**Support to Electoral Reforms in North Macedonia**

**Background**

**“Support to Electoral Reforms in North Macedonia”** is a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and its partner National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM).

The Project aims toward more inclusive and democratic election processes managed by enhanced organization of elections, closely monitored by citizens. A three-fold strategic approach has been designed to: 1. Build the capacities of the election administration to administer elections; 2. Support more citizen-oriented policies and party programmes through policy dialogue, evidence-based research and policies 3. Empower citizens to hold parties and elected officials accountable to their promises.

The Project responds to emerging priorities and developments in the political and electoral arena, while supporting country’s efforts towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

The proposed interventions require political will and commitment of all relevant actors – institutions, political parties, civil society and voters - to improve behavior and capacities and to adopt democratic principles of participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability.

**Overall Goal**

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

**Main Outcomes**

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

**Key activities under Outcome 1:** the performance of the election administration will be enhanced through institution building and tailored assistance to the SEC[[1]](#footnote-1)***,*** improving the knowledge and skills of election bodies at lower levels (MECs and EBs)[[2]](#footnote-2). It also entails introducing sustainable policies, systems and tools (including software and hardware), and ensuring that election officials acquire knowledge, capacity and resources to successfully implement their responsibilities.

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

**Key activities under** **Outcome 2**: political parties shall engage in internal democratization that will lead toward citizen-oriented policies and election programmes. Tailor made approach will be designed for each political party to increase their capacities and resources (especially for their RACs[[3]](#footnote-3) and youth) to further advance the conduct of evidence-based research and policy based programmes that respond to citizen’s needs. This outcome will also include policy dialogue in which the Embassy of Switzerland in North Macedonia will play an active role supported by the implementing organization.

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

**Key activities under** **Outcome 3:** citizens will be provided with opportunities for increasing their capacities to make their interests and demands heard. Through the network of the so-called “Community Mobilizers”[[4]](#footnote-4), local communities will be exposed not only to information but also to opportunities to learn about elections, candidates and their programs, interact with public officials using various informative materials, Town Hall meetings, dedicated platform, social media, etc. The Project will develop mechanisms for CSOs[[5]](#footnote-5) and citizens to monitor political parties’ electoral promises and their performance.

**Beneficiaries**

**The three-level election administration**, comprising of **SEC**, **80** **MECs** and the election commission of the City of Skopje, and around **3,500** **EBs** will be the direct target group impacted by the project through training, coaching and implementation of policies. The political parties will also be at the receiving end of the project. However, main beneficiaries are the voters, citizens of North Macedonia, especially **youth, women, and vulnerable groups[[6]](#footnote-6)** who will benefit from increased inclusiveness of political and electoral processes, and greater awareness about their needs, challenges and barriers in the election process.

Beside the election administration, the Project targets a number of key stakeholders in the electoral process to improve their knowledge and understanding of the electoral process, and international good practices. These include:

* Government agencies such as Ministry of Information, Society and Administration; Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services; State Statistical Office; Ombudsperson Institution; State Audit Office; Ministry of Internal Affairs; Ministry of Justice, etc.
* political parties;
* civil society organizations;
* voters and citizens

**Gender and Governance:** The project will respond to national strategies and policies[[7]](#footnote-7) aiming to ensure balanced gender representation at all levels and in all aspects of its implementation. Among others, the project will provide support in revisiting candidates’ registration process and promote equal gender representation. Also, it will assist in identifying and addressing technical barriers that undermine women’s participation in political and electoral processes. CSOs will be supported to increase their capacities for monitoring and advocating for greater equity in society.

Considering country’s sensitive political and inter-ethnic relations, the project will support political actors and decision makers in their efforts towards increased inter-ethnic cohesion and will promote measures for better social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups of citizens.

**Sustainability**:The proposed intervention aims at creating sustainable policies, tools and systems that will contribute to increased knowledge, capacities and resources of key stakeholders to improve their performance. The immediate ‘products’ of the project as well as enhanced resources and skills will remain with the target groups. In addition, the change of behavior and beliefs will ensure durability and sustainability of the results of the project.

The interventions also entail creation of a network of community mobilizers across the country, which will contribute to the sustainability of the results. The knowledge and tools developed to address the evidence-based research and policy based party programmes will be embedded within the RACs of the political parties. Formal anchoring of the policies, tools and systems will be sought for at a later stage with relevant state institutions and universities for a wide range of education modules and materials to be used as teaching material.

**Period of Implementation**

The Electoral Reforms project will be implemented in the period of 10 years, starting from July 2019 until June 2029.

The **Main Phase 1** will take place during the period - **July 2019** and **June 2023**. The activities described above refer to this phase.

Main Phase 2 is planned to be implemented during 2023-2027, followed by an Exit Phase, which will last until 2029.

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**About IFES:** Founded in 1987, IFES is a global, non-partisan organization dedicated to strengthening genuine and transparent political and electoral processes in countries around the world. In North Macedonia, IFES has worked extensively with the State Election Commission since 2016, contributing to improvements and consolidation of the conduct of electoral processes.

**About NYCM**: Established in 2013, NYCM unites 48 organizations that advocate for youth rights in public, political, cultural and business affairs. NYCM represents young people regardless of their socio-economic status, gender, race, ethnic/cultural background, political or religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity or other differences. NYCM’s diverse membership brings together organizations working at European, national and local level.

1. SEC - State Election Commission [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. MECs - Municipal Election Commissions; EBs - Electoral Boards [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Research and Analytical Centres [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Community mobilizers are activists from civil society organizations, media, youth or active citizens from local communities that will be selected through an open call. They will undergo capacity building to further develop their skills in public participation, advocacy, monitoring of party platforms and government performance and interacting with elected representatives. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Civil Society Organizations [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Vulnerable groups in this project include people with disabilities, rural and/or remote population [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. National Strategy for Equality and Anti-discrimination, draft National Action Plan for Gender Equality, Strategy for Cooperation of the Government with the Civil Society, National Youth Strategy and National Strategy for Equalization of Rights of People with Disabilities [↑](#footnote-ref-7)