



Sharing STORIES for a Just Transition

NORTH MACEDONIA



Powerful Bonds: A Mother-Daughter Duo Shaping the Just Transition Movement in North Macedonia

In the heart of the Western Balkans, a story of passion and unity unfolds as a mother and daughter duo form an unbreakable bond while standing up for just energy transition in North Macedonia. With an unyielding commitment to creating a sustainable future for their community, this extraordinary duo has joined forces, combining their expertise and mutual passion to drive positive change. Through their collaboration, they have not only strengthened their own bond but have also become a source of inspiration, demonstrating the profound impact that can be achieved when family and purpose align in pursuit of a common goal.

This is a glimpse on their journey of collaboration, resilience, and determination to shape a greener and inclusive tomorrow, where no one is left behind.

Embarking on a professional journey with your parents may not sound as an attractive prospect for many. Yet, there exist extraordinary instances where the seemingly improbable becomes an inspiring reality. Such is the case of Elena and Ivana Petkanovska, a mother and daughter duo. United not only by blood ties, their unwavering commitment to fostering a just transition in North Macedonia brought them together to tirelessly work on a common passion. Spanning two generations, their connection goes far beyond familial bonds; it resonates with determination, passion and an unspoken promise to inspire and catalyse change in their country. And at the very core of this union, lies the secret - not so secret-ingredient for the success of their relationship: trust.

Together, Elena and Ivana are demonstrating the limitless possibilities that arise when love, shared purpose, and trust intertwine on the path of success.

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Transition is not a foreign concept to Elena Petkanovska. Similar to numerous other families in the Western Balkans relocating across the region, Elena's ancestors had moved from Greece and eventually settled in Skopje, North Macedonia. Elena reflects on this shared history, remarking: *"Transitioning is an innate aspect of our human nature, something we all inevitably encounter in various forms and at different times. In the past, circumstances compelled our and many other families to relocate. Now, present circumstances call for a shift from our previous way of life, urging us to adopt a new approach in our relationship with the environment that surrounds us."*

From her personal life experience, Elena decided to extend the concept of transition to other aspects of her life, including the professional one. After successfully graduating from the law faculty in Skopje, she started working at the beginning of the 2000s as a counsellor in public administration at the Ministry of Local Government, working directly for the democratic transition faced by North Macedonia at the time and on the decentralisation reform. Equipped with the expertise, strength and the determination needed to operate on such a complex field of work, Elena had the further conviction that fostering change in any environment is a multi-layered process that, in order to bring desired results, needs to take into account intersectional factors that will eventually help the process and changes to be inclusive, just and leaving no one behind. Going beyond the professional sphere, these are the values that have always guided Elena in her life and also apply in the relationship with her daughter - and now trusted colleague - Ivana. From her daughter's upbringing to guiding her to the path of life, both personally and later on professionally, Elena had always shared with Ivana the importance of transformation, adaptation and inclusivity permeating every aspect of life, cultivating a shared passion for fostering positive change in the world.

Passion for social justice as a common denominator

Passionate since her childhood about art and design, it was just the right course of action for Ivana to continue her professional endeavours in a field that would do justice to her talent and skills and allow her to concretely contribute to foster change. It was then that Ivana enrolled at the faculty of architecture in Skopje and successfully pursued a master degree in sustainable architecture, becoming one of the few women in North Macedonia to specialise in this sector. Since that moment, and with unwavering determination, Ivana worked on multiple projects that eventually sparked in her a specific interest in energy efficiency and use of renewables in building construction processes.

United by a shared passion to drive tangible transformation in their ever-evolving world and society and driven by the pursuit of equity and sustainability within a region heavily influenced by the coal industry, the bond between Elena and Ivana naturally evolved to a working alliance and as the perfect chance to reunite their expertise and contribute to a just transition away from coal in North Macedonia.

"It just happened," Ivana explains " My mom was working as the Head of Department for sustainable development in the Ministry of Local Self Government and was involved in policy making processes. We used to discuss various topics, as any mother would with her daughter, but it never occurred to me that at one point something would connect us professionally.... And then, it was in the blink of an eye that we started working together for the establishment of our Organisation, CeProSARD (Center for Promotion of Sustainable Agricultural practices and Rural Development)"

Together, Elena and Ivana bring their years of experience and tackle just transition on different perspectives, making sure the issue is tackled at every angle and no detail is left behind. With Elena bringing 25 years of experience on sustainable development and working on the policy files of the organisation, and Ivana working for the past eleven years as the Head of Climate and Energy department at CeProSard, the organisation has produced numerous studies and worked on different projects directing attention on the potentials of implementing a social and just transition framework in North Macedonia, concentrating on the coal region of Bitola and others focusing on the impact of environmental risks to vulnerable communities. *“While North Macedonia is considered one of the most advanced countries in the Western Balkans region when it comes to moving away from coal, and also has progressed in the deployment and use of renewables, the journey towards complete transformation remains an ongoing endeavour that must take into account every aspect and angle to ensure equal progress is reached in all facets of society, including everyone, as everyone is impacted”* explains Elena.

With an energy landscape still dependent on coal, North Macedonia has yet a lot of work to get done to implement the transition process, open it to the local people, and amplify their participation in shaping the future energy landscape. Elena and Ivana firmly believe that achieving a just transition requires a comprehensive approach, blending both policy making and bottom-up citizen engagement. They emphasise the vital importance of active citizenry, with a particular focus on empowering youth, women, and marginalised groups. According to Elena, true success in societal transformation and transition can only be attained when and where no individual is left behind. This is the essence of justice.

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The impacts on every member of society are taken into account, ensuring that concrete solutions and approaches prioritise the social and economic well-being of all and where everyone is a stakeholder in the process and its outcomes.

A good example of their committed work towards coal phase out in North Macedonia, is their recent project "Green Heat". Implemented in the Municipality of Radovish, the project is centred around the introduction of an efficient, customer-oriented small-grid district heating service that harnesses the power of renewable energy sources. By combining their policy and engineering expertise, Elena and Ivana are piloting the replacement of the outdated and inefficient heating systems in five municipal buildings: a kindergarten, primary school, high school, sports hall, and the administrative municipal building.

Besides, they continue to advocate for effective application of the energy policies in the EU accession process and empower active participation and engagement of the civil sector for the implementation of energy policies in North Macedonia.

Forging a deeper connection everyday through shared goals

By working side by side on a daily basis, Elena and Ivana have elevated their ordinary mother-daughter bond to a whole new level. When asked about the most significant aspect of their working dynamic thus far, both Elena and Ivana concur that it is their contrasting characters and personalities that truly fortify their bond and contribute to make their work successful.

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Given the generational differences, life experiences and a different professional background, one might assume that collaboration would be anything but smooth sailing, and as every working relationship with any colleague, the collaboration between Elena and Ivana is not always all peaches and dandelions: *“ When embarking on a fresh project or assignment, our initial consultation is usually brief, allowing each of us to delve into independent work for a while, particularly during the research phase. This is particularly useful to shape our own ideas. However, the real deal starts when we meet to exchange our ideas, and this is when we usually have heated discussions. But also in this case I feel energised, and I like discussing different ideas as I would with another peer. ”*

And while discussions usually do not last too long, it becomes clear then that this remarkable duo has not only embraced their differences but also leveraged them to their advantage, harnessing the unique strengths each brings to the table and trusting each other's expertise. In doing so, they have seamlessly merged two distinct approaches, resulting in enhanced outcomes that are more profound, inclusive, and holistic.

“ We trust one another a lot, and our passion and shared dedication to contribute to the just transition in North Macedonia has united us even prior to our collaboration. Furthermore, we have profound respect for each other's ideas and experiences, and this is something that I believe plays a real difference in our working bond”.

United by their shared vision for a sustainable world and just transition in North Macedonia, Elena and Ivana's collaboration has proven to be an extraordinary source of growth and inspiration. As they shared their respective professional journeys, they not only imparted invaluable knowledge but have also cultivated an unbreakable bond.

Together, Elena and Ivana embody the true essence of unity, demonstrating the transformative power that lies within genuine collaboration and strong determination and being a true source of inspiration for generations to come and for a better future for all.