

Support to Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans



The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is implementing the Support to Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans project to support institutions and civil society in their efforts to follow-up on election observation recommendations. The project scope covers the areas related to election management, voter registration, the role and work of the media during election campaigns, the ability of parties and candidates to freely campaign and the capacity and independence of electoral dispute resolution bodies.

Five thematic areas

Support to local and international partners in their efforts to:

- Enhance the capacity of election management bodies to administer elections effectively, impartially and transparently;
- Increase the accuracy of voter lists and voter registration processes, including through effective co-ordination with population registers and public scrutiny of voter lists;
- Improve the knowledge and capacity of media regulation bodies to monitor and regulate media conduct during elections, thereby contributing to a pluralistic and fair campaign environment;
- Enhance election campaign rules and practice so as to allow parties and candidates to present their views freely without administrative action, violence or intimidation, and with campaign finance disclosure and enforcement mechanisms promoting increased transparency and accountability;
- Improve the capacity and independence of electoral dispute resolution bodies, including election management bodies and courts, to effectively adjudicate election disputes, thereby contributing to electoral integrity, public confidence in the election process, and the rule of law.

Focus

The three-year project is funded by the European Union and the Austrian Development Agency and began its work in January 2021. It offers assistance to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The project also offers assistance in Kosovo.* The activities are based on the recommendations of prior ODIHR election observation missions. Elections in Kosovo are observed by the European Union and, in this case, the recommendations of the European Union are being used.

The project builds on the work carried out by the Support to Elections in the Western Balkans project implemented between 2017 and 2020. While through the first project phase ODIHR's support led to some progress in addressing electoral recommendations, further assistance is needed to comprehensively consider and effectively address the recommendations.

“Addressing recommendations from ODIHR and European Union election observation activities is an important step that should be taken to improve the stability of institutions, safeguard democracy, and enhance public confidence in electoral processes. These fundamental goals are what guides ODIHR's work to support our local and international partners working on elections in the Western Balkans.”

Matteo Mecacci
Director, OSCE Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights

Activities

The project works to support partners through topical regional workshops, in-depth legal and technical assistance, the exchange of good practice among practitioners at the regional and sub-regional levels, and raising awareness about electoral reforms at regional and relevant beneficiary level. The project consists of a series of interlinked activities and allows flexibility to adapt to the results of consultative processes and to respond to new requests for assistance.



Inclusive Reform and Partnership

Lasting reform must be inclusive and driven by the stakeholders of the election process. This project supports existing reform mechanisms that involve civil society and other relevant stakeholders. Attention also focuses on engaging politically under-represented groups, including women, national minorities and people with disabilities.

This project works closely with international organizations to ensure activities are complementary to other ongoing support. This involves close co-operation and consultation with OSCE Field Operations, European Union Delegations and endorsers of the United Nations' *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* (2005).

Background

At the 1999 Istanbul Summit, OSCE participating States committed to follow up on ODIHR electoral assessments and recommendations. They also recognized the assistance that ODIHR can provide in developing and implementing electoral legislation. ODIHR has consistently supported the effective follow-up of recommendations and the 2016 *Handbook on the Follow-up of Electoral Recommendations* outlines ODIHR's approach in this important area. The EU, recognizing the importance of democratic reforms for European integration aspirations in the region, has also noted the need to support the follow-up of ODIHR recommendations.

* All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

For more information about the project and to access the project library, please visit: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/wb> or contact wb-project@odihr.pl



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