

KONEKT

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2024

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Skopje, February 2025

INTRODUCTION

Philanthropy is all around us. It can be found where there seems to be no solution. It has the power to transform and create a better life. Anyone can be a philanthropist, and when businesses, institutions, and civil society organizations work together, they drive sustainable development in our country.

The business world is also changing. Expectations and obligations for companies to demonstrate responsible business practices aimed at sustainable development are increasing. This opens opportunities for our companies to showcase their leadership and be active contributors to the development of our country.

Throughout 2024, Konekt continued to strengthen its role as a leading organization in promoting philanthropy and building sustainable business. Through our initiatives and projects, we managed to mobilize local resources and encourage citizens, businesses, and institutions to actively engage in addressing the challenges faced by their communities.

Our development as a country depends on the strength of its communities. This year will be remembered for the opportunity to bring our work to the local level. In partnership with local organizations, we began building local foundations. In communities where connections between different sectors (local institutions, civil society organizations, businesses, and media) have weakened, they offer opportunities for citizens and companies to engage, pool resources, and each contribute to a better future. At the national level, we strengthened and expanded our platforms for smart donations and achieved the drafting of a proposal for amending the Law on Donations and Sponsorships in Public Activities. The Responsible Business Club offered numerous opportunities for companies and initiated a dialogue on the role of business in sustainable development at the highest level of business leadership.

In 2024, Konekt managed to create many successful local stories that demonstrate our communities are vital and ready to invest in their progress. These stories not only inspire other communities to follow their steps but also confirm the importance of local philanthropy as a key factor for sustainable development and improving the quality of life for citizens.

We brought philanthropy into everyone's hands through www.opop.mk. With a few clicks, companies and citizens can become proud supporters of

thoroughly vetted organizations with significant impact. If all campaigns there achieve their goals, the lives of over 90,000 of our fellow citizens will change.

Read this report as our call to join us. We offer opportunities for everyone who wants to drive sustainable development. For companies, there is the Responsible Business Club, as well as the national campaign "Days of donation," which encourages donations from citizens who get involved. We collaborate with institutions to improve policies and laws, and we enable civil society organizations to achieve greater stability, development, and financial sustainability. The media are our partners in spreading the culture of philanthropy and social responsibility.

Thank you to everyone who turned our mission into reality this year. We have much more to achieve together through dedicated work.

Respectfully,

Nikica Kusinikova,
Founder and Executive Director of Konekt



KEY ACHIVEMENTS



14.282.998,00 MKD

- Donations for 48 civic society organizations



7.432.320,00 MKD

- Donations in Financial Resources for 2024



5.414.518,00 MKD

- In-kind donations for 2024



1.436.160,00 MKD

- Value of Volunteer Engagement for 2024

PHILANTHROPY

This year, we created numerous opportunities for increased donations across our country. We enabled donations worth a record **14,282,998 MKD** in financial resources, goods, and services **to 48 civil society organizations** worth of support, which is four times more compared to last year. We allowed over **500 individual and 126 corporate donors** to experience the joy of giving.

- In our **national philanthropy campaign "Days of Donations",** we involved over **3,000 citizens** and enabled **more than 50 businesses** to experience the beauty of giving.
- **The first national donor fund** established in the country awarded its initial grants to **3 organizations.** We promoted time donations with **36 volunteers** who this year **donated labor and skills six times more,** valued at **1,436,160 MKD.**
- At the **fifth giving circle,** over **one million MKD was donated, a new record, three times more than the initial goal,** with support from companies doubling the amount. **17 companies and 111 citizens** collectively donated to the circle to make significant changes in their communities. **Giving circles also exists outside Skopje! Over 197 citizens and companies** in Gevgelija, Strumica, and Gostivar **raised 767,400 MKD** in donations and supported **9 local initiatives** of civil society organizations. We support leadership structures for sustainabl development through local philanthropy and increased activities in seven municipalities. **We strengthen local partnerships with citizens and communities.**
- **We invest in the growth of local philanthropy!** We awarded the first 14 grants for philanthropy totaling over 9,560,000 MKD. Now, local civ society organizations and informal youth groups will enable donations and support living in their communities. Six civil society organizations mobilized a total of 2,341,509 MKD for initiatives in their communities
- We brought an inspiration from **a study visit to Romania** together witl members of action cores and leadership groups. We saw and believed that we can do it too! Local civil society foundations inspired us to wor intensively on creating conditions for the philanthropic potential in ou communities to be directed towards sustainable development.

ADVANCING CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- At **the first Director's Breakfast, 13 executive directors** of companies provided guidance for the Responsible Business Club.
- **40 representatives from 14 companies** gained new knowledge or received support to strategically apply CSR, ESG, and corporate philanthropy. We helped **18 companies** advance in their plans, strategies, and practices for corporate philanthropy.
- **8 companies** invested funds for the sustainability of the **Responsible Business Club.**

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

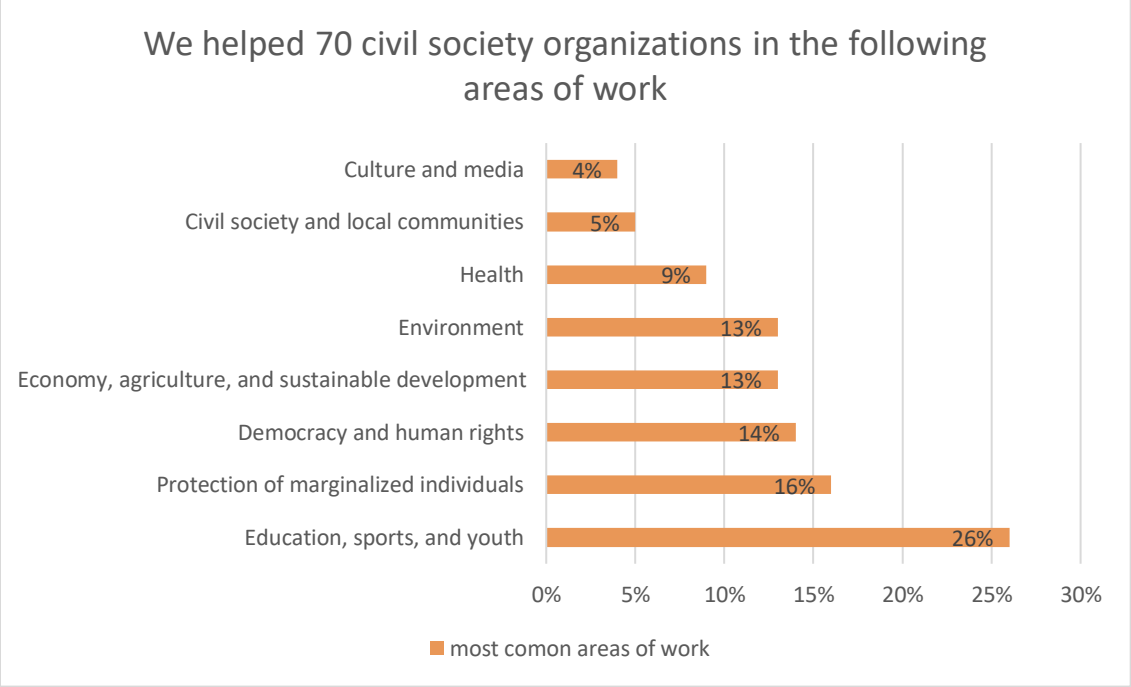
- We advocated regionally and internationally for the protection of civil society. We shared our expertise internationally, and the Macedonian examples of cross-sector cooperation are recognized as models worldwide.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ANDCOMMUNICATIONS

- We increased the scope and volume of program activities. **25 activities involved approximately ~600 participants.** Our media presence **grew by 52%** compared to last year. This year, we have over **157 public posts.**

SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- The Network for Financial Sustainability of CSOs **has grown** and now has **128 members.**
- **87 representatives from 53 CSOs and informal groups** learned how to raise donations, plan them appropriately, and maintain responsible relationships with local donors. We include organizations outside Skopje that have fewer opportunities.
- We certified **6 organizations with the Trust Mark**, which under our mentorship reached high standards and met the criteria.
- Through **28 mentorships, 21 organizations** now plan and successfully raise donations in their communities and on **www.opop.mk**
- **The "Get Connected!" service brings companies and civil society organizations closer and together.** We ended the year with **12 successful partnerships**. With the support of the service, a new civil society organization was established.



REPORT BY STRATEGIC AREAS OF ACTION

Philanthropy

Building National Infrastructure for Philanthropy

We continue to foster the philanthropic spirit among citizens and businesses, creating sustainable mechanisms and solutions for smart, thoughtful, and strategic giving. We promote a culture of philanthropy based on trust, accountability, and solidarity. We are building long-term infrastructure that will support both donors and civil society organizations, enabling them to create positive changes in their communities. We advocate for better laws, offer new opportunities to experience the joy of giving, including through the online platform for smart donations "Op-op." Through thoughtful giving, we create solutions to problems and their causes, rather than just alleviating the consequences.

1. Philanthropy Forum

The second edition of the Philanthropy Forum brought together 150 representatives from government institutions, civil society organizations, businesses, and the media. This unique national event in the country addressed the issue of philanthropy and served as a platform where philanthropic leaders and all other interested stakeholders discussed current issues related to philanthropy, shared best practices, knowledge, and inspired each other. Given the serious lack of such events in the region, this year's forum had a regional character with esteemed speakers sharing their inspiring examples from the region.

This year, with the support of our partner ECNL, we included the most advanced concepts in the program, such as the use of artificial intelligence through an online interview with Mrs. Usha Menon, a recognized fundraising expert from Singapore. We managed to establish a productive relationship with foreign speakers at the forum, exchanging experiences and ideas to deepen future cooperation. At the forum, through a panel session dedicated to philanthropy in the Balkans, we were inspired by the experiences of our guest speakers from Albania, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, and

North Macedonia, as well as the best practices from the Balkans, including cross-sector cooperation.



Part of the atmosphere at the Philanthropy Forum – Photo by Aleksandar Chokreski

A panel discussion was also dedicated to business, to hear their demands and needs, where business representatives emphasized the importance of businesses joining efforts in sustainability initiatives such as Konekt's Responsible Business Club.

The media panel discussion confirmed the need for good philanthropic practices to be ranked higher on agendas, and conclusions were made to encourage the media to cover topics related to philanthropy. The forum had excellent media coverage, with over 30 statements and articles in traditional media and online media portals.



Media Panel at the Philanthropy Forum – Photo by Aleksandar Chokreski

2. Days of Donations

The second edition of the national campaign "Days of Donation" demonstrated that the campaign is an important part of the philanthropic infrastructure in the country. We managed to mobilize 3,382,548 MKD in financial resources, goods, and services for 27 civil society organizations that we mentored for mobilization. We involved over 3,000 citizens and more than 50 businesses, promoting a culture of local giving through the campaign. This demonstrated that impactful initiatives can be supported by local resources rather than relying solely on foreign donors. With over 27 organized activities, more than 120 volunteers, and a duration of over 75 days, the campaign contributed to changing the perception of philanthropy, proving that anyone can donate and become part of significant changes. The number of our supporters and donors significantly increased, resulting in 20% more awards being given to donation partners compared to last year's campaign. This year, we ceremoniously opened the campaign with a special event at the plaza in front of East Gate Mall in Skopje, featuring volunteer firefighters from across the country. Citizens could take photos with them and had the opportunity to donate to volunteer firefighting associations and for their equipment.



Photo: Tomislav Georgiev

"The Tree of Good Deeds" from the bazaar within the campaign Days of Donation is not just a tree for writing good deeds, but also a legacy to help us learn, educate ourselves, and unite to donate wisely from the heart. 2024 was an exceptionally successful year with the support of Konekt, and I wish that in 2025 even more people will come together to make the decision to donate wisely." – Ognen Janeski, spokesperson for the campaign Days of Donation.

A central event in the "Days of Donation" campaign was the charity fashion auction. The auction brought together over 120 fashion enthusiasts, combining style, philanthropy, and a sense of community in an unforgettable evening. Attendees bid on donated fashion creations from 16 renowned Macedonian designers and new fashion talents, student designers, raising over 160,000 MKD for the donor fund, the first of its kind in the country. We also encouraged donors to contribute at a charity party with well-known DJs from the local music scene, including Toni Zen. To conclude the entire campaign, we traditionally organized the charity Christmas bazaar. Attendees who donated received interesting holiday products from 27 social enterprises and artisans who showcased their work and products.



Charity Fashion Auction - Photographer Aleksandar Čokreski

3. First Grants Awarded from the Konect Philanthropic Donor Fund

The Philanthropic Donor Fund is the first and only local source of direct financial support for civil organizations, pooling resources from local companies and citizens, which increase year by year. The fund operates with high standards of quality and efficiency and serves as a mechanism that allows donors, families, and businesses to enhance their philanthropic impact in their communities. For the first time in our country, we have provided financial support in the form of grants to three trusted civil organizations from funds donated to the fund last year, selected and verified by strict criteria for achievements and engagement in fundraising during last year's "Days of Donation" campaign.

Grants of 100,000 denars were awarded to the association "Wilson Macedonia" to continue raising awareness about Wilson's disease through their humanitarian race "Give a Hand" and to support people living with this condition, to the association "Stronger Together" to work on improving the quality of life for people living with HIV, and to help them address their needs and long-term challenges in their communities to institutions, as well as "HOPS" to continue providing free legal and psychosocial assistance, health services, and economic aid to marginalized and vulnerable communities, as well as their families. We are monitoring their progress and will inform donors about the achievements. The Donor Fund as a mechanism allows local donations to be directed to initiatives with proven impact.

This year, we have selected four organizations that will be supported by the fund through this year's "Days of Donation" campaign: "Volunteer Fire Society St. Nikole", "Open the Windows", "Pallium", and "YMCA Bitola". Donate too **<<here>>!**

4. Giving Circle

The Giving Circle is a society of individual philanthropists, representatives of local businesses, and other supporters who come together to donate to three selected civic initiatives that have the potential to positively impact the community with their work. In 2024, Konect held the fifth consecutive Giving Circle with record achievements. Over 160 citizens and businesses, individuals from all walks of life, jointly donated to make a significant difference in our communities, managing to raise an incredible 1,000,033 denars in the most successful circle to date.

"We are thrilled by the enthusiasm and solidarity in action demonstrated by our society of women and men philanthropists who donate together and thoughtfully. The success of the Giving Circle shows the power of the community to achieve the changes we want to see in society through donations. We nurture a culture of solidarity and support. Konekt expresses its gratitude to all donors, both individual and corporate, as well as volunteers who contributed to making this event so special." – Nikica Kusinikova, Executive Director of Konekt.



Part of the atmosphere from the Giving Circle in Skopje – photo Aleksandar Chokreski



Representatives from the NGOs on the Giving Circle - photo Aleksandar Chokreski

Our joint donations will enable **Action Zdrushenska** to continue pushing for access to water, transportation, education, health, and women's rights in communities, as in smaller places women are often voiceless, do not make decisions, are not present in cooperatives, and enter the municipality only for weddings.

With the collected donations, **Enheleus Lichnid** from Ohrid has already realized their idea and desire – to repurpose the old abandoned school in the village of Lakocerej into a multifunctional creative center for young people where they can create, socialize, debate, learn, play music, and have fun. The repurposing of the building is in full swing, and it is slowly turning into a center for organized youth development.

The joint donations for the **Women's Rights Initiative from Shuto Orizari** were directed towards the center, which is a shelter for women from Shuto Orizari, victims of violence. In just 8 months, the center managed to accommodate 65 women with their children. We helped this unique center to obtain an official license from the state. Our donations help in its sustainability as a long-term solution for women facing hopeless situations."

The First Local Giving Circles

We successfully transferred our knowledge to the local level and managed to introduce the giving circle model in three communities: Strumica, Gostivar, and Gevgelija. For the first time in these three communities, live donation events were held, and nine (9) local initiatives of civic organizations received support. As a result, over 197 individual and corporate donors raised 767,400 denars and experienced the joy of collective giving through the giving circle model. The giving circles were conducted by local civic organizations. Our partners for local philanthropy, who

are most deserving of the success of the local giving circles, are: "**Novus**" from Strumica, "**Democracy Lab**" from Gostivar, and "**Apolonia Foundation**" from Gevgelija.

In Strumica, the civic society association **'Mobility'** was raising funds to repair the van for transporting people with disabilities, the cycling club **'Aktiv'** was raising funds to complete the recreational camp on Mount Belasica, while the association **'Speech of the Heart'** was collecting donations to organize workshops to help families with autistic children.

"Drop by drop, the glass fills up. This is proof that we, the citizens, need to lend a hand to each other and send a message that we need one another. It doesn't matter how much I donated; what matters is that the citizens are mobilizing and helping to address certain needs," Marija Bandulova, donor at the donor circle in Strumica.





Part of the atmosphere from the donor circle in Strumica - photographer Deni Stefanovski

In Gostivar, the giving circle was an opportunity for solidarity and support for three inspiring initiatives from local organizations. **'When in Trouble'** is an initiative that raised funds to provide New Year's packages for children, aiming to bring joy and warmth during the holiday season. **'Etika'** is a women's rights center that collected donations for the operational costs of the shelter house, which serves as a safe shelter for women victims of domestic violence. The organization **'I Can'** raised donations to create a library for young people with self-help books, aimed at combating peer violence and anxiety, providing them with tools to better cope with challenges.





Photos from the Giving Circle in Gostivar, taken by Democracy Lab

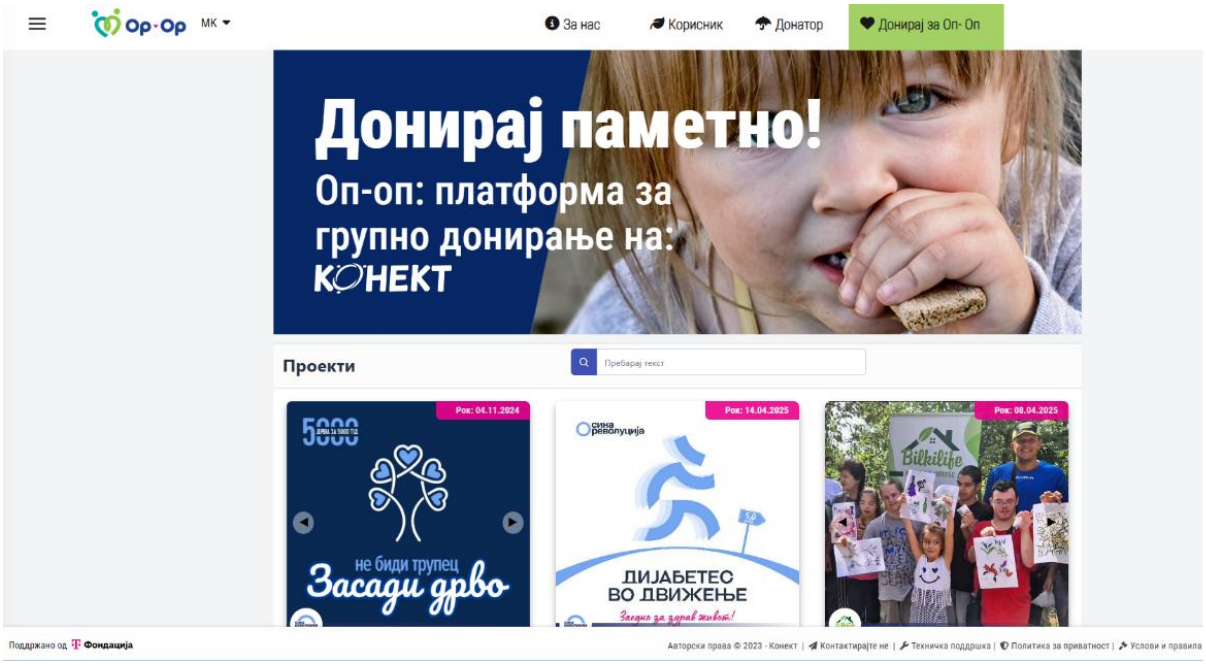
The Giving Circle in Gevgelija, organized by the Apolonia Foundation from Gevgelija, exceeded the expectations of both the organizers and the participants of the event. **An incredible 471,000 denars were raised for: 'NALLP Mother Teresa Center – Gevgelija,'** which is already creating new opportunities for children and people with disabilities in the community with the collected donations; **'Gevgelija Bike Club,'** which will use the donations to build a new cycling culture in the city; and the **'Association of the Blind – Gevgelija,**' with donations contributing to the physical and mental health of blind individuals. Over 100 people attended the giving circle, including individual philanthropists, representatives of the business community, and students from three primary schools who organized their own fundraising activities before the donor circle to support the presented initiatives.





Photos from the Giving Circle in Gevgelija, taken by photographer Vasko Trajkov

5. New platforms for civic participation and easy online donating



In 2024, we justified our commitment and effort to provide greater digital space for civic society organizations. We established the online crowdfunding platform 'Op-op.' With our partner Indigo, we organized two promotional events at East Gate Mall to bring 'Op-op' closer to the citizens, using tools to activate citizens and familiarize them with the platform. We actively promoted the platform on social media, as well as at all major events we organized (the philanthropy forum, the donor circle), and we held a dedicated training for mobilizing local resources at an advanced level with mentored organizations, focusing on creating and launching successful crowdfunding campaigns on the 'Op-op' online platform."

The advantage of the platform is that both citizens and companies can donate through it, not only from the country but also from abroad, which increases the potential for donations. 'Op-op' is easy and safe to use, with built-in security mechanisms and privacy protection mechanisms. It generates the necessary documents for using tax relief for all donors who need it. An additional value of the platform is that it also enables direct donations to organizations, contributing to the sustainability of NGOs.

Since its launch, 'Op-op' has hosted **21 campaigns, registered 18 organizations,** and **collected donations amounting to over 360,000 MKD**, with a tendency for this number to grow. We utilized the potential of the national campaign 'Days of Donation' to promote the platform and encourage citizens to donate wisely and strategically. Our strategic partner, Telekom, besides promoting, also provides us with free hosting for the platform, which is crucial for its long-term sustainability. **The campaigns on the 'Op-op' platform aim to improve the lives of over 90,000 citizens in the country.** The platform has also been recognized in domestic media with a series of publications dedicated to its promotion.



Promotion of the platform Op-op – photo Tomislav Georgiev

We have also enabled the local use of 'Komuniti – the digital platform for civic participation and communication with municipalities. The 'Komuniti' platform by our partner Indigo is available to citizens in 6 municipalities (Ohrid, Gevgelija, Chair, Shuto Orizari, Gostivar, Strumica), and through it, they are digitally engaged and participate in identifying priorities in their communities. Our partner, with the support of local action hubs, organized 3 caravans for its promotion, 1231 app downloads, and more than 3000 people attended promotional activities for the platform. The most active on the platform were local stakeholders, especially the hubs, who published more than 200 articles.



Part of the atmosphere from the Komuniti caravan - photo by Indigo

BUILDING LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PHILANTHROPY

1. Community Foundations

The good of the community is the good of every individual in it." We transfer our good practices and the working principle based on the community foundation model, which we advocate at the European level, to the local level. The established cooperation with the seven municipalities of Bitola, Gevgelija, Gostivar, Ohrid, Strumica, Chair, and Shuto Orizari has deepened.



From left to right: photos from the meetings of the leadership groups – LAH Ohrid and LAH Gevgelija

In 2024, the capacities of the 7 local action hubs were strengthened and built, and 6 leadership groups were identified and formed in the municipalities of Gevgelija, Gostivar, Ohrid, Strumica, Chair, and Shuto Orizari. The local action hubs, together with the leadership groups, initiated the first activities for local resource mobilization, which resulted in great success (see page 11 for the first local giving circles). Mobilizing local resources, connecting donation recipients with individual and/or corporate donors, and thereby activating the community is a completely new experience for the members of the leadership groups. The significance and success of these first steps are invaluable! Konect continues to operate at the European level, where we are networked in the **European Community Foundation Initiative**. We shared our experiences from a study visit to Romania with the members through a short blog about the key learnings from the visit.



Participation in the ECFI annual meeting in Berlin

Sectors Working Together: We organized the first **networking meeting** for representatives from local action hubs, leadership groups, and representatives of local self-government units. The meeting was attended by 49 people who exchanged experiences and information about opportunities for developing local philanthropy, mobilizing resources, and jointly solving problems and situations in their communities. Networking meetings are particularly important for mutual inspiration, sharing successful and less successful approaches, and thus learning from each other, guided by a common vision for a better tomorrow in our communities.




Photos from the networking meeting in Tetovo, taken by Nebojsha Petrevski

We encourage self-sustainability and expand partnerships. Fundraising, whether financial or material goods and services for a specific cause, solving a community problem, or organizing actions for the good and interest of the entire community, is a process that requires dedication, knowledge, innovation, and creativity. Konect continuously follows trends and innovations in fundraising approaches, and transfers knowledge and experience to partners and collaborators. Through training, we impart knowledge and skills on how to connect civic organizations with local businesses and institutions to achieve common goals, strengthen their negotiation capacities, and identify ways to secure funds for desired changes in their communities. The acquired information, gained skills, and dedication of civic organizations and activists have resulted in organizing various events to raise financial resources, material goods, and services.



Strategic meeting of mayors - photo by Tomislav Georgiev

2. Hubs in the communities

We support and develop: New hubs, new funds: In 2024, we dedicatedly supported **local action hubs** in Bitola, Gevgelija, Gostivar, Ohrid, Strumica, Chair, and Shuto Orizari, as well as local civic society organizations for community activation through local philanthropy. We believe that the local community have the necessary knowledge and resources to be the driver of sustainable development. Therefore, our approach is based on recognizing, strengthening, and mentoring local leadership to unite and make positive changes themselves. We do not come from Skopje directly to implement activities in other cities, but we work and support local organizations and stakeholders to whom we transfer all our experience and tools based on the community foundation model. Together, we build capacities for community development.

We are concluding 2024 by expanding the circle of municipalities we collaborate with, including the Municipality of Bitola. Representatives from the local government share our commitment to joint cooperation and joining the Komuniti platform.

The local action hubs created leadership groups and organized constitutive meetings attended by over 70 members. The leadership groups are informal groups composed of members from their municipalities, who, with their expertise, enthusiasm, time, and dedication, help mobilize resources. The local action hubs, together with the members of the leadership groups, began connecting local businesses with civic organizations, encouraging citizens to actively participate and propose ideas for solving challenges in local communities. The hubs from Gevgelija, Gostivar, and Shuto Orizari developed plans to establish the first local philanthropic funds aimed at pooling donations from businesses and citizens, which will then be transparently allocated to verified and impactful local organizations and initiatives that make long-term changes in the community. These funds will serve to encourage and support local initiatives in the municipality.

We encourage and share knowledge for sustainable development

We have created a team of trainers who teach civic society organizations how to successfully obtain donations in their municipalities for initiatives that are worthy of support. They are already prepared to organize giving circles, use the platforms "Op-op" **(www.opop.mk)** and Komuniti, and through the service "Get Connected!" link civic society organizations with companies. For this, we held two training sessions for trainers, inspired by examples we saw during a study visit to Romania (page 18). We worked and trained each core individually: on how to raise funds from local resources, how to prepare plans, tools, and techniques, different forms of cooperation with the business sector, ways of seeking support, creating a fundraising budget, nurturing relationships with donors, and public speaking before potential donors.

We worked and trained each hub individually: on how to raise funds from local resources, how to prepare plans, tools, and techniques, different forms of cooperation with the business sector, ways of seeking support, creating a fundraising budget, nurturing relationships with donors, and public speaking before potential donors.




Part of the atmosphere from the training sessions for trainers – photos of Konekt

We connect and help everyone who wants to be part of the change.

We traveled to Romania on a study visit. Seeing is believing! Representatives from the local action hubs and their leaders were inspired by Romanian examples. We visited community foundations and were convinced of their work, which is applicable to us. We gained experiences on how to create foundations in our communities that will collect many donations for the good deeds and missions of civic organizations. With the acquired knowledge, we are already creating conditions

for realizing the philanthropic potential in our country, which should be directed towards the sustainable development of communities.

"The study visit to community foundations in Romania not only provided me with valuable insights into their work but also inspired me to adapt their experiences to our community. The passion and dedication of these organizations, which positively and philanthropically impact their communities, strengthened my belief in the power of collective action. They motivated me to find ways to apply the learned lessons in my work and contribute to building stronger, more empathetic, and sustainable communities." – participant from the study visit



From left to right – visit to CF Ramnicu Valcea, CF Fagaras, CF Timisoara – Photo by Konekt



In December, we organized a two-day workshop on organizational management and procedures for local action hubs. Participants were introduced to the principles of good governance, the structure of civic society organizations, policies and procedures, as well as the Trust Mark.

ADVANCING CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF ENTERPRISES

We help the businesses to recognize their power to shape the society and the communities where they operate. From strategic approaches, through progress plans, to the design and implementation of special projects, we are their advisors for ESG, sustainability, and social responsibility. We increase the impact through our Responsible Business Club, which, in addition to an individual approach to its members, also creates expertly designed influential programs for sustainable development in the environment, good governance, and community development.

RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS CLUB

The club unites the businesses with proven experience in socially responsible practices with like-minded individuals dedicated to making a positive impact on society and the environment. The Responsible Business Club has several key components:

- **Collective Impact**: By joining forces, businesses in the club can amplify their influence and drive significant social change.
- **Leadership and Collaboration:** The club offers a unique opportunity for top management companies to network and collaborate for collective impact on sustainable development and key business challenges.
- **Knowledge Sharing**: Access to a wealth of resources, best practices, expert training, and insights to help businesses integrate sustainability into their daily operations and stay up to date with the best international practices and trends.
- **Individual Progress**: Through membership, companies enhance their practices for ESG, sustainability, social responsibility, and community investment.

Commitments to support the club and build responsible business were made by 36 business leaders, dedicating themselves to participating in solutions to local challenges, leadership, and continuous investment in the development and future of the country on its path to EU membership. At the first director's breakfast in Skopje, intended for top-level management, we discussed priority social issues important for companies and sustainable development. The unity of businesses is a key approach for social impact. Business leaders from our members expressed readiness for cooperation and jointly creating change to reduce emigration from the country, provide quality education and opportunities for young people, protect the environment and raise awareness, integrity, and cooperation with the civic sector. We agreed that companies will dedicatedly work on restoring the values that are missing in our society, and a positive step is that the leadership of

the companies expressed strong willingness to cooperate on these challenges and get involved in the club's work.



"The unification of businesses can be very influential in society and contribute to real changes. Businesses do not have enough focus on making a serious impact on social processes, and companies lack better networking." – Marjonka Veljanovska, Executive Director of "Farmahem".

A special guest at the breakfast was Ms. Lisa McIlvenna, expert and deputy director of Business in the Community (BITC) from Northern Ireland, which is a sister initiative of the Responsible Business Club.



Director's breakfast with top-level management of the member companies of the Responsible Business Club

STRATEGIC FOCUS ON ESG

Konekt continued to support companies in their growth in social responsibility, specifically ESG focused on sustainable development. We share our knowledge and expertise with companies and help businesses strengthen their capacities. We organized professional training on social

responsibility and ESG for the member companies of the Responsible Business Club, as well as for those interested in joining. During the training, Ms. Lisa McIlvenna, expert and deputy director of Business in the Community Northern Ireland, shared her experiences and knowledge. We trained 40 participants from companies directly working in this field, reviewed the latest trends in ESG and social responsibility. We shared best practices and helped companies gain practical, step-by-step knowledge for developing local materiality assessments. The training covered all key areas of ESG with a focus on environmental issues accompanied by practical examples that companies found particularly useful for their business.



Part of the atmosphere from the training on CSR and ESG - photo by Tomislav Georgiev

Through these activities, we directly invest in professionals working in the field of CSR and ESG in the member companies of the club and continue to promote social responsibility in the business sector. Our goal is to help companies ensure increased productivity, innovation, and long-term sustainable development..

Gender equality and family responsibility.

Maintaining productive workplaces and satisfied employees is crucial for the members of the Responsible Business Club. We continuously are supporting the public and private sectors in strengthening gender-responsive family policies and promoting workplaces that are tailored to the needs of employees and their family and private circumstances.



Workshop for companies in collaboration with UNFPA – Photo by Konekt

Within the framework of the program "Expanding Choices Through Family-Friendly Policies," where we are an implementing partner with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), we held workshops and discussions with representatives of the public and private sectors about the need to introduce and strengthen gender-responsive family policies and promote workplaces that help both women and men fulfill their aspirations at work and at home. A total of 6 institutions and 10 companies participated in this process, exchanged practices, and showed strong commitment to enhancing their positive impact on employees. Knowing the benefits of gender-responsive family policies and measures, businesses exchanged best practices that serve as inspiration, and Konect will continue to support them in improving these practices. The program is supported by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

We also continued to promote the MAMFORCE standard for work-life balance, which is an excellent opportunity for employers to improve their practices for satisfied and productive employees.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals represent a drive towards building partnerships and joint activities between NGOs, the business sector, and institutions. They serve as a platform for creating cross-sector partnerships to achieve changes that positively impact development and communities. We continuously work on Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals. We have connected different sectors to work together for the benefit of their communities, encouraging them to take the desired changes into their own hands and achieve them. All our initiatives are linked to the SDGs to actively contribute to a better and sustainable world. Read more at www.sdgs.mk.

In the past years, through our initiatives for cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development, together with companies, the civil sector, and institutions, we have mapped out the priority areas for our country where we can jointly achieve significant changes. These priority SDGs have been reflected in the priority areas of the first donor fund in our country as well as in the programs of the Responsible Business Club.

GET CONNECTED!

When businesses and civil society organizations collaborate, they actively create strong foundations for sustainable development and a better life for all. Businesses have a unique opportunity to support social development through investments in projects that significantly improve life in communities. At the same time, civil society organizations possess the expertise and knowledge of the needs of communities, making them key partners in this collaboration.

Through the "Get Connected" service, we continue to link civil society organizations with companies and institutions. The knowledge and expertise offered by companies are a significant resource for civil society organizations, and our role is to support strategic partnerships that benefit both businesses and CSOs. The support we offer to civil society organizations is tailored to their specific needs and the resources available from companies.

"Get Connected!" brings companies and civil society organizations closer together. We are ending the year with 12 successful connections between CSOs, local businesses, and institutions. Additionally, with the support of the service, 1 new civil society organization has been established.

The local action hubs worked with stakeholders to implement community-driven projects that address local needs. The hubs actively collaborate with institutions, CSOs, businesses, and citizens, identifying opportunities for cooperation.

The local action hub from Chair has connected "Edu Lumina" with the Municipality of Chair to provide free legal assistance and the necessary payments to the Central Registry for the formation of their civil society organization. Then, they connected them with Nahla Consulting, and this connection provided them with free accounting services for the first two years of the association's establishment.

ADVOCACY

WE ADVOCATE FOR BETTER LAWS AND POLICIES

We continued to actively advocate and make our expertise available to ensure that our laws and policies encourage more donations and socially responsible practices. Through collaboration and dialogue, we arrive at better solutions.

We actively advocate by consulting with all stakeholders, especially our network for the financial sustainability of civil society organizations, which in 2024 numbered 128 members. We collaborate with institutions and, through our key partnership with the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law in The Hague, bring significant international expertise in offering solutions.

This year, we were guided by the priorities of our roadmap based on a research process. We maintained our focus on amendments to the Law on Donations and Sponsorships in Public Activities, whose changes can make an important difference in the culture of philanthropy. As a result of our dedication and expertise, and with the involvement of all key stakeholders, the

working group formed by the Ministry of Justice drafted a proposal law that simplifies the procedure and removes identified barriers to using tax incentives. The process will continue further.

We also worked on the self-regulation of the civil sector to ensure the best practices in fundraising. Our rules and guidelines for collecting and documenting donations in cash or at various events make donating easier, safer, and more transparent. We share these rules with all organizations and stakeholders to actively use them in fundraising to establish good practices and strengthen transparency and accountability. These activities are also linked to the criteria of the Trust Mark.

We continued to advocate for the law on volunteering, the strategy for the development of the civil sector, social entrepreneurship, and a series of laws that can bring important changes for civil society organizations (CSOs). We also focused on acts related to social responsibility, so we are members and involved in the revival of the national coordinating body for CSR. We advocated for the adoption of a national action plan for business and human rights. Through the network in which we invite CSOs, we actively inform them about all changes and remind them of legal obligations. **Join us!**

WE ADVOCATE REGIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

Our experience and expertise are also invested in improving policies and the environment for the operation of civil society organizations in the region and globally. Analyses of all key stakeholders indicate that there is a significant narrowing of the space for civil society organizations to operate and that they face pressures and barriers in their work. International policies for preventing terrorism, as well as standards for preventing money laundering and financing terrorism, have a particularly negative impact on activists, civil society organizations, and their financial sustainability. The use of the narrative that donations can be misused for financing terrorism also negatively affects trust in the concept of donating. Therefore, our efforts at the national, regional, and international levels are aimed at raising awareness and understanding of these negative impacts, strengthening the capacities of institutions, banks, CSOs, and other stakeholders, as well as advocating for policy changes and creating protection and a safe space for civil society organizations. We are active members of global networks such as the **Global NPO Coalition on FATF** and the **Coalition of Civil Society Organizations for Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism.** Through the Global Coalition in 2024, we focused on several key areas:

- Financial inclusion and risk-based approach: Promoted guidelines for countries to understand and manage the risks of money laundering and terrorism financing in a way does not jeopardize the work operation of CSOs.
- Workshops and discussions: Organized workshops where we discussed the impact of regulation on civil society.
- Assessment of measures: Evaluated measures to combat money laundering and terrorism financing in different countries, and we promoted approaches that protect CSOs and enable their unhindered work operation

Additionally, we participated in the open briefing of the Committee as a key speaker to present the results of the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions by the member states of Southeast Europe and to present the **Recommendations from the regional consultations for Central and Eastern Europe**, which are part of the **"UN Global Study on the Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Civil Society and Civic Space."**

We continued to contribute to the development of a risk-based approach in the AML/CFT system for the non-profit sector to protect civil space. In collaboration with the Financial Intelligence Unit of North Macedonia and the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL), we continued to build dialogue to align national practices with international changes regarding AML/CFT standards, as well as focusing on self-regulatory mechanisms that should protect non-profit organizations. In this regard, together with ECNL, we networked with the director of the Dutch Fundraising Regulator **(CBF),** where we reviewed comparative practices for recognizing and practically using self-regulation mechanisms as a successful measure contributing to the AML/CFT system.

We closely followed European changes in this area - the new EU rules package, including the Directive and Regulation on preventing the use of the financial system for money laundering or terrorism financing. Since the package will have a significant impact on the non-profit sector, especially related to crowdfunding platforms, we joined the efforts of ECNL and the European Philanthropy Association **(Philea)** in analyzing the impact of these policies on the work of the non-profit sector. Our views and expertise in managing a crowdfunding platform and concerns about the implications of the new package on online crowdfunding platforms are part of the document **"Unpacking the EU AML/CFT Package: Implications for Non-Profit Organizations,"** which we presented at an online webinar where this document was promoted.

We also participated in the **International workshop of the Global CFT Expert Hub in Johannesburg**, where we were invited by our partners ECNL as experts from the civil sector, where together with representatives from the sector worldwide, we discussed the latest developments in AML/CFT. On this platform, we shared our successful examples of cross-sector collaboration between non-profit organizations, regulators, and financial institutions.



Photograph from the international workshop in Johannesburg - photo by ECNL

SUPPORT OF NGOs

JOIN THE NETWORK FOR FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF CSOs TO ADVOCATE TOGETHER FOR FAVORABLE CHANGES IN THE SECTOR

Our network for the financial sustainability of civil society organizations continues to grow and now counts 128 active members. Together with the members, we actively engage in key processes for the civil sector. We encouraged network members to participate with their proposals for joint advocacy, especially in the process of amending the Law on Donations and Sponsorships in Public Activities, which continues after a certain delay. We regularly inform them about the legal obligations and deadlines that civil society organizations have towards institutions and the public, as well as the importance of timely monitoring of these processes. With the network members and other civil society organizations, we provide resources such as the "NGO Handbook – Preventing Exposure of the Non-Profit Sector to Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing," which helps them build their capacities.

In consultation with our members, we submitted a proposal to contribute to the preparation of the annual Work Program of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2025, according to the public call. We pointed out the need to amend important laws, including the Law on Donations and Sponsorships, the Law on Accounting for Non-Profit Organizations, and the Law on Volunteering. At the end of 2024, the process of forming the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society began, in which we actively participated. We follow this process throughout the entire period and inform network members about all activities and progress. We continue to jointly advocate for significant changes for civil society organizations.

TRAINING AND MENTORING FOR MOBILIZING LOCAL RESOURCES

Civil society organizations are valuable and deserve more support. The relationship between a civil society organization and donors should be oriented towards building long-term partnerships that lead to stable resources and positive impacts in the community.

These are some of the key pieces of advice we regularly provide to civil society organizations during the three-day training sessions for mobilizing local resources, part of the capacity-building program. Through specific advice, examples, and exercises with guest lecturers from the business and civil sectors, we help and mentor civil society organizations on how to prepare a professional plan for mobilizing local resources and which techniques to use to be more successful in seeking donations.

"The training brought new knowledge, skills, and experience that we will apply in our work. Exceptional quality of the topics, trainers, and the way the training was conducted. Konect deserves the highest ratings, and their contribution should be particularly highlighted, as they participate in building the capacities of the civil society sector." – Marija Georgievska, President of the association "Bilkilife" and participant in the training

This year, we trained 166 representatives from 35 CSOs and one informal group on how to more easily obtain donations from businesses and citizens.

The acquired knowledge and skills are now being used by them to organize various events and activities to receive more donations and the support they deserve.



Some of the organizations that acquired skills for successfully mobilizing local resources - photograph by Konekt

MENTORING SUPPORT

After conducting the training sessions, we mentored the organizations that showed interest in creating a specific plan for fundraising and supported them in implementing their plans. Through the mentoring process, we help them gain confidence in approaching new donors, advise them on how to successfully carry out activities, and obtain a greater number of donations from businesses and citizens. During 2024, Konect's mentoring support for fundraising included 12 civil society organizations (Blue Revolution, HOPS, Voice Against Violence, INI-Viničko Kale, Association of Diabetics of Bitola Municipality, Association of Diabetics of Ohrid, National Network Women for Women, Open the Windows, Pallium, Wilson Macedonia, Stronger Together, and Crisis Center Hope) and guided them step by step to more donations. Some organizations continued to use their well-known methods of approaching potential donors for fundraising, while others organized special events for the first time and, with our help, received significant donations. They gained a new circle of supporters and donors who will continue to support their work in the future.

Pallium – From Passion to a Well-established Civil Society Organization

The story of "Pallium," which brings about change, began with the passion and dedication of Jordancho and Blagorodna, two palliative care professionals driven by the urgent need for systemic support for patients with terminal diagnoses. Recognizing the increasing number of cases and the

lack of care services, they founded "Pallium" as a civil society organization with the mission to provide professional volunteer care and access to basic orthopedic aids.

"The collaboration and support from Konekt in the past period have been immensely significant for all of us at 'Pallium.' We have improved our capacities for fundraising, engaged in communication, and received donations from socially responsible companies and philanthropists. Konekt provided a mentor who helped us not only with mobilizing local resources but also with strengthening our organizational capacities. Through this process, we matured as an organization, realizing that the process of obtaining donations largely depends on our seriousness. We established clear financial procedures, increased activity on social media, regularly updated our website, and improved our skills in writing projects and fundraising. Our progress also led to our first grant, a milestone of which we are incredibly proud as a team. Today, we stand stronger and more confident, knowing that we have the support of the community." – Mrs. Blagorodna Martinovska Gjorgieva, "Pallium"

However, the beginnings were filled with challenges. Without access to significant funding from major donors, connections in the non-profit sector, or experience in resource mobilization, "Pallium" struggled to gain the necessary support to fulfill its mission. Their enthusiasm alone was not enough to establish and maintain the organization.

Everything changed after their participation in the training for mobilizing local resources within the project "Partnerships for Giving", followed by mentorship. This turning point provided them with the tools, mentorship, and confidence needed to organize their first fundraising activities. With guidance from the project mentors, they reached out to the business sector and secured their first donations, including support from one of the largest banks in the country and companies that sell orthopedic aids. The donations were modest but demonstrated that supporters could be found within the community, which boosted their confidence, portfolio, and trust from future donors.

However, the impact of the project did not stop at mobilizing local resources. They realized they needed to seek support. With pro-bono volunteer support from the team and mentors at Konect, Pallium developed its first financial management policy, built a new website, increased its visibility, gained new skills for project proposals, and acquired key skills needed for effectively managing a sustainable organization. The subsequent effect of the support from the "Partnerships for Giving" project soon became evident. The organization secured its first grant, positioning "Pallium" as the only CSO in the country



Mrs. Blagorodna Martinovska Gjorgieva is a palliative care professional and one of the founders of Pallium.
Photo: Private archive

dedicated to providing palliative care services. As a result of all this, they now have a higher level of confidence, foster strong relationships with businesses, institutions, municipalities, and individual supporters, and are on a clear path to becoming a well-established and influential civil society organization that addresses the key needs of our citizens. The "Partnerships for Giving " project team selected "Pallium" as an organization to be supported by the donor fund to ensure their continued work. From struggling to continue progressing as a reliable partner in care, Pallium's journey is a testament to the transformative power of local resource mobilization and mentorship tailored to the organization's needs. Today, they advocate for systemic changes and provide opportunities where it matters most – ensuring dignity and care for those in need.

PHILANTHROPY GRANTS

We invested in the growth of local philanthropy! We awarded the first 14 philanthropy grants totaling over 9,560,000 MKD. We selected civil society organizations that are dedicated to their mission, offer solutions to local problems, and want to build a base of local donors to support their activities. We awarded grants for youth philanthropy as an incentive for developing future generations of philanthropists and young people who invest in their communities. We awarded grants for: **I Love My City, I Support My Community, and Young Philanthropists**, directly supporting civil society organizations, youth, and local action hubs to propose concrete solutions to local challenges and mobilize the necessary local resources for their implementation. This means that now, these local civil society organizations and informal youth groups enable donations and support for a better quality of life in their communities. The initial successes of 6 grantees include mobilized funds totaling 2,341,509 MKD for initiatives in their communities.

Our local action hubs additionally trained 101 representatives from local civil society organizations to successfully raise deserved donations, achieving increased activity of local stakeholders,



Awarded philanthropy grants - photograph by Konekt

unlocking the philanthropic potential in local communities, and developing a culture of philanthropy.

TRUST MARK

We are increasing trust in the civil sector. The Trust Mark is already a recognizable self-regulation mechanism in the civil sector that makes it easier for citizens and companies to choose trustworthy organizations where they can donate and be confident in their choice. Through a transparent process and thorough verification, the mark indicates recommended organizations worthy of donor support. Organizations with the Trust Mark operate at high standards and with dedication to their mission and values, they are transparent and accountable, and their management is responsible, ensuring legality and safe financial management.

The Trust Mark is open to all organizations. We mentor civil organizations in meeting their standards, taking care of their individual needs. Thus, they develop policies, procedures, and grow organizationally, and can obtain the mark through a carefully created process and criteria for transparency, accountability, performance results, and compliance with legal regulations. It represents a standard for good operation, awarded by an independent mixed expert board, and the process includes very detailed checks of the organizations' policies, practices, and work.

This year, the Trust Mark Board met and as a result, at the Philanthropy Forum in 2024, we certified the following six (6) organizations: 1) with a full-level Trust Mark: "HOPS – Options for Healthy Life Skopje", Scout Association of Macedonia, Association "Macedonian Association of Agricultural Cooperatives", Association for Assistive Technology "Open the Windows", Foundation for Educational and Cultural Initiatives "Step by Step"; 2) with a basic-level Trust Mark: "Macedonian Association of Career Development Counselors ASK". Additionally, the Board reviewed the applications of 2 more organizations that have started the process of obtaining the mark.



Certified organizations with the Trust Mark - photograph by Aleksandar Chokreski

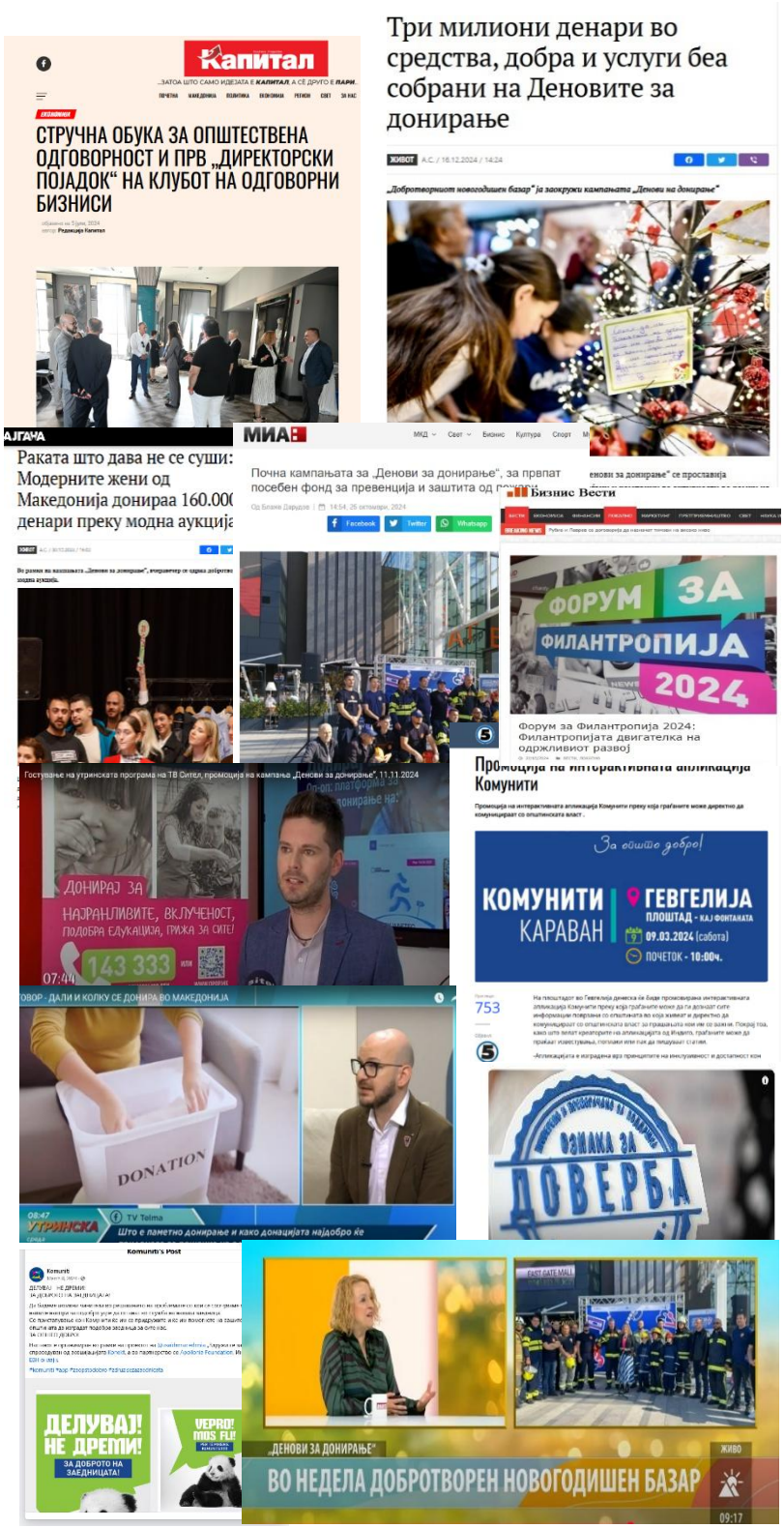
KONEKT IN THE MEDIA

50% increased media presence

157 public posts

15 TV appearances

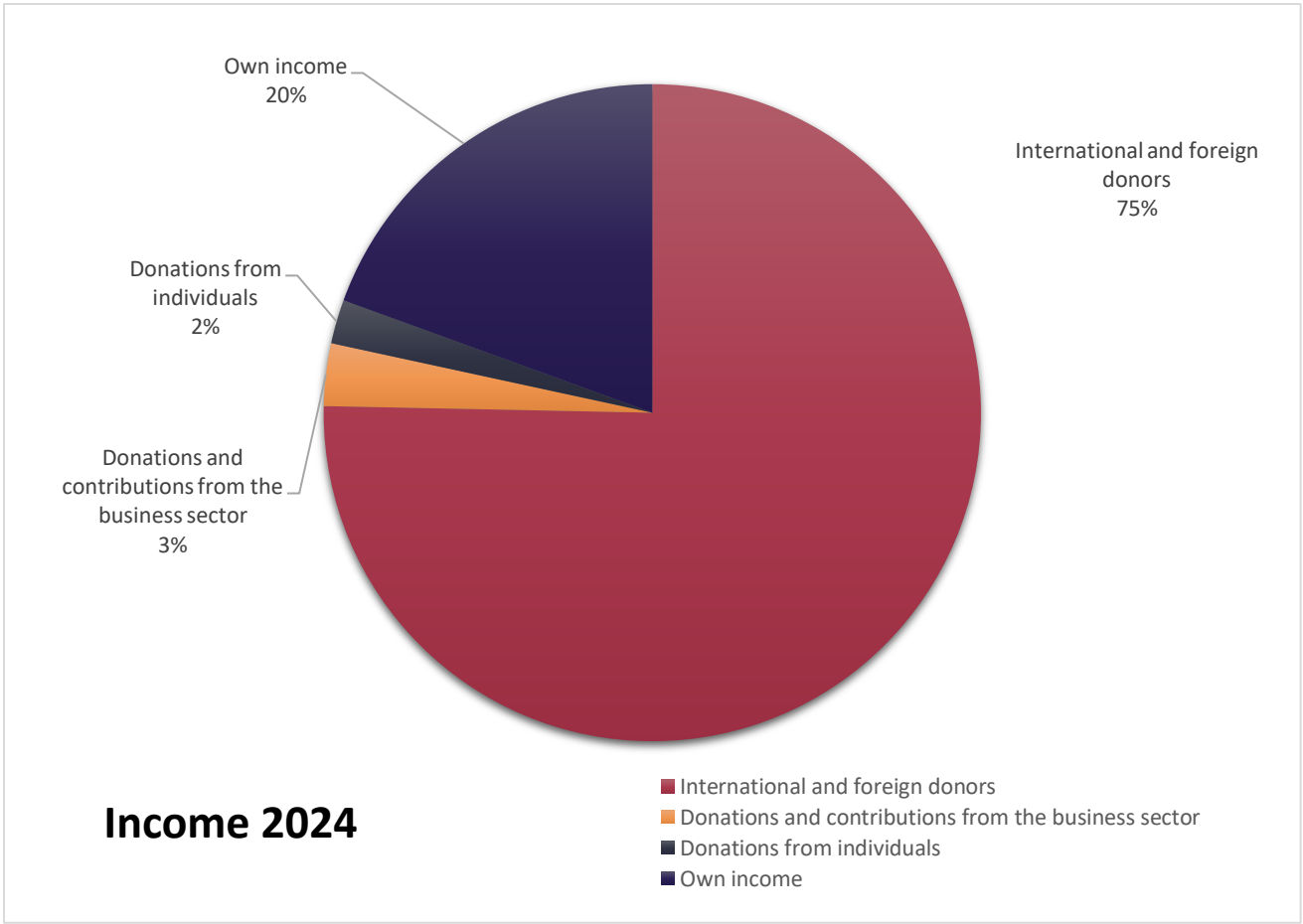
3 articles



KONEKT's FINANCES

In 2024, Konekt's total revenue amounted to 61,561,932 denars, the highest in the organization's history. This is primarily due to higher revenues from philanthropy programs with a significant increase in project activities at both national and local levels. The results of this program investment are reflected in the establishment of new infrastructure for easy and smart donations, increased activity and enhancement of the Responsible Business Club, the establishment of the first national donor fund, and the first donations through Op-op.

Additionally, in 2024, we recorded a significant increase in donations from citizens and a sixfold increase in company contributions compared to the previous year. Although the percentage contribution of donations from local sources is relatively low due to increased program costs, these funds provide crucial support for the organization's sustainability and are a direct expression of our mission. The funds carried over from previous years are for the self-sustainability of the organization and the implementation of activities not covered by other donors.

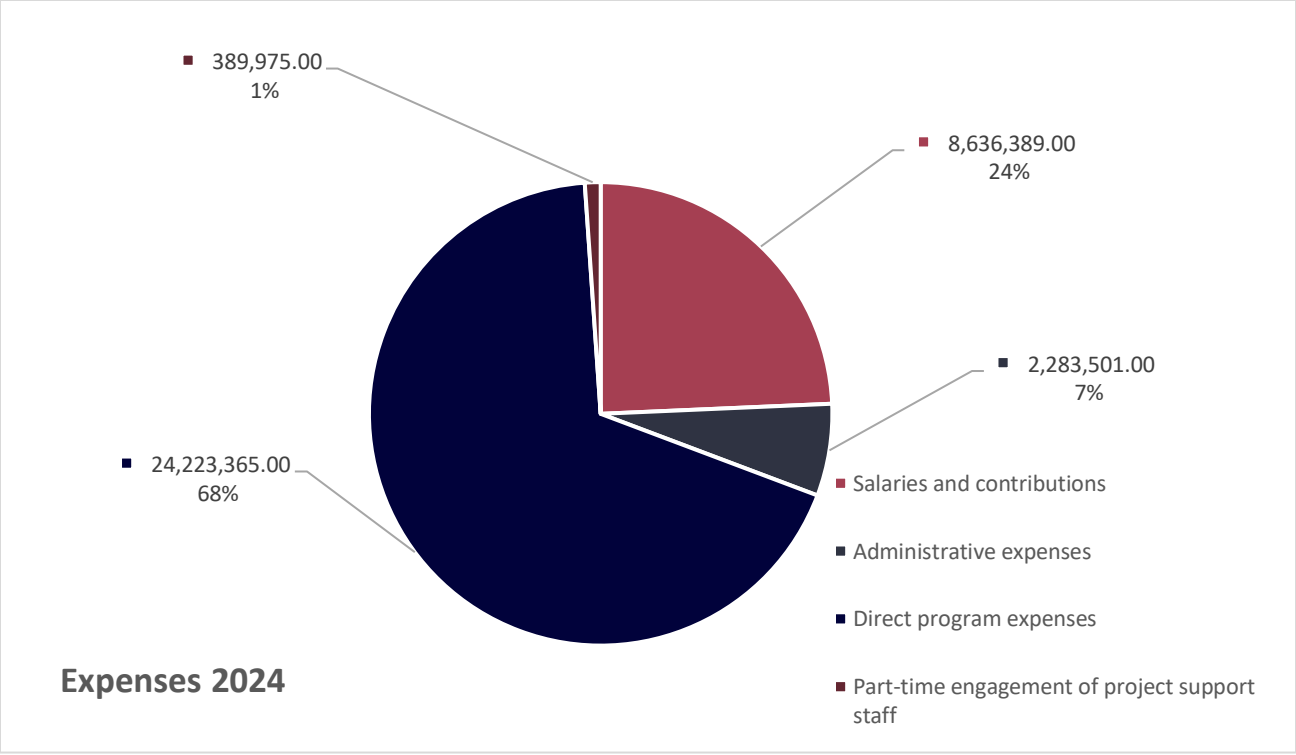


Sources of funding	Income (MKD)
USAID Project "Partnerships for Giving – National Philanthropy	13,015,878
USAID Project Get together for community" – Local Philanthropy	27,965,722
Technical and Integrated Protection of Personal Data - Building an Inclusive Digital Ecosystem (PD BIDE), funded by the European Union through the Metamorphosis Foundation	353,441
Partnerships for Integrity: Business without Corruption, Supported by MCMS through the USAID Project "Citizens Against Corruption"	1,679,613
The Funding Network	106,323
Expanding Choices Through Family-Friendly Policies, United Nations Population Fund - UNFPA	999,070
Donations via SMS	43,400
Donations from individuals	1,012,533
Donations from companies	771,798
Income from donations for civil society organizations	209,839
Support from Members of the Responsible Business Club	1,030,009
Income from interest and positive exchange rate differences	84,269
Income from reimbursement of travel and overhead costs	18,452
Carried over surplus from last year	14,270,199
Other income	1,386
TOTAL:	**61,561,932**

At the beginning of 2024, the organization had 7 full-time employees. By the end of the year, the team grew to 9 employees.

The average monthly gross salary for 2024 for the executive director was 131,669 denars. The ratio between the lowest and highest salary in the organization is 1:2.19, while the ratio between the average and highest salary is 1:1.5.

In terms of program costs, this year we provided 7,290,639 denars in direct financial support to civil organizations for mobilizing local resources (grants and mentoring for philanthropy) through the donor circle and the first national donor fund.



THANK YOU, DONORS

We thank everyone who donated directly to Konekt. Our donors enabled us to follow our mission and achieve successes in 2024. The successes of Konekt is also yours success!

USAID North Macedonia
European Union
United Nations Population Fund – UNFPA
The Funding Network
Macedonian Center for International Cooperation
Hristijan Gjorgievski

NLB Banka AD Skopje
EVN Macedonia

Farmahem
Unika Life AD
Makkos company – Silkapor
Dauti Komerc
Image PR
East Gate Mall
Intermezzo Music Bar
Foundation TELEKOM
Nikola Buleski
Nikola Eftimov
Katerina Tosheva
Lidija Georgieva
Milkbrides – Abnonija Guginska
Irina Tosheva
Ognen Janeski
Natalija Terzija
Alshar by Silvija Mihajlovska
Rosica Mrshikj
Simon Endrovski (Bella)
Aleksandar Stojanov Zorin
Marija Trajkovska
Snežana Evkovska EVILA
Tatjana Ginovska
Mihaela Shterjova
Sara Velichkovska
SKALA - School of Design



We are thankful to over 100 citizens who donated to the organizations through the donor circle and 'Days of Donations'.

Skopska Pivara
A1 Macedonia
Maliqi Foundation

Duna
Lingva Expert
ATK Premium Club
Laboratory
Enisa Kadri Brand

Cafe Bar Che
Roma Resource Center
Pepica Mancheva
Gordana Rodikj
David Sip
Anja Bosilkova Antovska
Fisnik Bekteshi
Ilina Bozhinovska
Anja Stojanovikj
Iva Angelkovska
Milica Lozanoska
Marko Karanfilovski
Samet Shabani
Maja Aleksievska Dimikj
Anita Palcheska



ABOUT KONEKT

For 16 years, we have been dedicated to building the potential of the Republic of North Macedonia, developing it by relying on local resources and capacities. We know that donations, social responsibility, and joint cooperation have the power to shape a better society where everyone can be an active participant in development processes. Therefore, we work with and for the citizens, donating families, non-profit organizations, businesses, and institutions in areas where we can make a significant difference together.

Konekt encourages and promotes private donations and social responsibility aimed at effective and long-term development. We show that philanthropy and social responsibility are not just about redistributing resources but are also powerful development tools that bring benefits to civil organizations, businesses, the environment, and communities.

We are a key link in connecting those who want to promote sustainable development. We serve with our specific expertise, services, and influential programs that meet the needs of our users and communities. We enrich our knowledge through our membership and the establishment of significant domestic and international initiatives, networks, bodies, chambers, etc.

For more information and cooperation, Konekt is here for you. Contact us, and jointly we will build better and more sustainable communities.

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www.sdgs.mk

www.opop.mk

Responsible Business Club