

# Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Evaluation of BIRN Macedonia, project “Credible journalism for real changes”

Date: 15 April 2025

## 1. General information

### 1.1 Introduction

BIRN Macedonia have ongoing agreement with Sida within Sweden’s strategy for reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey for the period 2021–2027 and now has an opportunity to evaluate ahead of decision of possible new phase.

Freedom of speech enables the realization of other rights and constitutes an important basis for tolerance and cultural diversity Free and independent media is important for ensuring access to accurate and fact-based information which enables citizens to exercise their democratic rights and counteracts disinformation. Furthermore, free and independent media can contribute to increased transparency and reduced corruption.

### 1.2 Evaluation object: Intervention to be evaluated

The evaluation object is the project “Credible journalism for real changes” implemented by Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Macedonia. The implementation period of the project is from October 2022 to March 2026. The program aims to restore the public trust in media, boost transparency and hold authorities accountable by producing high quality journalism and to train new journalists to serve as watchdogs over the young democracy.

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Macedonia is an independent NGO, founded in 2004. It is part of, and contributes to the regional BIRN Network, but a separate juridical entity, registered as a non-profit association Court in Skopje.

BIRN Macedonia is recognized for its award-winning reporting and databases that have exposed abuse of office and corruption. Stories are published on *prizma.mk*, which is a website in Macedonian language published by BIRN Macedonia. Some stories are also translated to English and published on *Balkaninsight.com* which is an English web side, published by BIRN regional network.

The two objectives of the project are 1) provide the public with access to credible information that enables them to make informed decisions and participate in democratic processes and hold authorities accountable, 2) contribute to strengthening capacities of media, strengthen professional reporting standards and ethics that leads to higher quality reporting and restore interest in the profession. To strengthen the impact and to extend the target group BIRN Macedonia has a partnership with three local organizations to which they forward funds:

- *360 Degrees* - an award-winning media organization that produces the TV show “360 Degrees” and publishes the news portal 360stepeni.mk.
- *Sakam da kazam* - a daily online newspaper that includes correspondents in regions and towns across the country is published on its platform sdk.mk.
- *Center for Civil Communications (CCC)*, a recognized CSO for monitoring of state institutions.

Project’s theory of change: If independent media organizations come together as a coalition then more high quality, credible content will increase audiences for professional media keeping the focus on matters of public interest and maintain a watchdog role, which will restore the public’s trust in media, boost transparency and hold authorities accountable. If there is structured, innovative training and mentoring aimed at young journalists, then more young people could enter journalism prepared and contribute to professional reporting.

The project is implemented in North Macedonia. BIRN Macedonia and its partners have also been funded by USAID. This funding has now been withdrawn which represents a challenge for sustainability.

The intervention logic or theory of change of the intervention may be further elaborated by the evaluator in the inception report, if deemed necessary.

## 2.1 Evaluation purpose: Intended use and intended users

The evaluation will be used as input ahead of discussions for possible future support. The evaluation has the following principal purposes:

- Help BIRN Macedonia and its partners assess progress of the on-going intervention and learn from what works well and less well and suggest possible adjustments and improvements in the project implementation.
- Provide Sida and its partners with an input to upcoming discussions concerning the preparation of a new phase of intervention.
- Provide input to Sida HQ in its evaluation of the BIRN regional network.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are:

- BIRN Macedonia
- The Swedish Embassy in Skopje
- Sida HQ

The evaluation is to be designed, conducted and reported to meet the needs of the intended users and tenderers shall elaborate in the tender how this will be ensured during the evaluation process.

## 2.2 Evaluation scope

The project which is object to evaluation is ongoing and the evaluation scope is limited to the time period that the program has been implemented so far. The geographical coverage of the evaluation is North Macedonia.

## 2.3 Evaluation objective: Criteria and questions

The objective of this evaluation is to evaluate the results of intervention with BIRN Macedonia and formulate recommendations as an input to upcoming discussions concerning the preparation of a new phase of the intervention.

The main evaluation questions are:

- To what extent has the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results? If not, why?
- Which specific approaches, strategies or interventions proved most effective or ineffective and what lessons can be drawn for future interventions
- Has the M&E system delivered robust and useful information that could be used to assess progress towards outcomes and contribute to learning?
- To what extent have lessons learned from what works well and less well been used to improve and adjust intervention implementation?
- Were the resources allocated sufficient to achieve the project output and outcomes? What additional resources, capacities and support if any were required for successful completion of the project
- To what extent will the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue? What could be done to improve sustainability of the intervention – how can commercial revenues be increased?
- Is the program cost efficient?

Questions are expected to be further developed in the tender by the tenderer and further refined during the inception phase of the evaluation.

## 2.4 Evaluation approach and methods

The evaluator is to suggest an approach/methodology that provides credible answers (evidence) to the evaluation questions. Limitations to the chosen approach/methodology and methods shall be made explicit by the evaluator and the consequences of these limitations discussed in the tender. The evaluator shall to the extent possible, present mitigation measures to address them. A clear distinction is to be made between evaluation approach/methodology and methods.

Sida's approach to evaluation is *utilization-focused*, which means the evaluator should facilitate the *entire evaluation process* with careful consideration of how everything that is done will affect the use of the evaluation. It is therefore expected that the evaluators, in their tender, present i) how intended users are to participate in and contribute to the evaluation process and ii) methodology and methods for data collection that create space for reflection, discussion and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

In cases where sensitive or confidential issues are to be addressed in the evaluation, evaluators should ensure an evaluation design that do not put informants and stakeholders at risk during the data collection phase or the dissemination phase.

## 2.5 Organization of evaluation management

This evaluation is commissioned by BIRN Macedonia. The intended users are BIRN Macedonia, the Embassy of Sweden in Skopje and Sida HQ. The Embassy of Sweden in Skopje has contributed to the ToR, will comment on the inception and final report as well as approve the final report. Sida HQ will comment on the inception and the final report. Both BIRN Macedonia and The Embassy of Sweden in Skopje will participate at the start-up meeting and at the final workshop/discussion.

Note that an evaluation of BIRN network's organizational structure, commissioned by Sida HQ, will be conducted during approximately the same time period. It will be important for the evaluation teams to coordinate with each other, preferably before finalizing the draft final report.

## 2.6 Evaluation quality

All Sida's evaluations shall conform to OECD/DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation<sup>1</sup>. The evaluators shall use the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation<sup>2</sup> and the OECD/DAC Better Criteria for Better Evaluation<sup>3</sup>. The evaluators shall specify how quality assurance will be handled by them during the evaluation process.

## 2.7 Time schedule and deliverables

It is expected that a time and work plan is presented in the tender and further detailed in the inception report. The evaluation shall be carried out between May and September 2025. The timing of any field visits, surveys and interviews need to be settled by the evaluator in dialogue with the main stakeholders during the inception phase.

The table below lists key deliverables for the evaluation process. Alternative deadlines for deliverables may be suggested by the consultant and negotiated during the inception phase.

Deliverables	Participants	Deadlines
1. Start-up meeting virtual	BIRN Macedonia relevant team, Evaluators  Embassy of Sweden in Skopje	Tentative 13 May 2025
2. Inception phase	Evaluators	
3. Draft inception report		Tentative 3 June 2025

<sup>1</sup> OECD/DAC (2010) Quality Standards for Development Evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> Sida OECD/DAC (2014) Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.

<sup>3</sup> OECD/DAC (2019) Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use.

4. Intended users read the draft inception report	Intended users, BIRN Macedonia and Embassy of Sweden in Skopje  Sida HQ	
5. Deadline for comments from intended users to evaluators		Tentative 17 June 2025
6. Inception meeting virtual	BIRN Macedonia relevant team, Evaluators	Tentative 19 June 2025
7. Revise inception report	Evaluators	
8. Deadline final inception report		Tentative 26 June 2025
9. Data collection, analysis, report writing and quality assurance	Evaluators	
10. Debriefing/validation workshop (meeting)	BIRN Macedonia relevant team, Evaluators	Tentative 31 July 2025
11. Draft report writing phase	Evaluators	
12. Submitting of the draft evaluation report		Tentative 21 August 2025
13. Intended users read and comment the draft report	Intended users, BIRN Macedonia and Embassy of Sweden in Skopje  Sida HQ	
14. Deadline to submit comments to evaluators		Tentative 11 September 2025
15. Final report writing phase	Evaluators	
16. Final evaluation report		Tentative 25 September 2025
17. Workshop/discussion	BIRN Macedonia relevant team, Evaluators  Embassy of Sweden in Skopje	Tentative end of September 2025

**The inception report** will form the basis for the continued evaluation process and shall be approved by BIRN Macedonia before the evaluation proceeds to implementation. The inception report should be written in English and cover evaluability issues and interpretations of evaluation questions, present the evaluation approach/methodology *including how a utilization-focused and gender-responsive approach will be ensured*, methods for data collection and analysis as well as the full evaluation design, including an *evaluation matrix* and a *stakeholder mapping/analysis*. A clear distinction between the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection shall be made. All limitations to the methodology and methods shall be made explicit and the consequences of these limitations discussed.

A specific time and work plan, including number of hours/working days for each team member, for the remainder of the evaluation should be presented. The time plan shall allow space for reflection and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

**The final report** shall be written in English and be professionally proof read. The executive summary should be maximum three pages.

The report shall clearly and in detail describe the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection and analysis and make a clear distinction between the two. The report shall describe how the utilization-focused approach has been implemented i.e. how intended users have participated in and contributed to the evaluation process and how methodology and methods for data collection have created space for reflection, discussion and learning between the intended users. Furthermore, the gender-responsive approach shall be described and reflected in the findings, conclusions and recommendations along with other identified and relevant cross-cutting issues. Limitations to the methodology and methods and the consequences of these limitations for findings and conclusions shall be described.

Evaluation findings shall flow logically from the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions should be substantiated by findings and analysis. Evaluation questions shall be clearly stated and answered in the executive summary and in the conclusions. Recommendations and lessons learned should flow logically from conclusions and be specific, directed to relevant intended users and categorized as a short-term, medium-term and long-term.

The report should be no more than 35 pages excluding annexes. If the methods section is extensive, it could be placed in an annex to the report. Annexes shall always include the Terms of Reference, the Inception Report, the stakeholder mapping/analysis and the Evaluation Matrix. Lists of key informants/interviewees shall only include personal data if deemed relevant (i.e. when it is contributing to the credibility of the evaluation) based on a case-based assessment by the evaluator and the commissioning unit/embassy. The inclusion of personal data in the report must always be based on a written consent. The final report shall be approved by the Embassy of Sweden in Skopje and BIRN Macedonia.

## 2.8 Evaluation team qualification

Applications from individuals, team of individuals or companies are eligible to submit offers.

The evaluator/s should fulfil the following criteria:

- Good knowledge of the media and political context in North Macedonia
- At least 5 years of working experience in monitoring and evaluation
- Knowledge of development perspectives and OECD/DAC standards
- Very good skills in writing and speaking English
- Be able to communicate clearly and effectively
- Strong time-management and organizational skills
- To be able to ensure confidentiality of project information
- Proven experience in evaluating similar interventions on media programmes and/or non-for-profit organizations
- Experience/knowledge on google analytics

It is important that the competencies of the individual team members are complimentary. It is highly recommended that evaluation consultants from North Macedonia are included in the team, as they often have contextual knowledge that is of great value to the evaluation.

The evaluators must be independent from the evaluation object and evaluated activities and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

Please note that in the tender, the tenderers must propose a team leader that takes part in the evaluation by at least 30% of the total evaluation team time including core team members, specialists and all support functions, but excluding time for the quality assurance expert.

## 2.9 Financial and human resources

The maximum budget amount available for the evaluation is 120 000 SEK

Invoicing and payment shall be managed according to the following:

- Approval of the Inception Report: 30% of the amount; and
- Approval of the final report: 70% of the amount

The contact person at BIRN Macedonia is the executive director. The contact person should be consulted if any problems arise during the evaluation process.

Relevant documentation and contacts will be provided by BIRN Macedonia executive director and finance and operations manager.

The evaluator will be required to arrange the logistics such as booking interviews, preparing visits, conducting surveys including any necessary security arrangements.

## Application Process

The evaluator / team of evaluators is expected to submit a proposal, including:

- Letter of Interest, summarizing previous relevant experiences with this call
- Technical proposal, including a summary of steps/approaches to be implemented for the successful fulfilment of the assignment and division of work between experts (max. 2 pages);
- Financial offer for this assignment



- CV of the expert/s;
- The contacts of two possible references.

If the application will be submitted by a team of experts, please note that the tenderers must propose a team leader that takes part in the evaluation by at least 30% of the total evaluation team time including core team members, specialists and all support functions. It is important that the competencies of the individual team members are complimentary.

The deadline for submission of applications is **May 2nd, 2025**.

All applications should be sent by email to the following address: [birnmk@birnnetwork.org](mailto:birnmk@birnnetwork.org), indicating the title of the TORs in the Subject.