



EU TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE  
TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS  
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

CHANGE MAKERS

# Civil Society Success Stories

## FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

Highlighting stories  
that show **incredible  
resilience** and  
**positive impact** in our  
communities.



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# Governance, Participation & Civil Society Resilience



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# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

**Gender-Based Journalism Handbook – 2018**  
**IPS Communication Foundation (bianet)**

## CHALLENGE

In Türkiye, the media often reinforced gender stereotypes and failed to properly report on gender-based violence. Phrases like “honour killing” masked the real issue—systemic male violence. Meanwhile, women and LGBTI+ voices were largely missing from newsrooms and news stories.

## CHANGE

Developed and published by IPS Communication Foundation/bianet in Turkish, English, and Kurdish, the Gender-Based Journalism Handbook, together with editorial advocacy and trainings for over 150 journalists, contributed to the transformation of harmful narratives in the media and the introduction of a rights-based language into mainstream journalism. The project supported a shift in public discourse towards gender justice.





# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

## Interfaith Dialogue Platform – 2023 ADIP Platform

### CHALLENGE

In Türkiye's diverse but divided religious landscape, dialogue between belief groups was rare. Stereotypes persisted, and there was no shared space for trust-building or joint cultural projects.

### CHANGE

The ADIP platform brought together representatives from more than 10 faith communities. They created a shared calendar, held intercultural conferences, and built ongoing cooperation between minority and majority groups, strengthening Türkiye's interfaith civic fabric. Today almost all minority groups are represented in ADIP, individuals of different faith groups are sharing and celebrating sacred days of each other together, meeting in exhibitions, concerts and cultural activities with an increasing number of followers from Turkey and neighbouring countries.





# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

Experimental Video Theatre:  
**KRIEG/ACINSELAK – 2023–2024**  
**Macedonian Center ITI / PRODUKCIJA**

## CHALLENGE

In the post-war landscapes of North Macedonia, younger generations were increasingly disconnected from historical memory and peace narratives. Artistic platforms to explore trauma, gender, and conflict through contemporary performance were nearly non-existent, especially for emerging, unemployed artists.

## CHANGE

Through the KRIEG/ACINSELAK video theatre project, artists transformed a World War I German military cemetery in Bitola into a powerful stage. Featuring both male and female soldier perspectives, the production toured festivals across Europe, won multiple awards, and created a vibrant, international conversation on war, memory, and healing through art.



# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

Cross-Border Journalism Exchange – 2023–2024  
BIRN Skopje & Regional Exchange (Storyteller,  
Serbia) – North Macedonia

## CHALLENGE

Young journalists in North Macedonia had limited access to mentorship, regional cooperation, or cross-border learning opportunities. As fake news and political pressure intensified, developing skills in investigative storytelling became harder than ever.

## CHANGE

Through BIRN's journalist exchange programme, Western Balkans reporters, such as Bojan Blazeovski from North Macedonia, spent one month in regional media outlets outside their homelands (in Bojan's case, that was Storyteller from Serbia).



# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

EU Integration Commentary Portal – 2023–  
ongoing

CTRL – Centar za trening, razvoj i lobiranje

## CHALLENGE

Public space for critical thinking was shrinking in Republika Srpska. Disinformation, political pressure, and smear campaigns made it harder for civil society to engage openly in debates about the EU and democracy.

## CHANGE

CTRL launched [www.lobiranje.eu](http://www.lobiranje.eu), a platform where experts, activists, and diplomats publish fact-based, pro-European opinion pieces. The site became a trusted source, was widely shared by the media, and inspired a new generation of young advocates committed to truth, integrity, and EU values.





# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

## Investigative Journalism for Public Accountability – 2022–ongoing BIRN

### CHALLENGE

In North Macedonia, serious issues like prison abuse, corruption, and pollution often go unreported due to limited resources, safety risks, and political pressure. Journalists lacked support for deep, cross-border investigations.

### CHANGE

BIRN trained and supported journalists to produce powerful investigations, such as those on the Idrizovo women's prison and air pollution. These stories led to parliamentary debate and public engagement. The initiative also built a network of investigative reporters across borders, reinforcing journalism as a public good.



# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

## LINK 4 Cooperation – 2021–2023 Agencija lokalne demokratije Mostar

### CHALLENGE

In many Bosnian municipalities, civil society and local authorities worked in silos. Trust was low, and meaningful citizen participation was rare, especially among women, youth, and people with disabilities. Marginalised groups had little voice in local governance, and many towns lacked tools for dialogue.

### CHANGE

Twelve municipalities and 22 CSOs came together to co-create local initiatives—from women's skills workshops to green actions and cultural events. The project introduced the EU's ELoGE (European Label of Governance Excellence) standard to BiH for the first time and installed “smart benches” as innovative civil participation points. A new model of participatory democracy began to take root.”





# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

## Ortaklaşa: Culture, Dialogue and Support Programme – 2023–2025

### Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSİV)

## CHALLENGE

Türkiye's cultural CSOs were sidelined from local policy processes. Municipalities and CSOs rarely collaborated, and the lack of inclusive, community-oriented cooperation was a major missing link for strengthening local democracy.

## CHANGE

İKSİV built a model for cooperation between CSOs and municipalities. Through dialogue and sub-grants, 13 cultural projects emerged—from youth festivals to artist residencies and venue transformations. The programme engaged 314 stakeholders across 52 cities, showing that culture can lead rights-based dialogue.





# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

## NPO Academy and Civil Society Week – 2019–2024

### Partners Albania for Change and Development

## CHALLENGE

In Albania, many civil society organisations and activists operated with limited capacities, lacking access to consistent guidance, standards, and collaborative networks. These gaps hindered their ability to work transparently, influence policy, and build public trust, especially in areas with fewer resources and support structures.

## CHANGE

The creation of the National Resource Centre for Civil Society has equipped over 3,000 CSO representatives across Albania with tailored capacity-building and mentoring in governance, financial sustainability, and advocacy. Civil Society Week alone amplified the work of over 200 CSOs, engaging more than 4,600 citizens nationwide. The initiative helped establish national transparency standards and contributed to 35+ policy improvements, empowering civil society to actively shape Albania's democratic and integration agenda.





# FROM CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

## Strengthening Capacities and Policy Engagement of Community Service Providers –IRIS Progress 2021–2024

### NGO ALPHA Centre

## CHALLENGE

Community-based social service providers across the Western Balkans play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable groups, yet their contributions are often overlooked by public institutions. Despite their contributions, CSOs are rarely treated as equal partners in shaping social policies. Increasing their visibility, capacity, and institutional recognition remains a key priority.

## CHANGE

With EU support, the IRIS Network strengthened its role as a regional voice for social protection. Over 500 members engaged in training and dialogue. Thirty CSOs improved their licensing and service quality, while 12 received grants to expand operations. Gender was embedded across procedures, and a regional shadow report brought CSO priorities to policymakers. As a result, civil society actors gained stronger visibility and influence in national and regional decision-making.

