

# Kopče

## The Buckles That Hold Us Together



The gradual recovery of the Balkans from the devastating consequences of human disagreements of the recent past is still ongoing. Step by step, hopes are to get closer to European ideals. Yet, despite investments in the revitalization of society and its mechanisms, the economic aspect of this region has been stagnant for a long time. With the high unemployment rate, a labor drain, low average incomes, but extremely high living costs, we often wonder how, in fact, the price standard is aligned with living standards. Do retirees, students or socially disadvantaged families have to calculate when fulfilling their needs, and choose priorities, because it is financially impossible to cover everything?

Kopče (Kopče; Buckles) operate in the field of social entrepreneurship in Skopje, trying to mitigate the impact of the aforementioned problems. This effort, initiated by the Red Cross

of The Republic of North Macedonia, offers an efficient system of distribution of well kept second-hand clothes, shoes, bedding and other necessities to people in need and very affordable prices of clothes for all citizens. The goal is to preserve the dignity of low-income people, who are often ashamed to ask for help. Here you can donate, buy, but also get clothes for free with a coupon.



## Everyone can take part

Both individuals who believe that giving away an item of clothing will make another person happy and those who cannot afford to shop in shopping malls, often visit the second-hand shop Kopče. It truly does not matter who are the ones who help, and to whom the help is intended. All are united in the noble intention of creating a happier and more empathetic society in which it is not a shame to ask for support.

This social enterprise significantly reduces the ubiquitous problem of lack of employment opportunities, especially when it comes to members of marginalized groups. Kopče offer employment to socially disadvantaged persons without a permanent income, women from vulnerable groups and others who need support, thus promoting humanity, solidarity and care for others.

One department of the enterprise manages sewing and embroidery workshops, thus initiating the training of employees who work with donated clothes.

## Challenges and blessings

Hristina, a responsible associate at the Kopče social enterprise, says that they always try to establish healthy and quality communication with customers, other companies and associates. The coordinator of this effort, Aleksandra, who communicates with potential donors, corporations and local community representatives, as well as government bodies, informs us of the numerous positive experiences. Of course, there are often certain challenges present too.

"It is hard to be a social enterprise in an environment where people are convinced that everything the Red Cross supplies must be completely free."

She tells us about their daily efforts to raise motivation and awareness about donating clothes that citizens no longer use, as well as about buying second-hand items, which a certain layer of society, unfortunately, still considers humiliating. It is they who do not believe that clothes should be bought when there is a need. They rather try to follow trends. However, she believes that promoting responsible spending habits will slowly transform North Macedonian society into an economically and environmentally conscientious community, and contribute to the quality of life of all citizens.

One of the most beautiful experiences they had, says Aleksandra, was working with a group of young web developers, aged ten to thirteen, who came forward with their own initiative and desire to create a website for Kopče and successfully completed the task. Another nice experience was a cooperation with a coffee shop in Skopje, where every donor would get free coffee. She tells us that those experiences were very motivating and inspiring.



Lately, this business has been growing, where more and more people are donating, but also buying clothes. About 20 tons of clothes are donated to the Red Cross annually, and Kopče invented a way to utilize unusable items as well and turn them into material for the patchwork technique. Increase in the number of donors, customers, but also employees lays the foundation for the sustainability of this enterprise. They plan to increase the number of stores soon and thus create more jobs, but also to increase the customer service capacity.

## The symbolism of buckles

Similar to the connective tissue of the body, there are forces of attraction in society that bring together complete strangers in one sublime intention. That mission, for our friends from North Macedonia, is to be a part of the society where everyone appreciates what is provided to them, but also contributes to the community in accordance with their abilities. That maintains the necessary balance of our surroundings, where we stand firmly on our feet while holding hands.

In times where about 90 million tons of clothing and textile waste is thrown away every year, let us set aside items that are usable, in good condition, and donate them to a social enterprise, or help others in our society. Let us not throw away clothes just because we don't like them anymore. That is not luxury, it is arrogance!

"I believe in the potential and strength of each person individually in creating positive social change. We are the ones who need to stand up and create that change!" - says Aleksandra in her strong unifying message.

For more information on "Kopče" d.o.o., see: [facebook.com/kopce](https://facebook.com/kopce).

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