

SUPPORT INCLUSION
ENSURE JUSTICE
PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY

MAKE A CONTRIBUTION - DONATE TO ESE!

With your donation, you help ensure better access to healthcare, economic independence for women who have survived domestic violence, and their integration into the labour market. At the same time, you support the improvement of legal protection and the removal of barriers that prevent vulnerable groups from exercising their rights.



MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION

Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women

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ANNUAL REPORT FOR
2025

ABOUT ESE



ESE is a civil society organization that works to improve the implementation of the social and economic rights of vulnerable groups of citizens by empowering, mobilizing, and involving them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public policies and services in the Republic of North Macedonia.

ESE is guided by its commitment to solving problems. Through the promotion and advancement of human rights, we work to improve social and economic justice, while considering human rights to be an indivisible set of standards that must be enjoyed by all. We are particularly committed to working in the field of promoting and advancing health rights and women's rights.

This is why we focus on two goals: responding to the immediate needs of citizens, especially vulnerable groups, and influencing the creation of sustainable, long-term change. We do much more than document, report, and condemn injustices. We provide legal and paralegal assistance, thereby enabling citizens to exercise their rights and change the conditions in which they live.

Moreover, we work to change laws and policies at the national, regional, and international levels.

DEAR FRIENDS,

In 2025, ESE continued its work to advance social and economic rights through direct support to citizens, the systematic generation of evidence, and active advocacy for more accountable, transparent, and gender-sensitive public policies. Our work focused on improving the health of women and children, access to justice for victims of domestic and gender-based violence, and increasing fiscal transparency and civic participation.

In the field of healthcare, in 2025 we contributed to improving the health of pregnant women, mothers, and children, with a particular focus on maternal mental health. We prepared educational materials and carried out activities aimed at the direct education of women, providing them with relevant and professional information on healthy pregnancy, motherhood, care, and the development of infants and young children. In addition, through the production of a podcast on maternal mental health, we helped open up public space for discussion, awareness-raising, and encouraging women to seek support when they need it.

At the same time, we continuously monitored the planning and implementation of several preventive healthcare programmes and actively contributed to improving the quality, coverage, and effectiveness of preventive health policies.

In 2025, ESE significantly strengthened its work in combating corruption in the healthcare system. We conducted research among citizens and healthcare professionals, generated evidence on the risks and forms of corruption, and identified priority measures for reducing it. We also strengthened the capacities of civil society organisations through training on recognising, confronting, and reporting corruption, and launched a national media campaign that achieved significant reach and public engagement on the issue of corruption in healthcare.

In the area of access to justice, in 2025 ESE provided direct legal and psychological support to women who had experienced domestic violence, including legal counselling, court representation, and psychological counselling.

At the same time, we contributed to strengthening the capacities of civil society organisations, practitioners, and institutions through the development of training modules, participation in national and international processes, and the organisation of training sessions for professionals involved in the system of protection from violence.

A significant part of our work was focused on generating evidence on the actual situation and the economic consequences of domestic violence. We prepared and published analyses on the costs borne by women as a result of domestic violence, on the determination and payment of child support, as well as on the functioning of protection systems, thereby contributing to informed policymaking and data-driven advocacy at both the national and international levels.

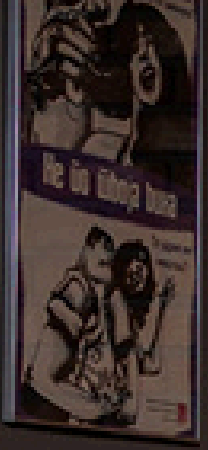
In 2025, through the social enterprise POGON, we provided concrete support for the economic empowerment of women who had experienced domestic violence. Through training, production support, and the introduction of systems for work planning and remuneration, we contributed to strengthening their economic independence, skills, and self-confidence.

At the same time, we continued to work on improving fiscal transparency and institutional accountability through systematic monitoring of proactive and reactive transparency, analysis of public procurement in the healthcare sector, and active participation in the Open Government Partnership mechanisms.

We contributed to improving the quality of publicly available information and to strengthening civic participation. Through strategic public information efforts and continuous interaction with citizens via online platforms, we helped make complex fiscal issues more understandable to the wider public.

Our work in 2025 further reinforced ESE's role as a relevant partner to institutions, civil society organisations, and international actors, and as an organisation that connects direct support for citizens with evidence-based advocacy and long-term systemic change.

The ESE Team



OUR APPROACH

GOAL 1:

INCLUSION OF CITIZENS IN PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION OF LEGISLATION, BUDGETS, AND SERVICES IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

- **Civic participation** – We help women and men from Roma and rural communities understand their rights, monitor the work of institutions, and demand accountability when those rights are not respected.
- **Evidence for change** – We conduct research that shows how laws and policies affect the lives of vulnerable groups, so that institutions can make better and fairer decisions.
- **Advocacy and accountability** – We advocate for changes in public policies and for more open and fair governance, in the interest of people who are most often neglected.
- **Strengthening resilience** – We help communities cope more effectively with crises and build a safer future for themselves and their families.

GOAL 2:

ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

- **Access to justice** – We strengthen alternative legal services and paralegals for vulnerable communities, so that people can more easily resolve their legal problems.
- **A voice for the vulnerable** – We research and document the barriers people face in accessing justice and advocate for systemic change.
- **Empowering women** – We help women who have experienced domestic violence understand and exercise their legal rights.
- **Monitoring institutions** – We monitor the work of and strengthen the capacities of key institutions that provide justice and protection.
- **Sustainability and economic support** – Through the social enterprise POGON, we ensure the financial sustainability of the legal aid we provide and contribute to the economic empowerment of women.

GOAL 3:

ADVANCING FISCAL TRANSPARENCY OF INSTITUTIONS IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SECTORS

- **Education and information** – We prepare and share accessible educational materials for citizens and practical guidance for institutions, with the aim of increasing fiscal transparency.
- **Network of experts and civil society organisations** – We build a network of experts and civil society organisations for the exchange of knowledge, experience, and good practices in the field of fiscal accountability.
- **Strengthening institutions** – We help public institutions strengthen their capacities and encourage open and constructive dialogue on transparency and accountability.
- **Monitoring and advocacy** – We monitor public procurement and the transparency of institutions and advocate for better policies and practices.
- **Digital solutions** – We develop digital tools that enable citizens to participate more easily and communicate better with institutions.

WHAT WE WORKED ON IN 2025

INCLUSION OF CITIZENS IN PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION OF LEGISLATION, BUDGETS, AND SERVICES IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

In 2025, no significant systemic changes were recorded toward improving health and access to healthcare for women, children, and vulnerable population groups.

Women continue to face a range of barriers in accessing reproductive healthcare services, including healthcare during pregnancy and after childbirth. The insufficient number of gynaecologists and their unequal geographic distribution, the financial costs of accessing gynaecological healthcare, and the lack of health information represent serious barriers to women's timely and adequate access to healthcare services during this period. The country still lacks an organised system for comprehensive health education for women on healthy pregnancy and motherhood, perinatal mental health, as well as the care, nurturing, and proper growth and development of infants and young children. As a result, most women do not have access to professional and relevant information relating to their health during pregnancy and after childbirth, or to the proper care and development of infants and young children.



The situation regarding maternal mental health is particularly concerning: the latest available data indicate that postpartum depression was manifested in 27.6% of young mothers in North Macedonia, while 27.8% were affected by moderate to extremely severe anxiety. However, the state does not provide mechanisms for systematic and comprehensive mental healthcare for women during pregnancy and after childbirth. In fact, there is only one maternal mental health support group in the entire country, and it is available only in Skopje. This indicates that mental health services are almost inaccessible to the majority of women during pregnancy and after childbirth.

WHAT WE WORKED ON IN 2025

In 2025, the Ministry of Health continued its non-transparent planning of the Cervical Cancer Screening Programme. The 2025 Programme does not specify how many women are planned to be covered by the screening, nor does it clearly present the planned scope of the individual services. The success indicators are stated only narratively, without being quantified. At the same time, the practice of insufficient transparency in the programme's budget planning continues, as the funds allocated to individual measures and activities, as well as the total amount earmarked for cervical cancer screening, are not specified. The 2025 Programme shows no improvements aimed at increasing the coverage and effectiveness of the screening.

The Ministry of Health continues to demonstrate a lack of accountability and transparency with regard to the implementation of the Cervical Cancer Screening Programme. The last publicly available report on the programme and budget implementation of the Screening and Early Detection of Malignant Diseases Programme dates back to 2020. The evaluation and report on cervical cancer screening for 2023 were published only in March 2025, even though they are crucial for improving the programme and should be prepared in the first half of the following calendar year. ESE's monitoring findings on the implementation of the screening programme in 2024 indicate that the coverage of women under the Cervical Cancer Screening Programme is declining compared to previous years.

ESE's monitoring findings on the implementation of the screening programme in 2024 indicate that the coverage of women under the Cervical Cancer Screening Programme is declining compared to previous years. Activities aimed at reaching vulnerable categories of women, such as services provided through the mobile gynaecological clinic, are not adequately funded and therefore remain inaccessible to the majority of women belonging to vulnerable groups.

In the adopted 2025 Programme for Active Healthcare for Mothers and Children, we noted certain improvements, such as the reintroduction of the pilot screening for preeclampsia, the recognition of women without health insurance as beneficiaries of the programme's measures and activities, and an increase in budget funds for activities intended for vulnerable categories of women. However, ESE's monitoring of the programme's implementation in 2024 showed that the measures and activities intended for vulnerable categories of women remain underutilised, a situation that has been repeated almost every year. The Ministry of Health also demonstrates a lack of transparency and accountability with regard to this programme, as the most recent available report on its programme and budget implementation dates from 2023.

WHAT WE WORKED ON IN 2025

Corruption remains a deeply rooted and systemic problem, particularly pronounced in the healthcare sector. According to national surveys, 97.5% of the general public recognise the negative impact of corruption, while 64% of citizens identify it as one of the biggest problems in society. Due to its complexity, the size of the available budgets, the lack of transparency, especially in public procurement, and the vulnerability of patients, the healthcare system is particularly susceptible to various forms of corruption, including informal payments, favouritism, procurement abuses, and mismanagement. Although the National Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest includes healthcare in its action plan, its focus remains limited to budgets, public procurement, and medicine prices, without addressing the everyday experiences of patients and healthcare workers. At the primary care level, the burden of corruption falls disproportionately on women, especially those from vulnerable communities. In fact, ESE's findings over many years indicate that the majority of women, particularly those from vulnerable communities, pay for gynaecological services at the primary healthcare level which, according to the bylaws of the Health Insurance Fund of the Republic of North Macedonia, should be free of charge. All of these conditions represent serious barriers to women's access to reproductive healthcare, especially for women from vulnerable communities.



WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN 2025

We improved the health of pregnant women, mothers, and children, with a particular focus on maternal mental health

- We prepared 6 educational materials for women on the following topics: healthy pregnancy and motherhood; care, support, and health promotion for infants and young children; and the promotion of maternal mental health.
- We educated 42 women (pregnant women and mothers of infants) on healthy pregnancy and motherhood; care, support, and health promotion for infants and young children; and the promotion of maternal mental health.
- We produced a podcast entitled “Maternal Mental Health – Conversations That Matter” with the aim of informing women and encouraging them to speak openly about this topic and seek help when they need it.

We continuously monitored the planning and implementation of preventive healthcare programmes and advocated for their improvement

- We continuously monitored the planning and implementation of preventive healthcare programmes (the Programme for Active Healthcare for Mothers and Children and the Programme for Screening and Early Detection of Malignant Diseases).
- We prepared analyses based on the monitoring of the budgetary and programme implementation of the programmes for 2024, as well as three advocacy documents aimed at improving their planning and implementation.

France

МАЧИНО МЕНТАЛНО ЗДРАВЈЕ
Разговори што значат.

ПРАКТИКУВАЊЕ НА ПОЗИТИВНО РОДИТЕЛСТВО

Секој родител се надева дека ќе воспита здрави, среќни, самоуверени и успешни деца. Сепак не постои вистинско упатство за тоа како правилно да се практикува родителството. Да се биде родител е вистински предизвик и ако започнете градење на врска со вашето дете исполнета со многу љубов и взаемна почит, вие сте на вистинскиот пат да практикувате позитивно родителство и да го унапредите детското здравје. Еве неколку препораки како би можеле тоа да го практикувате:

- **Покажете му нежност што почесто.**
Вашето дете нека се чувствува сакано преку вашите зборови, прегратки и времето поминато заедно. Познато е дека детето најдобро расте во семејство каде се чувствува безбедно и разбрано, а не онаму каде е заплашувано и насилно казнувано.
- **Поминувајте повеќе време заедно со вашето дете.**
Започнете со 10 до 20 минути фокусирано време за играње, разговор или забава. При тоа, исклучете го телевизорот и телефонот и фокусирајте се само на вашето дете.
- **Забележете ги и пофалете ги позитивните постапки на детето, дури и оние најмалите.**
Децата напредуваат преку пофалби. Тоа им помага да се чувствуваат сакани и го поттикнува нивното добро однесување.
- **При воспоставување на правила, на детето поставете му јасни очекувања.**
Правилата нека бидат едноставни и реални за неговата возраст и способности.
- **Разбијте ги родовите стереотипи така што без оглед на полот, детето ќе го охрабрите да си игра и да истражува со различни играчки, активности и улоги.**
Поддржете ги момчињата да бидат грижливи, а девојчињата да бидат самоуверени лидери.
- **Вие бидете пример за однесувањето што сакате да го видите кај детето.**
Детето учи преку набљудување - кога ќе останете смирени и љубезни, поверојатно е дека и детето ќе го стори истото.

France

МАЧИНО МЕНТАЛНО ЗДРАВЈЕ
Разговори што значат.

КАКО СЕ ЧУВСТВУВАМ ПО ПОРОДУВАЊЕТО?

1 ПЕРИОДОТ ПО ПОРОДУВАЊЕТО - НОВО ПОГЛАВЈЕ

Породувањето не завршува со раѓањето на бебето - тоа е само почеток на едно ново патување. Во овие недели, жената доживува физички замор, хормонални промени и емоционални турбуленции. Може да се јават мешани чувства: љубов, вина, страв, тага, збунетост. Ова не значи дека не ја сакаш својата мајчинска улога - значи дека твоето тело и ум се обидуваат да најдат нова рамнотежа.

2 САМОПРОЦЕНКА - КАКО СЕ ЧУВСТВУВАМ?

Пополнувањето на оваа кратка листа може да ти помогне да разбереш што ти е потребно:

ПРАШАЊЕ	ДА	НЕ
Имам енергија за секојдневни активности	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Често се чувствувам тажно или плачам без причина	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Имам потешкотии со спиењето	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Се чувствувам виновно или неспособно	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Имам поддршка од партнерот или семејството	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Уживам во времето со моето бебе	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Имам мисли дека не можам да издржам	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Се чувствувам како да сум „на работ“	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Ако имаш повеќе од 3 одговори „ДА“ на редови поврзани со тага, вина или безнадежност, разговарај со стручно лице.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN 2025

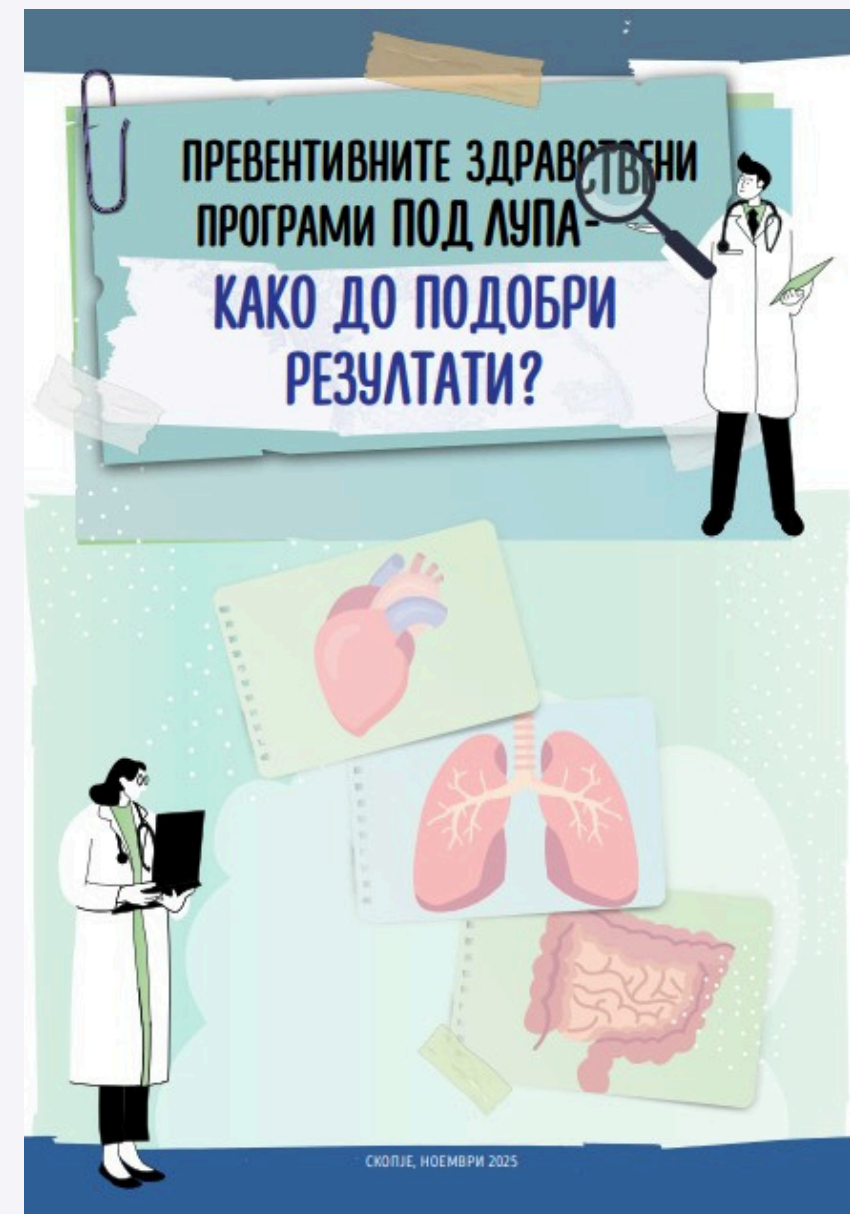
- We participated in the preparation of a publication containing findings and recommendations on four preventive healthcare programmes of the Ministry of Health (the Programme for Active Healthcare for Mothers and Children, the Cervical Cancer Screening Programme, the Programme for Protection of the Population from HIV Infection, and the Programme for Participation in the Use of Healthcare), in cooperation with partner organisations.
- We organised a consultative workshop with general practitioners specialising in family medicine in order to identify the opportunities and needs for their involvement in the implementation of the Cervical Cancer Screening Programme.
- We organised the thematic forum “When Prevention Is Underfunded, the Consequences Are Costly”, at which we presented the monitoring findings on the programmes and our demands for their improvement, in cooperation with partner organisations.
- We carried out advocacy activities aimed at improving preventive programmes for the advancement of women’s health by submitting findings and recommendations to the competent institutions, holding advocacy meetings with decision-makers, and informing the public about the findings and recommendations through press releases, media appearances, and social media.

We worked to reduce corruption in the healthcare system by involving citizens and healthcare workers, improving institutional accountability, and promoting gender-sensitive and coordinated anti-corruption policies.

- We conducted a survey among 1,137 citizens, with a particular focus on women, in order to identify citizens’ experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding this issue, as well as their needs and views on the measures that should be taken to reduce corruption in healthcare.
- We conducted a survey among 400 healthcare professionals and associates in the field of gynaecology and obstetrics in order to determine their knowledge, attitudes, and experiences regarding corruption, both at the level of healthcare service provision and at the organisational level, that is, at the level of the institution, as well as their views on the measures that should be taken to reduce corruption in healthcare.
- We conducted interviews with 20 managers of public healthcare institutions, with a particular focus on gynaecological and obstetric healthcare, in order to identify systemic weaknesses and risks of corruption in decision-making, healthcare service provision, and institutional accountability, as well as to determine the need for measures and activities to prevent corruption.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN 2025

- We trained 16 representatives from four partner civil society organisations to recognise, resist, and report corruption in healthcare through a training-of-trainers programme intended for the further education of women.
- We prepared a comprehensive Visibility and Public Communication Strategy, which provides a clear framework for the national media campaign, including defined objectives, target groups, key messages, channels, timeline, and mechanisms for the continuous monitoring of audience engagement.
- Public visibility of the issue of corruption in healthcare was successfully increased through media content, including the publication of a press release in 11 online media outlets, the production and dissemination of two testimonial videos with more than 265,000 views on social media, as well as the creation and publication of an informative infographic on the forms of corruption and the possibilities for reporting it.



WHAT WE WORKED ON IN 2025

ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In 2025, no substantial improvements were observed in the areas of access to justice, gender equality, and the protection of women from various forms of gender-based and domestic violence. Long-standing systemic weaknesses remain in place, continuing to limit the effective implementation of laws and policies in practice and reducing the actual reach of protection and support mechanisms for victims.

In the area of gender equality, amendments were adopted to the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Textbooks in Primary and Secondary Education, which resulted in a narrowing of the scope of protection against gender-based discrimination in the education system. The amendments removed the grounds of “gender,” “sexual orientation,” and “gender identity” from the anti-discrimination provisions, deleted provisions related to sexual and reproductive health, and relativised the prohibition of segregation. In addition, references to the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination were replaced with a general reference to the Constitution. The amendments were adopted without public debate and under a shortened procedure, after which civil society organisations, through the Network for Protection against Discrimination, submitted an initiative to the Constitutional Court to assess their constitutionality, pointing out that these changes represent a regression in protection and an increased risk of exclusion, violence, and inequality in education, especially for girls and other vulnerable groups.



Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 210

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

Istanbul, 11.V.2011

Preamble

The member States of the Council of Europe and the other signatories hereto,

Recalling the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5, 1950) and its Protocols, the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35, 1961, revised in 1996, ETS No. 163), the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197, 2005) and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, 2007);

Recalling the following recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member States of the Council of Europe: Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence, Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 on gender equality standards and mechanisms, Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)10 on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building, and other relevant recommendations;

Taking account of the growing body of case law of the European Court of Human Rights which sets important standards in the field of violence against women;

Having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ("CEDAW", 1979) and its Optional Protocol (1999) as well as General Recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee on violence against women, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its Optional Protocols (2000) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006);

Having regard to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2002);

Recalling the basic principles of international humanitarian law, and especially the Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949) and the Additional Protocols I and II (1977) thereto;

Condemning all forms of violence against women and domestic violence;

Recognising that the realisation of *de jure* and *de facto* equality between women and men is a key element in the prevention of violence against women;

Recognising that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women;

WHAT WE WORKED ON IN 2025

The situation regarding violence against women and domestic violence in 2025 was marked by the initiation of the process for preparing the National Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2026–2033. The process was initiated by the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, with technical support from UNFPA, UN Women, and UNDP, and included consultations and interviews with relevant stakeholders, as well as regional meetings with practitioners from institutions, the judiciary, local self-government units, civil society organisations, and other actors. The strategy is currently being finalised, and its adoption is expected at the beginning of 2026.

In 2025, the new composition of the National Coordinative Body for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention was also established, with representatives from the Government, relevant ministries, judges, public prosecutors, local self-government units, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. Despite its formal establishment, its functionality and the effective exercise of its legal competences remain dependent on investments in institutional and human capacities, clear working mechanisms, and the provision of adequate financial resources.

In this context, the lack of financial and human resources for the implementation of laws and policies continues to be a fundamental challenge, preventing the overcoming of long-standing weaknesses in the system, including “neglected” prevention, irregular data collection and publication, the absence of a functional monitoring and

evaluation system, insufficient coordination among institutions, limited access to protection mechanisms and victim support services, and lenient penal policy toward perpetrators.

The need for systemic measures is further underscored by the data of the Ministry of Interior on reported cases of domestic violence in 2024. On average, 15 cases per day were reported to the police, while a 16% decrease was recorded compared to 2023 (a total of 5,574 cases in 2024 compared to 6,703 in 2023), mainly due to a significant decrease in the number of registered complaints. With regard to the types of criminal offences, it remains characteristic that criminal proceedings are initiated to a much lesser extent for certain forms of psychological violence (for example, no proceedings were initiated for “Coercion,” and only three were initiated for “Unlawful Deprivation of Liberty”), while no criminal charges were recorded for offences related to sexual violence. These findings indicate the need for greater recognition and prosecution of psychological, economic, and sexual violence, as well as for improving the categorisation of reports and reducing the number of cases recorded merely as “complaints.”

The actual situation of women who have experienced domestic violence is further aggravated by the economic consequences of violence and the limited possibilities for compensating costs and meeting children’s needs after divorce or separation.

WHAT WE WORKED ON IN 2025

Economic insecurity is one of the reasons why women remain in abusive relationships, but it is also a factor that limits their ability to live independently after leaving the abuser. The transition period after divorce or separation is particularly critical, as women usually take on the care of the children, lack sufficient financial resources, and a significant number of them rely on support from their parents in the absence of appropriate state financial assistance models.

Domestic violence has serious and long-term consequences for the economic situation of women, particularly with regard to labour market participation, financial independence, and opportunities for economic recovery. ESE's analyses show that violence acts as a structural factor that directly limits women's ability to work and pushes them into economic dependence, poverty, and social exclusion. One of the most pronounced forms of economic violence is the prohibition to work — a significant number of women were prevented by their partners from being employed, which affects their long-term employability and income stability. In addition to lost income, violence also generates additional costs (healthcare, psychosocial support, medication, legal proceedings, transport, relocation, and new accommodation), which most often arise precisely at the time when women have the least economic power.

Economic insecurity is further deepened by inadequate and irregular child support. ESE's analysis shows that the amounts awarded often do not meet actual needs, while the enforcement mechanisms are ineffective, meaning that the largest share of the costs falls on mothers.

The lack of regular and predictable income from child support forces women to accept low-paid and insecure jobs or to withdraw entirely from the labour market due to childcare responsibilities.

In such circumstances, economic dependence is not the result of individual choice, but rather the consequence of systemic failures, including the lack of specialised measures for the economic empowerment of victims, weak links between the violence protection system and active employment policies, and ineffective child support enforcement. Therefore, the position of women who have experienced domestic violence in the labour market should be considered as an issue of gender equality, social protection, and economic justice. Without integrated measures that connect protection from violence, child support, and employment, the risk of long-term economic exclusion remains high.



WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN 2025

We worked on strengthening capacities to address problems in access to justice for women and other vulnerable groups

- We developed e-modules to strengthen the capacities of practitioners and civil society organisations in the field of gender-based and domestic violence, within the framework of the global Grassroots Justice Network – NAMATI, in cooperation with the organisation FIDA from Uganda.
- The modules include an overview of gender-based and domestic violence, the legal framework for prevention and protection, and a case study based on ESE's advocacy work. Their implementation is planned for the beginning of 2026, with potential global reach.



We generated evidence on systemic weaknesses and citizens' needs in access to justice

- We prepared and submitted a Monitoring Report to the UN Human Rights Committee under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), with a focus on access to justice for women victims of domestic violence and access to primary healthcare for women, children, and other vulnerable groups of citizens.
- We participated in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) processes and in the development of the National Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Gender-Based and Domestic Violence 2026–2033, through which we advocated for the rights and needs of women and victims of violence within formal policymaking processes.
- We prepared an analysis of the costs borne by women as a result of domestic violence, based on 52 interviews with women users of ESE's Legal Centre, covering lost work and income, healthcare costs, relocation expenses, and other debts.
- We prepared an analysis of the determination and payment of child support, based on 31 interviews with women who had experienced domestic violence, in which we compared the amount of child support with the actual needs of children.
- We began preparing additional analyses, including on the use of free legal aid and exemption from court fees, a second cycle of analysis on the costs of violence, and an analysis of the effectiveness of the civil and criminal justice protection system.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN 2025

We continued to provide legal and psychological support to women who have experienced domestic violence

- We provided legal aid to 150 women who had experienced domestic violence through 534 individual meetings with a lawyer and the preparation of 227 written submissions (lawsuits, appeals, requests, and other filings), as well as court representation for 5 women in the most disadvantaged economic situation.
- We provided psychological counselling to 47 women who had experienced domestic violence.

We strengthened the capacities of institutions responsible for access to justice and protection from violence

- We contributed to the development and implementation of public policies through participation in the drafting of the National Strategy 2026–2033 and the implementation of a specific objective from the National Action Plan 2024–2026 within the framework of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), aimed at improving protection mechanisms and raising public awareness.
- We conducted practical training for 24 police officers on handling cases of domestic and gender-based violence (December 2025).



WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN 2025

We contributed to the economic empowerment of women who have experienced domestic violence through the social enterprise POGON

- We prepared and implemented a one-year work plan for POGON for the period January–December 2025, which included training, production support, branding, promotion, mentoring, coordination, and sales.
- We involved nine women who had experienced domestic violence in training and production activities, eight of whom continued with structured production activities and/or micro-business engagement.
- We introduced a production planning system and provided materials and symbolic compensation per product, with the aim of strengthening continuity and recognising women's work.
- Through POGON, we contributed to increasing women's economic independence and stability by strengthening their skills, self-confidence, and opportunities to generate income.



WHAT WE WORKED ON IN 2025

ADVANCING FISCAL TRANSPARENCY OF INSTITUTIONS IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SECTORS

Civic participation in decision-making processes in 2025 continues to face structural challenges, especially in the area of public finance and fiscal policy. Although recent years have seen efforts to open up data and improve access to information, policymaking and implementation processes still remain largely insufficiently inclusive and only limitedly understandable to citizens.

In North Macedonia, civic participation in 2025 still depends to a significant extent on the initiatives and capacities of civil society organisations. Institutions formally meet their transparency obligations, but the quality, timeliness, and usability of the published information often do not allow for the meaningful involvement of citizens in the processes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating public policies, especially in relation to budgeting and the spending of public funds.

The lack of clear, understandable, and contextualised information continues to represent a significant barrier to active civic participation. This is particularly evident in the area of public finance, where complex budgetary and fiscal data, although formally available, remain difficult to understand and insufficiently used by citizens and the wider public. As a result, opportunities for informed participation, oversight, and demands for accountability remain limited.

In 2025, capacities for effective participation also remain unevenly developed among all stakeholders. Civil society organisations continue to play a key role in interpreting data, monitoring institutional practices, and mediating between citizens and institutions, but they face limitations in access to timely and complete information.



WHAT WE WORKED ON IN 2025

On the other hand, public institutions still do not have sufficiently developed internal mechanisms, knowledge, or motivation to actively promote transparency and enable meaningful civic participation, which directly affects the quality of public services and increases the risk of inefficient and non-transparent spending of public funds.

Cooperation among institutions, practitioners, and civil society organisations remained limited and fragmented in 2025, reducing the possibility of creating a common advocacy agenda and advancing systemic reforms, especially in areas that directly affect vulnerable groups. Although digital tools and platforms are increasingly used for publishing information, they are still not sufficiently utilised as spaces for genuine dialogue and the active involvement of citizens.

In 2025, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) continued to be a key national mechanism for advancing transparency, accountability, and civic participation. Civil society organisations actively participated in its functioning, particularly through the OGP Council and the CSO Network for OGP, contributing to strategic planning and the definition of priorities. However, the implementation of the commitments undertaken still depends on political will and institutional capacities, while the impact of OGP mechanisms on the day-to-day work of institutions remains limited.

As in previous years, donor support and the active involvement of civil society organisations continue to be crucial for achieving progress in the field of fiscal transparency and civic participation. The most significant progress in 2025 also resulted from continuous monitoring activities, analyses, and advocacy carried out by the civil society sector, while systemic institutional changes continue to take place at a slower pace.



WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN 2025

In the context of insufficient practical progress in fiscal transparency, limited capacities of public institutions for the regular and high-quality publication of information, and ongoing risks of non-transparent spending of public funds, ESE in 2025 continued to direct its activities toward a combined approach: strategically informing and mobilising the public, systematically monitoring and generating evidence on the existing situation, and directly supporting institutions through cooperation and the initiation of concrete improvements. The key achievements in these areas are presented below.

We provided support to citizens and public institutions to improve fiscal transparency and achieve greater and more sustainable change

- We ensured continuous and strategic public information through four digital channels (fiskalntransparentnost.org.mk, esem.org.mk, copasaheurope.org, and ESE's social media channels), with the aim of presenting complex fiscal issues in a clear and understandable way.
- We reached a total of 240,020 people, the published content was viewed 476,423 times, and we achieved 19,671 unique visits to the websites.

- We prepared and published educational and informational content (short explanations, infographics, news items, etc.) related to budgeting, public procurement, fiscal risks, and the right of access to information.
- We actively managed the online community by moderating and responding to citizens' questions, encouraging two-way communication and increased engagement.
- We prepared materials, draft agendas, and case studies for two online discussions/webinars on fiscal transparency in healthcare and the prevention of domestic violence, adapting the pace of activities based on the actual needs of practitioners.

We worked on building trust and ensuring the sustainable development of initiatives aimed at improving fiscal transparency

- We carried out a full annual monitoring of the proactive transparency of 25 public institutions through four quarterly monitoring cycles, thereby ensuring continuous insight into their practice of publishing information related to budgets, expenditures, programmes, reports, public procurement, open data, and mechanisms for informing citizens, and we prepared a report on proactive transparency based on the annual monitoring conducted.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN 2025

- We conducted comprehensive monitoring and analysis of public procurement in the healthcare sector, covering 19,930 public procurement procedures with a total value of MKD 44.56 billion, carried out in the period January 2023 – April 2025, and prepared a report with findings and concrete recommendations for reducing the risks of corruption, limited competition, and price deviations, as well as for improving transparency, integrity, and accountability in public procurement in healthcare.



- We carried out 47 procedures for access to public information addressed to relevant institutions and prepared a report on reactive transparency, assessing their handling of requests, compliance with legal deadlines, and the quality of the responses provided.
- We actively participated in the Steering Committee of the civil society network for the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and in the OGP Council, where we coordinated the preparation of the Strategic Plan and the Annual Work Programme of the CSO Network for OGP and laid the foundations for the preparation of the new OGP Action Plan 2026–2028 through coordination with civil society organisations and institutions, and by contributing to the definition of priorities for transparency, accountability, and civic participation.
- We continued to strengthen institutional cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, the Employment Agency, the Ministry of Justice, and other relevant institutions, building on the cooperation already established in order to improve mechanisms for fiscal transparency, access to information, and accountability.
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THE YEAR IN NUMBERS – 2025

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

6 analyses and research studies conducted

3 research processes carried out with citizens, healthcare professionals, and institutions

2 analyses based on interviews with women victims of domestic violence

continuous monitoring of healthcare policies, budgets, and services

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

150 women received legal aid

47 women received psychological support

5 women were represented free of charge in court proceedings

534 individual legal counselling sessions provided

227 written submissions prepared

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

9 women engaged in activities within the social enterprise POGON

8 women actively involved in production and/or micro-business activities

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS – 2025

CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

24 police officers trained to handle cases of domestic and gender-based violence

12 representatives from **4** civil society organisations trained on preventing and reporting corruption in healthcare

42 women (pregnant women and mothers) educated on health and maternal mental health

e-learning training modules developed with potential global reach

ADVOCACY FOR BETTER POLICIES AND ADVOCACY

1 monitoring report submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee (ICCPR)

active participation in national processes for the development of policies and strategies

1 thematic forum and **1** consultative workshop organised with healthcare professionals

FISCAL TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

25 public institutions covered by the annual monitoring of proactive transparency

4 quarterly monitoring cycles conducted

19.930 public procurement procedures in healthcare analysed

47 requests for access to public information submitted

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS – 2025

VISIBILITY AND PUBLIC IMPACT

more than **240,000** people reached through digital channels

476.423 views of published content

19.671 unique website visits

11 online media outlets published a project press release

2 testimonial videos with more than **265,000** views

1 visibility and Communication Strategy prepared

1 infographic published and **1** podcast produced

EXECUTIVE BOARD

In **2025**, ESE's Executive Board held a regular electronic session at which Marija Todorovska was elected Chairperson and Goran Mojanovski Deputy Chairperson of the Executive Board. At the session, amendments to the internal acts related to financial management, job classification, and the organisation's administrative policy were adopted, and information on ESE's newly approved projects was also reviewed.

Members of the Executive Board

GORAN MOJANOSKI

MARIJA TODOROVSKA

CENA CHALOVSKA

SEAD ISMAIL

M.SC. MIHAJLO KOSTOVSKI

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In **2025**, ESE held a regular session of the General Assembly, at which the members of the Assembly:

- reviewed and adopted the narrative and financial report on ESE's work for 2023;
- reviewed and adopted ESE's Work Programme and Financial Plan for 2025.

FINANCIAL REPORT

REVENUE (in MKD)

	2025	2024
DONATIONS AND GRANTS	18.760.406	13.035.239
Expertise France	12.290.000	/
Kvinna Till Kvinna	2.424.367	2.988.608
CIVICA Mobilitas	1.400.538	729.661
French Embassy	2.251.036	304.878
JSI Research & Training Institute	/	4.747.721
European Commission	/	3.506.148
Other donors (small grants, private companies, individuals)	394.465	758.223
PERSONAL REVENUE	847.489	533.901
POGON - Social enterprise	5.388	81.845
Consultancy	842.101	452.056
OTHER REVENUE	152.595	273.950
Interest and positive exchange rate difference	3.462	100.977
Extraordinary income (unusual and infrequent)	149.133	172.973
CARRIED - FORWARD SURPLUS	14.066.369	14.333.335
TOTAL REVENUE	33.826.859	28.176.425

FINANCIAL REPORT

EXPENSES (in MKD)

	2025	2024
DIRECT PROGRAM COSTS	17.605.593	11.662.975
Engaging citizens in the planning and evaluation or legal regulation, budgets and services	9.980.361	6.902.901
Ensuring equal access to justice	4.252.882	3.282.294
Advancing fiscal transparency	2.879.425	1.383.992
Women economic empowerment	492.925	89.063
Other programs costs		4.725
SUPPORTING SERVICES	2.453.277	2.606.549
Costs for Support Staff	1.128.300	1.128.300
Allocable Administrative/Operational Costs	1.324.977	1.478.249
TOTAL EXPENSES	20.058.871	14.269.524

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