Project “Support to Electoral Reforms in Macedonia”, Main Phase 1

**Description of project activities**

**Overall Objective/Goal:**

Democratic and credible election processes that facilitate political participation and social integration by enabling voters to select their representatives and hold them accountable.

**Project Outcomes**

Outcome 1: Strengthened institutions conduct fair and efficient election processes

Outcome 2: Internally democratized political parties present citizen-oriented policies and election programs

Outcome 3: Empowered citizens hold political parties and elected officials accountable

**Outcome 1: Strengthened institutions conduct fair and efficient election processes**

***Strategy: Electoral administration performance can be enhanced through the introduction of sustainable policies, systems and tools, while ensuring election officials have the knowledge, the capacity and the resources to successfully implement them.***

Macedonia has a three-tiered election administration, comprised of the SEC, 80 MECs and the commission of the City of Skopje, and some 3,500 EBs. The SEC is supported by a permanent secretariat and 34 regional offices and branches. The tasks of the secretariat are distributed among sectors and departments, covering voters’ services, legal and education affairs, information and communications technology and financial affairs.

**Result 1.1. SEC implements strengthened innovative systems and tools for election management;**

* + 1. Feasibility study to identify most appropriate software solutions for the SEC and development of the respective software application(s)
    2. Roadmap for possible introduction of fingerprint identification of voters during elections
    3. Creation of an election portal

Based on previous experience in developing and providing technical assistance to the SEC in using software applications that help manage various elections operations and in consultation with the SEC during the Inception Phase, a ***thorough assessment of the existing software solutions*** that the SEC is implementing will be required. This will help define priority needs and resources.

In response to a requirement within the Electoral Code, the SEC has committed in its Strategic Plan to undertake a ***comprehensive study on practical implications and costs of introducing fingerprint biometric technologies to register and identify voters***. The country believes that such technology may help build trust in the voter list and elections in general.

Based on its worldwide experience in using new technologies to increase transparency and trust in election processes, and to make information more accessible to all voters, IFES will engage with the SEC on creating an ***election portal.*** These efforts will contribute to improving transparency and inclusivity through new communication tools.

**Result 1.2 Officials at central level administering key election processes acquire greater practical knowledge and skills;**

* + 1. Development of SEC Strategic Plan
    2. Capacity building for the SEC at Headquarters (HQ) and its Regional Offices (ROs)
    3. Proposals for improved methodology in the selection/appointment of EBs and MECs members

Having assisted the SEC in the development of its 2017-2020 Strategic Plan and with an eye on long-term results, IFES will help the SEC review the implementation and realization of goals set in the current plan and will partner with the SEC on ***strategic planning*** for its 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. This will also help in identifying needs under the potential Main Phase 2.

Drawing on decades of experience across the region, IFES will be prepared to provide ***studies and proposals of appointment processes in comparative country contexts***. IFES will also offer support to the SEC to introduce measures aligning with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, such as publishing lists of prospective MEC and EB members and enabling third party verification of the computer algorithm for member selection.

**Result 1.3 Improved education materials, tools and methodologies increase performance of election administration;**

* + 1. Development of feasibility study for a possible setting up a training academy
    2. Assistance in creating the institutional and legislative framework for the academy
    3. Development of online courses on different aspects of the electoral process
    4. Development and printing of user friendly education materials

IFES will assist with the development of a ***feasibility study that would explore the possibilities for creating a training academy***. Based on the findings and the SEC decision, as well as availability of resources, additional support will be defined.

MEC members and a majority of EB members are drawn from the list of public officials and are due to be replaced before the local elections in 2021. IFES will explore possibilities of cooperation with MISA to create ***standing e-learning modules for MEC and EB members***.[[1]](#footnote-1) E-learning as a training tool can increase knowledge and capacity for a large number of individuals while reducing the need for costly face-to-face trainings.

IFES can provide additional support to EBs by creating step-by-step guides on completing results forms. Political parties’ complaints were often undocumented and did not follow proper procedures of election dispute resolution, making the handling of such disputes difficult for lower-level commissions. In this sense, in the period in-between elections, and based on SEC guidance, IFES will provide technical assistance to the SEC education department to create ***supplementary education materials*** to augment the existing curricula, which will also be available as e-learning modules.

**Result 1.4 Informed stakeholder discussion and increased cooperation on electoral reform topics lead to policy actions;**

* + 1. BRIDGE workshops on a variety of election related topics
    2. Roundtables discussions with relevant stakeholders on electoral reform aspects

The SEC, MECs and EBs represent the main stakeholders in electoral administration and management, but there are other bodies which would benefit from increased knowledge on specific electoral issues. In this sense, IFES will use the ***BRIDGE methodology*** to develop a select series of customized workshops to respond to the most pressing needs of professional election administrative development.

Complementing the BRIDGE training, IFES will assist with the organization of ***roundtable discussions with relevant stakeholders*** on electoral reform topics in order to discuss existing challenges, gaps and ambiguities in the electoral process, and find ways to act upon identified solutions.

**Outcome 2: Internally democratized political parties present citizen-oriented policies and election programs.**

***Strategy: To ensure accountable governance, parties and elected officials must have the tools and resources to understand and prioritize citizens’ competing needs and to reach out to local communities. By adopting policy-based programs, political parties engage in making election processes more inclusive and representative toward overcoming the ethnocentric narrative.***

**Result 2.1. Political party policies are informed by improved party research, analytical and legal drafting skills;**

* + 1. Drafting and signing of MoUs with political parties
    2. Technical assistance in the set up and development of the political parties’ Research and Analytical Centers (RACs)
    3. Quantitative and qualitative research for parliamentary and local elections
    4. Training and capacity building for RACs on evidence based research and policy based programs and study mission(s)

In partnership with the four parties that have government-funded RACs, the project will provide ***technical assistance in the set-up of the institutions***, including establishing their mandate and ***building their capacities to undertake research, develop policies and educate their party constituents***. This assistance will include public opinion research at the national and local level, and other capacity building support on policy development.

IFES will provide training in conducting opinion polls, focus groups and other qualitative/quantitative research methods and data management. IFES will also mentor party RACs in their research and policy development and support meeting opportunities, including study missions in other countries.

**Result 2.2. Young political leaders are experienced in drafting policies that respond to citizens’ needs;**

* + 1. Training for political party youth on public policy development and outreach to communities;
    2. Technical assistance in developing and presenting policy briefs and study mission(s);

In parallel to the support provided to the RACs, the project will identify political party youth, especially women and those outside of Skopje to be actively engaged in policy-based programs. Through an ***intensive training program on policy development and outreach to communities,*** young men and women will increase their knowledge on how to identify a problem and formulate a policy response.

The project will provide ***coaching and targeted assistance*** in developing such briefs. Furthermore, following presentations of policy briefs to citizens, authorities and civil society, participants will develop realistic action plans—identifying potential allies, resources and obstacles in their implementation.

**Result 2.3. Political parties increase outreach to local communities, including vulnerable groups to advance policy solutions;**

* + 1. Support to Innovative Initiatives for political party youth, especially women
    2. Implementation of actions to reach out to local communities and vulnerable groups
    3. Town hall discussions
    4. Bi-annual conferences on policy development and implementation

The knowledge and experience acquired by the RACs and the party youth will be put into action through “Policy Pilot” initiatives. Through in-kind support and a Innovative Initiatives program, and in cooperation with NYCM, IFES will help graduates to defray basic costs or jumpstart innovative ideas and specific activities identified in the action plans. Through such initiatives, the project will support communication and outreach efforts by the political parties to local communities and vulnerable groups.

At the end of each cycle of implementation, NYCM and IFES will collect ***success stories*** from participants to report on the impact and adjust the program, if necessary. The project will also hold a ***bi-annual conference*** in Skopje.

Furthermore, the project will undertake ***town hall-like discussions at the local level***, bringing party candidates and elected officials together with vulnerable and ethnic minority communities. The activity is integrated with community outreach activities under Outcome 3.

**Result 2.4. Awareness about women representation and participation in electoral and political processes furthers;**

* + 1. Technical assistance to the SEC in revising candidates’ registration instruction to ensure gender representation
    2. Analysis, debates, proposals on women representation and participation in elections

While the project will focus on public policy training for both aspiring male and female leaders, IFES will also attempt to address ***technical barriers that undermine women’s participation*** in electoral and political processes in the country. In this sense, IFES will develop an analysis of these obstacles to highlight policies and practices that will improve conditions for women’s participation.

Furthermore, the project will support ***outreach and discussions*** with the SEC, MoJ, parliament, political parties, civil society and other key stakeholders on changes to electoral regulations and the Electoral Code regarding these issues.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Result 2.5 Political parties are better equipped to comply with legal requirements of elections;**

2.5.1 Crash course and workshops for smaller political parties

In partnership with the SEC, IFES will help build the capacity of political parties to comply with legal requirements of the participants in elections. This will include design and delivery of a ***training program on topics following the election calendar***, beginning with candidate submissions and ending with the submission of election complaints and appeals, and financial reporting obligations.

**Outcome 3: Empowered citizens hold political parties and elected officials accountable.**

***Strategy: In order to hold parties accountable, citizens need better information, increased capacities and inclusive forums to make their interests and demands heard, especially at the local level.***

**Result 3.1. Profile demographic reports are developed for more effective civic education;**

3.1.1 Research to inform design and delivery of civic education

3.1.2 Presentation of research results/findings

To support a variety of civic and voter education activities, IFES and NYCM, in close cooperation with the SEC’s Education Department, propose conducting ***comprehensive evidence-based research to provide unique respondent data*** and insights to test voter priorities, rigidities and responsiveness to motivating stimuli. The quantitative research will be complemented by focus groups and other studies, and will produce data that contributes to improving both the effectiveness and the efficacy of voter and civic education campaigns.

The findings will also be shared with political parties at the local and central levels, and their RACs, seeking to improve voter outreach. In addition, in close consultation with the parties, these research activities will determine pilot groups that can be targeted with policy and outreach initiatives.

**Result 3.2. Active citizens and civil society are mobilized to promote civic education, inclusion, monitoring and advocacy in local communities;**

3.2.1 Selection, training and capacity building of community mobilizers

3.2.2 Selection and coaching to NYCM mentors for community mobilizers

3.2.3 Organization of international/regional exchange/ study mission(s)

Based on a set of criteria and requirements, defined together with NYCM and through an open call to NYCM member organizations, other civil society actors, media representatives and citizens active in their communities, a group of activists will be selected to serve as ***local community mobilizers*** throughout the country. These individuals will undergo a series of ***trainings and workshops***, throughout the duration of the project, to further develop skills in public participation and community engagement, monitoring of party platforms and government performance or interacting with elected representatives and/or advocacy.

Community mobilizers will receive ***coaching and*** ***mentorship from NYCM***, through its regional offices and member organizations around the country, which will support them in developing and implementing the acquired knowledge and skills, when undertaking monitoring and advocacy initiatives. IFES and NYCM will explore opportunities to learn about new tools and approaches for increased community participation through ***study mission(s) and participation in events abroad***. The network of community mobilizers will be present throughout the country, especially in local communities and reaching out to marginalized groups in society.

**Result 3.3. Innovative mechanisms help civil society and citizens to monitor political promises, rhetoric and performance;**

3.3.1 Development of monitoring matrix and of capacities to report on monitoring findings;

3.3.2 Technical assistance for creating monitoring tools – video production, project website,

3.3.3 Presentation of results from monitoring

At the beginning of Main Phase 1, IFES and NYCM will identify key areas of interest to local communities and based on that will develop a comprehensive ***monitoring matrix and methodology*** for collecting and analyzing relevant data with regard to party programs and candidates’ promises during elections and government performance post-election.

Complementing this activity will be ***spot reporting on implementing campaign promises*** in the form of ***short videos*** disseminated through social media and a dedicated platform. Stories will focus on how elected officials are implementing promised platforms and/or where governments are doing well or poorly. These easily digestible stories will be uploaded also to the ***dedicated project website*** or YouTube channel and disseminated through social media, potentially reaching many viewers across Macedonia in a short amount of time.

Findings from the monitoring exercise and local stories will be presented to the public, political parties and relevant state institutions.

**Result 3.4. Greater citizen engagement, including of vulnerable groups leads to improved political accountability and transparency in local communities**

3.4.1 Implementation of small grants scheme for community mobilizers actions;

3.4.2 Town halls discussions with vulnerable groups

3.4.3 Bi-annual conferences on community mobilization

Through ***small grants***, NYCM and IFES will support initiatives that propose innovative approaches and tools led by community mobilizers to involve the community. This would include vulnerable and non-voters groups, such as rural women, ethnic minorities and youth and first-time voters to become more involved in election and political processes.

Activities may include voter registration drives, education on parties’/candidates’ platforms or efforts to bring community members together with political parties and elected leaders through ***town hall*** activities (described in Outcome 2). The town hall discussions can be a great opportunity for NYCM and the community mobilizers to present their findings involving elected party representatives and together with citizens to review the implementation of campaign promises and party platforms.

Lessons learned and success stories from grantee initiatives will be disseminated through a series of workshops, events and ***bi-annual conferences*** ***on community mobilization*** highlighting this project.

1. The Ministry for Information Society and Administration (MISA) currently maintains an online portal for public officials used for a variety of training and information purposes. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Analytical research conducted under Result 2.1 will help further this objective. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)