

SUBVERSIVE FRONT
SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITIES ASSOCIATION

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 - 2023

Skopje, August 2019

ABBREVIATIONS

AQAHIM - Agency for Quality and Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions in North Macedonia

AYS - Agency for Youth and Sport of North Macedonia

LGBTI people - lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and intersex people

LPPD - Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination

MEdu - Ministry of Education and Science of North Macedonia

MHealth - Ministry of Health of North Macedonia

MJust - Ministry of Justice of North Macedonia

MLSP - Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of North Macedonia

Mol - Ministry of Interior Affairs of North Macedonia

SGM - sexual and gender minorities

SPP - Skopje Pride Parade

INTRODUCTION

After the establishment in June 2013 and the following 6 years of growing as an organization, Subversive Front has managed to accomplish the following achievements:

- Established human rights violations documentation system for the LGBTI people in Macedonia that produces evidence as basis of conducting advocacy efforts for LGBTI equality
- Enabled building and strengthening the dialogue with the key stakeholders including the state institutions, political parties, media, social workers and mental health professionals
- Generated and disseminated data and knowledge on various topics related to the rights, status, issues and the needs of the LGBTI people in Macedonia
- Increased visibility of the organization and its core work and results through the networks and platform built and enabled by the Civica Mobilitas facility, and
- Strengthened organizational capacities in terms of office space, personnel, equipment as well as the provision of free services of legal and psychosocial support and counseling.

In August 2018, due to the emerging need to condense the scope of its strategic areas, and to set out a clear strategy for guiding the work of Subversive Front in the period 2020-2023, the work on the Strategic Plan of the organization was commenced.

The aim of the Strategic Plan 2020-2023 is to utilize the knowledge and network of the organization into contributing to effectuating sustainable improvements in the advocacy of SGM rights and equality, to enabling better social inclusion and acceptance of the SGM community members and to generating knowledge-base on topics of relevance for the SGM community which can serve as guidance for the advocacy efforts for equality.

In the forthcoming period, Subversive Front will continue focusing its efforts in documenting the violations of the human rights of the SGM in the country which has become the cornerstone of the advocacy activities we have been conducting since the very beginning.

In addition, the dialogue with the relevant state institutions - the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Interior, the Agency of Youth and Sport, the Agency for Quality and Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions, the centers for social work, then the relevant civil society and professional associations - the Association of Social Workers in Macedonia, the Chamber of Psychologists of Macedonia, the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, the National Network against Homophobia and Transphobia, then the relevant regional and international players - ERA - LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey, ILGA-Europe, Transgender Europe,

European Pride Organisers Association, as well as with the media, will continue to be developed.

Furthermore, we will invest significant efforts into developing and building a strong community of SGM members toward increasing their capacities in recognizing and reporting violations of their human rights, toward increasing their psychosocial outcomes on a variety of mental health parameters as well as toward increasing their agency as socially and politically active citizens.

Finally, we will continue generating scientifically valid data on the status, the rights, the issues and the needs of the SGM community members on the areas that have in the past been detected as some of the most relevant ones such as discrimination, violence, bullying, access to healthcare services, access to education, access to justice, employment and so on and further.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Despite several years of advocacy for safeguarding and promoting equal rights and status for the sexual and gender minorities (SGM) in North Macedonia, the implementation of laws and policies and the proactive tackling of pervasive negative public attitudes remains a key issue, resulting in a distressing picture of discrimination, harassment, exclusion and violence. Findings¹ confirm that most SGM community members hide their identities and have legitimate concerns about their safety. Discrimination in the workplace and in the health care and education systems remains common, and incidents of exclusion and harassment are widespread. The everyday life experiences of SGM community members are marked by fear and invisibility, within private as well as public spheres, exposed to pressure of secrecy, job discrimination, and social isolation. Our own research studies show that sexual and gender minorities experience significantly higher levels of anxiety in societal interaction, depression, self-concealment, discrimination and violence (because of their [different than the dominant] sexual orientation and gender identity) than their cis and heterosexual counterparts.² Surveys have shown that acceptance in society is low and prejudice high towards SGM community members. Violence and discrimination against SGM community members are widespread in the country and this is connected to the violence still affecting women and ethnic minorities. Levels of unreported violence and discrimination remain high, due to insufficient trust in the justice system, and lack of knowledge and awareness of SGM community members about laws protecting them from discrimination. Hate speech against SGM community members is also widespread, and it is not uncommon for politicians and other state representatives to use discriminatory speech against SGM community members. Freedom of assembly by the SGM community is continuously being contested by violent attacks against SGM community activists, organizations, etc. Despite that North Macedonia has ratified most of the international human rights conventions, including the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, generally, governmental institutions remain insufficiently committed to improving the institutional and legal mechanisms that protect minority rights in general and SGM community members' human rights in particular. Issues such as hate crime cases not being classified as such or investigated effectively, discriminatory educational materials, continue to be an issue. Furthermore, gaps remain in legal protection, with lacking legal recognition of

¹ World Bank. 2018. Life on the Margins: Survey Results of the Experiences of LGBTI People in Southeastern Europe (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/123651538514203449/Life-on-the-Margins-Survey-Results-of-the-Experiences-of-LGBTI-People-in-Southeastern-Europe>

² Stojanovski, K. Discrimination, violence, and bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Skopje: Association for a critical approach to gender and sexuality Subversive Front (2016). Available at: <http://s-front.org.mk/en/2016/04/11/izvestaj-od-istrazuvanje-za-diskriminacijata/>

same-sex partnership and legal gender recognition procedures. Although in North Macedonia, freedom of association is enforced, and SGM organisations are able to operate, very often these organisations, the events organised and the individual activists are faced with threats and violent attacks. In many cases, there have been a lack of protection from the state. This makes the work of the SGM organisations risky and difficult.

A SWOT analysis, developed in order for a more detailed review and analysis of the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as of the external opportunities and threats for Subversive Front, can be found enclosed to this Strategic Plan 2020 - 2023.

MISSION

Subversive Front is a community-engaged organization that aims to promote justice, freedom and equality for the members of the sexual and gender minorities in North Macedonia through the principles of accountability, solidarity and inclusivity.

VISION

Subversive Front believes that in order for the members of the sexual and gender minorities to live freely, openly and authentically, we must develop evidence-based policies, programs and services that support the self-identified needs of our community.

In our approach, we strive to promote and practice the following

VALUES:

Diversity - We commit particular effort in creating an environment that reflects and represents the diversity within our community. All our actions are led by the idea that promoting and practicing diversity brings benefits to our community members.

Community-based - The creation and the conduct of our activities, plans and budgets are guided by the guidelines, findings and instructions on the issues and the needs of the sexual and gender minorities. The voice of the community of sexual and gender minorities is revered and respected in all areas of our work.

Collaboration - In all our efforts, we aim to build a climate of trust, confidence and shared values with any party we enter in a dialogue with. We strive to work together at the cross-points of our resistance and thus build alliances of solidarity.

Transparency - We conduct open and honest communication with all stakeholders. The evidence of our work, our results, and our methods are openly, publicly and easily accessible for any stakeholder that may wish to conduct observation or evaluation.

Solidarity - We are united in the realization of our goals and interests. We practice and promote togetherness in our messages, activities and behaviour.

STRATEGIC AREAS

Research & evidence: Subversive Front finds that research initiatives that create data and evidence regarding the SGM community's needs and concerns is imperative in developing an organized and evidence-informed response to address the myriad of issues that influence the lives of SGM in North Macedonia. Therefore, one of Subversive Front's strategic areas of work is to establish programs of research locally, nationally, and regionally to ensure that we have the necessary science, data, and evidence to make our programs more effective, and to leverage such research in our policy and advocacy-related efforts.

Community development: Subversive Front believes that in order for SGM in North Macedonia to live openly, safely, and authentically, community development and building is crucial to harnessing community assets and engaging with the community. Another one of Subversive Front's strategic areas of work is to assist in developing the SGM community, both individually and collectively, to ensure they are at the forefront of all of our activities. As part of our community development work we conduct trainings, self-development workshops, social and sports events, and educational campaigns with the SGM community in North Macedonia. Presently, our work focuses on issues of mental health, social wellbeing, human and civil rights, access and utilization of legal services, and community connectedness.

Advocacy & policy influence: Subversive Front recognizes that structural factors, such as policies, laws, and politics influence the lives of SGM in North Macedonia. Given this, Subversive Front's final strategic area of work is to advocate for policies and laws that address the needs of the SGM community and ensures their protection. We work closely with government officials to ensure that the SGM community's voice is adequately represented on issues and policies that are important for them to live freely and authentically. In this strategic area, Subversive Front utilizes our, and other NGOs research, to support appropriate and evidence-based policy-making. Presently, Subversive Front works with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to advocate for the needs of the SGM community, holds meetings with parliamentary officials to inform them about SGM community issues, and participates in relevant policy-making initiatives and processes.

STRATEGIC GOALS

1. *Establishment of research programs* at local, national and regional level for generating data and knowledge about the needs and concerns of the sexual and gender minorities community;
2. *Support in the individual and collective building of a community* of sexual and gender minorities in order for its members to be at the forefront of all our activities;
3. *Advocacy of policies and laws* that address the needs of the sexual and gender minorities community, and ensure their protection.
4. *Building cooperation, partnerships and alliances* with civil society organizations, ministries, local self-government units, state agencies, bureaus and administrations, trade unions, health-care institutions, educational institutions, social work centers, youth organizations, youth workers, media, family members, supporters and allies, researchers and research institutes and agencies, international organizations and institutions, and other stakeholders in order to advance the status and the human rights of sexual and gender minorities in the country and beyond.

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Outcome 1: Evidence-base is generated on the variety of issues affecting the SGM, in particular the ones related to the exercise of their human rights, as well as their social, economic, health and political status.

Outcome 2: SGM community assets are harnessed and SGM community members are engaged into developing and building a SGM community that enables SGM community members to live openly, safely and authentically, and that provides SGM CSOs guidance and vigor in pursuing their vision.

Outcome 3: The legal framework, the institutional support and the public administration capacities in safeguarding the human rights of the SGM are advanced.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

An *implementation plan* and a *development plan* were developed for the implementation of this Strategic Plan 2020 - 2023 to take place. Both can be found enclosed to this Strategic Plan 2020 - 2023. Yearly evaluation of the implementation of the Strategic Plan is to be conducted every August in the period 2020 - 2023.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

“Through investing in individual development, we can expect contribution to making a societal change.”

A number of research studies show that investment in efforts for reducing negative behavioural, mental and sexual health outcomes (anxiety, depression, substance abuse and sexual risk-taking) on an individual level, can change social-level structures through facilitating positive inter-group contact, increasing the visibility of stigmatized SGM individuals, and empowering them to advocate for structural change³. Remediation of underlying depressive and anxiety symptoms and associated health-risk behaviours of sexual minority clients bolsters a sense of agency and community belonging for the sexual minority client and also advances the representation and political influence of a group often targeted and disenfranchised by discriminatory policies and social attitudes. In stigma research, interventions focus on the intra-personal and the inter-personal level⁴. It is important to alter physiological, cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses among the targets of stigma and thus help members of stigmatized groups cope with stigma, and to reduce stigma toward a particular group, thus reducing the expression of stigma (intrapersonal interventions), usually through education and counselling. Interpersonal interventions attempt to reduce stigma by harnessing the power of social situations, targeting interactions between the stigmatized and the non-stigmatized, which are often characterized by discomfort or small groups that share one or more stigmatized identities.

Our intervention logic as an organisation is the assumption that there is no progress in advocacy and the actual everyday livelihood of the sexual and gender minorities without investment in developing the psychosocial outcomes above, and making intra-personal, inter-personal, and structural interventions to reduce societal stigma against SGM.

³ Burton et al., Psychotherapy for the Spectrum of Sexual Minority Stress: Application and Technique of the ESTEEM Treatment Model, Cognitive and Behavioral Practice (2017)

⁴ Cook et al., Intervening within and across levels: A multilevel approach to stigma and public health, Social Science & Medicine (2013)

THEORY OF CHANGE

IF we invest in development and affirmation of the SGM identities in wider society through:

- organizing SGM community development and engagement efforts such as workshops, community gatherings, movie projections, CAB meetings, provision of psychosocial support and counselling services, provision of legal aid and counselling services,
- organizing raising awareness and visibility efforts such as pride parade, media and public campaigns, and press conferences, and
- conducting advocacy, dialogue building and capacity development efforts such as meetings with local and national authorities, sensitization trainings of civil servants and other public sector employees, communication with domestic and international allies and supporters, and fundraising - crowdfunding activities,

THEN we contribute towards:

- increased well-being and ability to live open and authentic lives of the SGM individuals,
- developed support systems, alliances of solidarity and platform for exchange, interaction, and cohesion in wider society, and
- increased integration of SGM individuals in society in different areas of their lives - family, workplace, school, healthcare, media, etc.

BECAUSE negative portrayals and attitudes against SGM individuals are decreased, knowledge and awareness of the issues and the needs of the SGM individuals are increased, and tolerance, understanding and acceptance of SGM individuals in society are increased.

TARGET GROUPS

SGM community members, in particular SGM youth, SGM community members under a certain social risk (homelessness, joblessness, disability, elderly SGM, etc.), SGM who live with HIV, SGM who are sex workers, SGM who are drug users, SGM community members with an ethnic and religious minority background, SGM asylum seekers, SGM refugees, SGM activists for human rights and equality of SGM, whose rights have been violated, and who have the need of adequate legal and psychosocial aid and counselling.

State officials employed at all governance levels - central government, legislature, courts, prosecution offices, municipality administration, as well as in the different public sectors: healthcare, social protection, education, justice, etc.) whose mandate covers human rights protection, promotion and safeguard, and whose knowledge and skills on issues and needs of LGBTI people needs to be increased.

Civil society organisations working with human rights protection, respect, and promotion, community development, rule of law, good governance, gender equality, and protection of environment.

Media, journalists and editors at traditional (TV, radio, print) and electronic media who publish and present information to wider society and are able to influence the public debate.

International partners - governmental and non-governmental organizations, universities, research institutes, donors, funders, and foundations, who adequately support our strategic work.

BENEFICIARIES

SGM community members - lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, gender diverse, and other persons identifying as part of the sexual and gender minorities.

ORGANISATIONAL CHART (2019)

