



# PROJECT FACTSHEET

Western Balkans May 2018

## THE MEMBERS OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS WORKING FOR DEMOCRACY



Citizens are encouraged to get involved in the development of inclusion policies via community forums. © SDC

With the «Empowering Municipal Councils» project, Switzerland's international cooperation is helping municipal councils in Macedonia to become effective local authorities whose community policies take into account the interests of ordinary citizens.

The decentralisation process set in motion by the Ohrid Framework Agreement which ended the armed conflict in 2001 handed new responsibilities over to municipalities, in particular at the level of education, culture and social and public services. However, the 81 local governments lack the funds and human resources to fulfil these tasks and meet the needs of their citizens. The local governments' dependence on central government funding in a wide range of areas is also reflected at the political level, and significantly limits their ability to pursue effective and citizen-oriented community policies independently.

### MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS' ROLE IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The members of the municipal councils play an important role in decentralization processes and local democracy. However, they lack the skills, expertise and information to assume their duties effectively, and are not independent enough of the central government. The councillors often approve policies handed down by the executive without close scrutiny or public consultation. This situation leads to a lack of transparency and accountability towards constituencies, which undermines democratic governance at local level.

The project aims to improve the councillors' autonomy and expertise, to enable them to fulfil their oversight, legislative and representation roles in a participative, responsible and transparent way. This will lead to better management of financial resources and more effective policies that reflect citizens' priorities and actual needs.

### TRANSPARENT, INCLUSIVE POLICIES

The SDC aims to support over 300 municipal councillors (a third of which are women) in 24 municipalities (of a total of 1,327 councillors in 81 municipalities). The efforts are designed to address:

- Councillors' lack of expertise and knowledge in data analysis to allow them to monitor public spending;
- Low levels of engagement by councillors in the institutional processes;
- Ineffective oversight of the local government and administration by municipal councillors and inadequate inclusion of citizens.

Thanks to specific training and the sharing of experiences between peers, councillors will gain a better

understanding of their role and more expertise and independence from the executive government, allowing them to play a more active part in municipal governance. Specific outcomes:

- Municipal councils become more autonomous and able to stand up to the executive and to political parties in order to provide oversight and represent their constituents;
- Municipal policies are developed in such a way as to put citizens' interests first, improving the transparency and accountability of the municipal councils;
- The municipal councils operate in an improved legal and institutional framework supported by an effective network of councillors.

The project places particular emphasis on the needs of marginalised groups, to promote social inclusion through municipal policies. In time, the project will make available the financial resources to support activities to encourage the inclusion of marginalised groups. The municipal councils must engage citizens in the planning process through community forums. A more active role and investment by the equal opportunities and inter-ethnic relations parliamentary committees is particularly encouraged in order to promote inclusion.

## THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

### NAME

Empowering Municipal Councils

### DEPARTMENT

SDC – Cooperation with Eastern Europe

### TOPIC

Democracy, Decentralisation

### COUNTRY/REGION

Macedonia

### PARTNERS

UNDP

Association of Finance Officers of Macedonia

Association of Units of Local Self-government - (ZELS)

### BACKGROUND

In Macedonia, the members of the municipal councils play an important role in decentralised governance and local democracy. However, they lack the expertise, knowledge and information to assume their duties effectively, and are not independent enough of the central government

### OBJECTIVE

Thanks to specific training and peer coaching, councillors will gain a better understanding of their role and more expertise and independence from the executive government, allowing them to play a more active part in municipal governance

### TARGET GROUPS

Over 300 municipal councillors (a third of whom are women) in 24 municipalities. The project places particular emphasis on the needs of marginalised groups, to promote social inclusion through municipal policies

### DURATION

Phase 1: 01.07.2016 – 30.06.2020

### BUDGET

Phase 1: CHF 4'000'000

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Switzerland's activities in Macedonia:  
<https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/countries/macedonia.html>

Decentralisation  
<https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/themes-sdc/state-economic-reforms/decentralization.html>

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