



**Association for the Advancement of Journalistic Practices
Innovative Media**

Annual Report for 2023

**Covering the program activities
between**

January 1 to December 31, 2023

**February 2024
Skopje, North Macedonia**

Innovative Media Mission and Vision

Vision

The Association for the Advancement of Journalistic Practices Innovative Media envisions a society in which engaged and aware journalists actively use innovative tools to exercise their duties, a society in which they are cautious about influencing and demanding accountability from the authorities, while ensuring democratic, accountable and prepared governance.

Mission to Achieve the Vision

Innovative Media protects, promotes and advances professional standards in the media by building capacities of journalists and strengthens the awareness and capacity of young journalists for them to take on the best possible role as innovative journalists respecting ethical norms and are activists for democracy.

Program areas

Innovative Media strengthens the awareness and capacity of citizens and civil society to assume their fullest possible role as activists for democracy, while supporting government to fulfil its democratic role in serving society. Innovative Media work is focused within three main program areas:

1. Combating disinformation;
2. Upholding democratic values through watchdog journalism;
3. Advancing professional journalism standards.

Basic Information

Registration data	Contact information
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Executive Summary

The Association for the Advancement of Journalistic Practices **Innovative Media – Skopje** was established in 2019 in Skopje, North Macedonia by a group of journalists and civil society. Over the years, it has established a diverse portfolio of collaborations, projects and capacities related to covering digital transformation issues and usage of digital tools in journalistic work. As a result, it has formed lasting partnerships with other civil society organizations, donors and media outlets.

Innovative Media projects conducted during 2023, primarily provided support for the news portal Portalb.mk, with an aim to provide the Albanian speaking population of North Macedonia and abroad with accurate and reliable information, through news and analysis production, with a focus on the reform process of European Union (EU) accession and the benefits and responsibilities resulting from the NATO membership.



[Portalb.mk](https://portalb.mk)

During 2023, Innovative Media started implementing two new projects. The first project started in March is called Reporting Diversity Network – The New Agenda, primarily aims to promote more responsible public speech by debunking stereotypical, discriminatory and hateful discourses and effectively influence media representation of ethnicity, religion and gender in the Western Balkans. The main activities for the first year of the project were participating in the 3-day introductory training and knowledge transfer gathering of the regional network Reporting Diversity Network, held in Durrës, Albania. Also, the team of Innovative Media attended three workshops: The first one was dedicated to creation of the RDN Strategy, defining its mission, vision and position in WB. The second workshop was dedicated to re-evaluating existing and developing new social media strategy and project communication plan, in line with the strategic priorities. While the third workshop was devoted to ensuring secure working environment and (online) safety of the team members while doing the monitoring and responses. Moreover, by the end of 2023, Innovative Media published the Open Call for the Reporting Diversity training of trainers inviting CSOs, grassroots activists, human rights defenders from North Macedonia to attend this training in 2024 in Podgorica.

The second project called Media for youth: Promoting digital safety and good governance, started in May 2023. With this project, Innovative Media aims to contribute to an increased level of awareness among young people on key topics: digital security and cyber-hygiene, misinformation as a security threat and the environment, which gives them the opportunity for competent involvement in solving these issues that affect their lives, as well as greater resistance of young people to disinformation campaigns through accurate information. This project offers support for the shared activities of the Albanian news portal Portalb.mk and the Macedonian news Agency, Meta.mk, for producing articles and a show called “Shortcut”, aimed at youth.

In 2023 Innovative Media received support from three donors, enabling partnerships contributing to increasing the scope and quality of its work; the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) from Washington, DC, USA, the donor of the project “Promoting Credible and Reliable Reporting in Albanian Language - Portalb.mk”; the SMART Balkans–Civil Society for Shared Society in the Western Balkan the donor of the project Media for youth: Promoting digital safety and good governance and Media

Diversity Institute Western Balkans the donor of the project Reporting Diversity Network – The New Agenda.

Below is an overview of the projects Innovative Media has worked on in 2023 and of the highlights of some of the achievements.

Innovative Media Activities and Projects in 2023

Innovative Media conducted a range of activities in 2023 in order to promote the crucial role of free and professional media in providing knowledge and in giving voice to citizens of Republic of North Macedonia in general, and in particular the primary audience of Portalb.mk - the ethnic Albanian community from the country and the region, as basic condition for empowering citizens to meaningfully participate in democratic processes.

Overall, the yearly impact of the project Portalb.mk can be summarized as fostering transparency, accountability, and social justice. By uncovering discrimination, labor rights violations, corruption, and inefficiencies in public administration, Portalb.mk has contributed to shaping a more equitable and accountable society. Through its journalism, the project has empowered citizens with knowledge, catalyzed institutional reforms, and served as a watchdog for democracy. Moving forward, sustained efforts in reporting and advocacy will be crucial in addressing systemic issues and advancing societal progress.

Empowerment of Marginalized Communities

Portalb.mk's pursuit of justice and accountability has empowered marginalized communities, particularly those affected by discrimination and inaccessible services. By shedding light on issues such as the lack of accessibility for people with disabilities in Karposh or ethnic discrimination in 'Hygiene of Skopje', the project has given a voice to those who have long been overlooked or silenced. Through its reporting, Portalb.mk has not only exposed injustices but also catalyzed actions to address them, ultimately leading to improvements in the lives of individuals and communities. The media outlet's dedication to supporting students' rights and welfare has also yielded significant results. Through its journalism, Portalb.mk has shed light on safety concerns faced by students, prompting authorities to implement measures to enhance security on university campuses. Furthermore, the reporting on the delayed opening of a student dormitory in Tetovo brought attention to the challenges students were facing, ultimately leading to the facility's inauguration. By amplifying students' voices and holding authorities accountable, Portalb.mk has contributed to improving educational environments and ensuring that students have access to essential resources. Moreover, Portalb.mk's advocacy for the establishment of vital community services, such as shelters for women victims of domestic violence, has had an impact. The media's sustained coverage of the need for a shelter in the Pollog region spurred action from authorities, resulting in the opening of a much-needed facility. Similarly, efforts to address drug abuse among minors in schools, highlighted through our reporting, led to the formation of councils dedicated to preventing child delinquency. **The Association of Journalists of North Macedonia** has [awarded recognition](#) our journalist Fisnik Xhelili, for his contribution to promoting professional investigative journalism. The recognition was awarded for the article about the municipalities that violate the Law on Juvenile Justice for the prevention of delinquency among children. These initiatives not only address immediate social

challenges but also foster a safer and more supportive environment for vulnerable individuals within communities.

Demanding Accountability and reforms

The project's emphasis on transparency and accountability has played an important role in promoting good governance practices and holding government institutions accountable for their actions. By uncovering instances of corruption, illegal practices, and inefficiencies, Portalb.mk has forced authorities to confront their shortcomings and take corrective measures. The imposition of fines for misuse of personal data and the initiation of investigations by the Prosecution in response to Portalb.mk's reports demonstrate the impact of the project in fostering a culture of accountability within government agencies and institutions. Portalb.mk's investigative reporting shed light on the shortcomings of the government's digitalization efforts, particularly the "One point for services" project, which failed to meet expectations despite extensive promotion. The outlet's data revealed that in a country of 1.8 million citizens, only 1,062 documents were processed electronically in one year, casting doubt on the effectiveness of the initiative. Following Portalb.mk's exposé, there was a significant public outcry, with the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, subsequently promoting digital services for document registration and certification. Portalb.mk pushed for anti-corruption measures within public administration. The outlet's reporting influenced the Ministry of Information Society to organize a public debate on a draft law aimed at appointing skilled professionals based on meritocracy rather than political affiliation. Portalb.mk consistently emphasized the importance of this legislation in enhancing governance and combating corruption.

Pushing for local change

Portalb.mk has played an important role in advocating for local achievements and addressing pressing issues affecting communities. Notably, the coverage of infrastructure projects and public service reforms has brought about tangible improvements. For instance, the reporting on the reconstruction of local roads, removal of illegal objects and the subsequent initiation of reconstruction work in various local spots underscore the media's capacity to influence local development. Similarly, the persistent coverage of issues such as dysfunctional sound systems in courts has led to authorities taking corrective actions, enhancing transparency and efficiency in judicial proceedings. These accomplishments demonstrate Portalb.mk's commitment to fostering positive change at the local level.

Advancement of Media Freedom and Integrity

Portalb.mk's commitment to truth and integrity in journalism has contributed to the advancement of media freedom and ethical standards in North Macedonia. Despite facing obstacles such as police obstruction during live coverage, the project has persisted in its pursuit of accurate and unbiased reporting. By upholding journalistic principles and exposing wrongdoing without fear or favor, Portalb.mk has set a precedent for media integrity and professionalism.

Republications and virality of the articles

Cumulatively, Portalb's articles were republished by 200 different media outlets—news web sites/news portals/news aggregators/newspapers—during the last 20 months, including Macedonian, Albanian and other language media. Portalb sends e-mails containing article links to

our articles offering them for free republication to over 80 news media outlets twice every week. Some outlets republish on regular, even daily basis, alongside our partner site in Macedonian language, Meta.mk and [Truthmeter](#) in Albanian and Macedonian language. On our social channels, especially in Facebook, posts and videos in some of the cases have become viral and have garnered thousands of comments, shares and other reactions.

Strong brand awareness, the main credible portal in Albanian in North Macedonia

Due to the fact that Portalb.mk in its 13-year existence is recognized as the most professional portal in Albanian language in North Macedonia, the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Skopje contacted Portalb asking from us to republish in Albanian language the columns of the British Prime Minister, Liz Truss. The link of Portalb was shared on their official [Facebook page](#). Also, the French Embassy, sent us the article of the Secretary of State for Europe, Lawrence Boone, and republished it on their official [Facebook page](#).

The Editor in Chief of Portalb.mk, Elida Zylbeari, gets constant invitations to participate in public debates, TV shows of private and national media in order to give statements about the challenges of working in a professional online media.. Besides this, Zylbeari also have been invited by institutions' like mayor EU Embassies, US Embassy, European Commission, USAID, OSCE and international NGO-s in order to participate in study visits abroad, briefings trainings, receptions and different cultural events.

Reporting Diversity Network – The New Agenda

Through the project Reporting Diversity Network – The New Agenda, Innovative Media team is preparing to start the Media Monitoring process in 2024 which means monitoring of traditional and new media to uncover hate speech and divisive discourses following media monitoring methodology. The team participated in the 3-day introductory training and knowledge transfer gathering of the regional network Reporting Diversity Network, held in Durrës, Albania, from 25 May until 27 of May 2023. Also the team attended three workshops: The first one was dedicated to creation of the RDN Strategy; The second workshop was dedicated to re-evaluating existing and developing new social media strategy and project communication plan and the Third workshop was devoted to ensuring secure working environment and (online) safety of the team members while doing the monitoring and responses

The organization published the call for the Reporting Diversity Training of Trainers: A group of Network representatives as well as additional number of CSO and media representatives interested and/or experienced in the topic, will be selected in 2024 in order to attend a training workshop in Podgorica aimed at equipping them for individual provision of training and mentoring in the field of representation of diversity.

The project includes other activities such as:

Publicize Complaints: When monitoring efforts detect hate speech and discriminatory discourses in the media, the partners expose and counter them using the most appropriate mechanisms, such as articles and blog posts, letters and meetings with editors, reports to social media platforms;

Social Media Campaign: A project-dedicated website and social media platforms will be developed to promote project outputs and initiate debate over hateful narratives in the media. We will use diverse formats, from memes, cartoons to educative videos.

Sub-granting: Supporting overall 30 projects across the region by providing program and financial

support;

National and regional conferences aiming at advocacy and initiating discussion over this topic with key stakeholders.

Media for youth: Promoting digital safety and good governance

This project offers support for the shared activities of the Albanian news portal Portalb.mk and the Macedonian news Agency, Meta.mk, for producing articles and a show called “Shortcut”, aimed at youth.


During 2023, 34 new episodes of the show were produced and published in the websites of the media and also in the social channels of these two media.



Additionally, three trainings and three webinars were held during the year 2023. The list is as follows:

- 23.06.2023 – One-day training on Cyber Security and Digital Hygiene
- 18.09.2023 – One-day training on Video production
- 11.12.2023 – One-day training on Data Journalism and Visualization
- 10.10.2023 – Webinar on the topic “Hot eco-spots through the journalistic prism”
- 20.11.2023 – Webinar on the topic “Fact checks and exposure of journalistic disinformation – journalistic experiences”
- 28.02.2024 – Webinar on the topic “Artificial intelligence in the media – pros and cons”

Cooperation with/in Various Networks

During 2023, Innovative Media participated in the work of the following networks and coalitions:

<p>Media Literacy Network - MLN Throughout 2023 Portalb.mk continued to contribute as member of the Media Literacy Network, established in North Macedonia in 2017 and administered by the state regulatory body in charge of media literacy the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. Also, Innovative Media through Portalb.mk participated in the activities of the MLN-organized Media Literacy Days in November of 2023.</p>	 mediumskapismenost.mk
<p>Global Voices in Albanian Innovative Media contributes to translation and dissemination of the news of the Albanian version of the website of the international, multilingual, primarily volunteer community of writers, translators, academics, and human rights activists Global Voices Online. Global Voices members include over 1200 citizen journalists, analysts, online media experts and translators, reporting from 167 countries and translating into up to 30 languages.</p>	 sq.globalvoicesonline.org

<p>ACTION SEE - Accountability, Technology and Institutional Openness Network in South-East Europe</p> <p>Through reporting via Portalb.mk and participation of Innovative Media team members in events organized by ACTION SEE network, IM increased visibility of the projects of this network that enables cooperation between leading digital transparency organizations from North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania. Its members use new technologies for empowering citizens and increasing public institutions' accountability via fact-checking projects, annual POINT conferences on new technologies and political accountability, and developing the regional Index of Transparency.</p>	 <p>www.actionsee.org</p>
<p>Anti-Disinformation Network for the Balkans (AND-Balkans)</p> <p>Innovative Media is among the founding members of this network that serves as the basis of a cooperation between civil society organizations, media outlets, educational institutions and all other relevant stakeholders with a goal of forming a wide front on countering disinformation through affirmation of the highest standards of fact-checking and professional journalism, as well as promoting media literacy & critical thinking based on the Declaration that re-affirms the freedom of expression in its various forms.</p> <p>ADN-Balkans developed gradually through bilateral and multilateral cooperation of its founding members, and from November 2021 it provided infrastructure for Metamorphosis-led project Western Balkans Anti-Disinformation Hub: Exposing Malign Influences through Data-Driven Watchdog Journalism in the six countries of the region, with support of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.</p>	 <p>antidisinfo.net</p>
<p>Other cooperation's and public appearances in 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Editor in Chief, Elida Zylbeari was a guest speaker at the conference "Building Social Resilience to the Harmful Effects of Disinformation in the Republic of North Macedonia", organized by the Presidential Centre for Political Education. • Elida Zylbeari was invited to give a lecture at the Multiplier Event held at the South East European University, organized by the Max van der Stoel Institute, part of the University. She talked about the importance of professional journalism in making a positive change in the country, while presenting Portalb's work as an example of a media whose purpose is to create constructive journalism. • Zylbeari was a guest speaker at the show called "Click Plus" aired in TV21, sharing her expertise on the topic of "Disinformation and media literacy". • Zylbeari was a guest speaker at the public Macedonian Radio Television, sharing her expertise on the topic of professional journalism and their connection to social media as a tool in (mis)informing the population. 	

- Elida Zylbeari gave an interview for the [show called “Evropat” aired on TV 24](#), known for their expertise on topics about European Union and the process of reforms of North Macedonia toward its integration to this Union. She discussed about current affairs in the North Macedonian media, it’s vulnerability to malign disinformation campaigns and offered possible solutions.
- Elida Zylbeari was one of the 6 guest speakers in a panel of the [Regional conference](#) organized by the Albanian fact-checking media organization Faktoje, in Tirana, Albania. She than gave a [statement for The Voice of America](#).
- The Editor in Chief, Elida Zylbeari gave an [interview for the youth show “Shortcut”](#), marking the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, discussing about the harmful myths and fake news that have been most prevalent during this time in the national media.
- Zylbeari gave a brief interview for the [Focus Magazine](#), sharing her insights about the issue of disinformation in North Macedonia, analyzing how media should have reacted in a case where fake news was spread among youth and amplified by local and national media.
- The Editor in Chief, Elida Zylbeari was chosen from The EEAS Western Balkans StratCom Task Force to attend the [Western Balkans capacity building program](#), which took place in the first week of October 2023 in Aarhus and Copenhagen. This program was implemented in cooperation with the Constructive Institute, an independent center based in Aarhus University in Denmark.
- The Editor in Chief, Elida Zylbeari attended a [study visit](#) in Washington DC with newsroom visits and meetings with data journalism and fact-checking experts, organized by International Center for Journalists and Metamorphosis Foundation.
- Elida Zylbeari was a guest speaker at the event "[Fake News: Distortion of Reality](#)" conference, organized by Rotary Club of Tetova and Metamorphosis Foundation.
- Elida Zylbeari gave [an interview for TV Klan](#) sharing her insights about the harmful effects and the issue of disinformation in North Macedonia before elections.