit sector.

2. Good Governance

2.1 Civil organizations that are signatories to this Code have adopted a Statute or another form of governance document, clearly defining the organization’s vision, mission, and goals.

2.2 Civil organizations have a clear organizational structure with well-defined roles, rights, and responsibilities between non-executive and executive bodies. The work of civil organizations is overseen by an independent non-executive body, which regularly meets to review and approve the organization’s annual reports (both

narrative and financial), discuss and decide on significant organizational policies, and make key decisions regarding finances, plans, and work programs.

2.3 The non-executive body that oversees the organization's work is an independent entity, with clearly defined rules for the election and re-election of its members.

2.4 Members of non-executive bodies do not receive compensation for performing their duties, except for necessary expenses related to organizing meetings or sessions.

2.5 Leadership in civil organizations is visionary, innovative, and fosters the development of a team spirit within the organization's bodies.

2.6 Civil organizations ensure their independence from the government, political parties, and other powerful social actors. Members of the organization's bodies prioritize the organization's interests over personal interests, adhering to the duty and responsibility to act in the best interest of their beneficiaries, constituents, and the broader public.

2.7 Civil organizations clearly define and declare any potential or actual conflicts of interest in their operations.

2.8 Information about employees, members, donors, and financial resources is made publicly available by civil organizations and is easily accessible to all stakeholders, especially the general public.

2.9 Civil organizations ensure gender equality in both non-executive and executive bodies. The members of these bodies come from various social groups, representing the diverse cultural, multi-ethnic, and social backgrounds of the communities in which they operate.

2.10 Decisions in civil organizations are made responsibly, based on a continuous process of exchanging information and feedback with users and target groups.

2.11 Civil organizations use digital technologies to promote greater integration of target groups and to achieve their mission while respecting privacy. Personal information held by the organization is handled with care and in compliance with relevant privacy protection standards.

3. Ethical Financing and Responsible Resource Management

3.1 Fundraising and donations are conducted to achieve the mission and goals of civil organizations. These organizations ensure the reasonable and accountable management of financial resources, using them efficiently for the intended purposes in order to maximize the achievement of their mission.

3.2 Civil organizations continuously monitor their expenses and ensure internal financial oversight, as well as, when necessary, independent external financial audits of their operations.

3.3 Civil organizations comply with and implement legally established financial, accounting, and administrative systems to minimize the risk of misuse of funds and corruption.

3.4 Civil organizations provide transparent reporting on the funds secured and utilized in their annual organizational reports. The utilized funds are presented in a manner that clearly explains the various categories of expenses and the funds received from different sources and donors.

4. Strong Connections with Employees, Members, Supporters, and Volunteers

4.1 As employers, civil organizations ensure fair and transparent policies for hiring qualified personnel with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies. Employment policies are based on non-discrimination and respect for the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

4.2 Civil organizations promote a culture of accountability, where employees and volunteers feel a strong sense of responsibility for their actions and impact.

4.3 Civil organizations are open to suggestions from their members, supporters, and beneficiaries, implementing these suggestions to improve their work and engage them in the implementation and evaluation of programs and projects.

4.4 Civil organizations invest resources in building the professional capacity of their employees and continuously measure their work performance.

4.5 Civil organizations ensure that employee compensation is determined based on the complexity of work processes and is competitive with salaries in the public and private sectors.

4.6 Civil organizations continuously nurture and develop a volunteer spirit, recognizing volunteers as valuable resources. Volunteering in civil organizations is

always welcomed and appreciated. Depending on the needs and conditions, volunteers undergo specific training to effectively perform their tasks and are supported and mentored in their work.

4.7 Civil organizations respect labor laws and ensure equal pay for equal work, as well as providing decent working conditions.

5. Responsible Advocacy

5.1 Civil organizations actively and publicly advocate for important social issues, with their advocacy based on evidence (obtained from verifiable research and/or ongoing communication with target groups) and the needs of people in the communities.

5.2 Civil organizations advocate with integrity, ensuring the truthfulness and honesty of their actions. Their advocacy methods do not put their beneficiaries or citizen groups at risk, and the advocacy aligns with the organization's mission and goals, aiming to promote the public interest.

5.3 Civil organizations clearly declare whose interests they represent within their activities and in communications with all stakeholders.

6. Accessible and Inclusive (Social) Services and Care for Beneficiaries

6.1 Civil organizations, in delivering (social) services, focus on their end beneficiaries and their real needs, aiming to improve the quality of their lives. The organizations promote services that are equally and easily accessible to all users.

6.2 Care for beneficiaries is based on the protection and promotion of human rights, guided by the principles of freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association, non-discrimination, and empowering the capacities of beneficiaries.

6.3 In delivering services, associations and foundations provide a feedback mechanism to improve the services. Programs for (social) services undergo regular quality assessments and are continuously improved based on feedback and changes in the social and economic context of the communities.

6.4 Through programs for providing social services, we support beneficiaries in taking an active role in improving their lives as active agents in their transformation.

7. Strong Partnerships

7.1 Civil organizations build partnerships based on respect and support, contributing to mutual development.

7.2 Civil organizations collaborate with various stakeholders to achieve common goals and activities, ensuring participatory decision-making in addressing important societal issues and problems, and building lasting platforms for networking and cooperation.

7.3 Civil organizations share information, resources, and knowledge objectively and impartially, and important societal decisions are made collectively.

7.4 Civil organizations encourage citizens to take active roles and steps to engage in the process of change at both local and national levels.

8. Open Two-Way Communication with All Stakeholders

8.1 Both external and internal communication reflect the core values and principles of civil organizations. In their activities and relationships with third parties, civil organizations uphold the principles of two-way, clear, truthful, and non-violent communication, and promote a culture of reasoned dialogue.

8.2 Civil organizations transparently and promptly share information about their mission, goals, activities, finances, employees, members of non-executive bodies, and contacts. The shared information is easy to use and accessible to all interested parties. In their work, organizations ensure the protection of personal data to prevent misuse. Civil organizations always strive to adapt communication to the needs of persons with disabilities.

8.3 In the best interest of civil organizations and their service users, fostering a spirit of open communication is crucial. The goal is to promote and consistently uphold the standards set in this Code as a fundamental measure for our relationships within civil society and in communication with the public.

8.4 Civil organizations facilitate two-way communication and encourage citizens and all relevant stakeholders to express their thoughts, suggestions, and comments about their work in order to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of their operations.

8.5 Civil organizations provide a complaint mechanism (both external and internal), creating a safe environment and appropriate procedures for resolving complaints and preventing further issues.