



IFES supports citizens' right to participate in free and fair elections. Our independent expertise strengthens electoral systems and builds local capacity to promote sustainable democracy.

Middle East and North Africa

Overview

As the global leader in democracy promotion, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) advances good governance and democratic rights by providing technical assistance to election officials; empowering the underrepresented to participate in the political process; and applying field-based research to improve the electoral cycle. For over 30 years, IFES has worked in more than a dozen countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, from Morocco to Lebanon to Iraq, and in over 145 countries worldwide.

Current Programs

Egypt: 2005-Present

IFES provides long-term, nonpartisan support to election management bodies in Egypt to increase their capacity to administer national and local elections, as well as referendums. IFES also conducts activities with local partners in Egypt, including think tanks and universities, to increase public understanding of electoral processes and voter rights and responsibilities, and to support dialogue on electoral reform. IFES has collaborated closely with the High Election Commission, the Presidential Election Commission and various other government agencies. IFES also has played a key role supporting the implementation of elections and referendums in Egypt through the provision of electoral commodities, such as secure ballot boxes and tamper-evident seals to enhance electoral transparency and security, as well as through voter information campaigns.

Iraq: 2003-Present

IFES is currently supporting the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq (IHEC) in voter outreach efforts, election technology, and adapting voting processes to ensure displaced people can vote. IFES has worked in Iraq since 2003 to provide technical electoral assistance to key stakeholders and provided advice to Iraqi and international authorities on incorporating electoral processes into the post-conflict transition and establishing a legal and institutional framework for elections, including the creation of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI). IFES played a central role in the development of the IECI through technical assistance in key areas such as legal and regulatory issues, operational planning, voter education and public outreach, and finance and administration. IFES subsequently adopted an advisory role toward the IHEC, providing technical advice as requested by the IHEC on long-term strategic planning, institutional capacity building, and transfer of knowledge by improving the IHEC's voter education activities and conducting technical training to ensure the IHEC's long-term stability. Trainings emphasized legal and financial skills, international standards in internal management, and administrative processes. IFES also worked with Iraqi civil society organizations on community peace building and reduction of election violence as well as with organizations representing underrepresented populations to promote those populations' civic education and political participation.

Jordan: 2007-17

From 2007-17, IFES worked with Jordan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) to build its long-term institutional electoral management capacities and promote public confidence in the IEC through public outreach, while working to strengthen the legal framework for electoral administration in Jordan. IFES provided the IEC with technical assistance, including supporting the development of the IEC as a self-sustaining electoral management body; developed the IEC's strategic planning, executive procedures, and operational planning abilities; provided technical training and operational capacity building for electoral events in Jordan; and trained electoral officials on international electoral best practices and administration. IFES also provided critical Election Day procurement, training and operational support to national and subnational events.

Lebanon: 2005-13

In Lebanon, IFES worked to support electoral reform and improve the conduct of elections. IFES provided technical assistance and trainings to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) to strengthen the credibility and management of its election administration, and supported its voter education strategies. IFES also worked with the MoIM to develop an election violence risk assessment tool – which included a Lebanon-specific assessment methodology and a database to track and analyze violence risk indicators – and integrate the information and analysis into strategic planning for elections in Lebanon. For almost a decade, IFES sought to build the capacity of civil society in Lebanon to effectively advocate for reform on key electoral issues, women’s inclusion in the political process, campaign finance reform and the advancement of political rights of persons with disabilities. In 2018, IFES launched a new project that supports Lebanese civil society organizations’ ability to jointly advocate for meaningful political participation and prevent identity-based political discrimination and violence.

Libya: 2011-Present

Since 2011, IFES has provided essential technical support to the High National Election Commission (HNEC) and other government stakeholders to enhance the transparency, integrity and management of electoral and political processes. IFES builds the capacity of local partners to develop credible electoral administration procedures and systems, as well as promote a culture of democracy in Libya. For example, to improve access and opportunities for women to actively engage in public affairs, IFES has worked closely with the HNEC to establish a Gender Unit within the commission. The Gender Unit will be responsible for ensuring gender equality, sensitivity and women’s empowerment in electoral processes and within HNEC’s leadership structure.

Beyond electoral support, IFES engages with local organizations to raise awareness among Libyan women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups about the transition process to that they may be involved in decision-making processes. IFES supported the establishment of the Electoral Access Working Group, composed of members of disabled people’s organizations and disability activists, responsible for coordinating efforts to raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities in Libya. The working group has implemented several ground-breaking projects in cities across Libya, including assisting the HNEC with establishing accessible polling stations; carrying out a nationwide awareness campaign, “Zaykum Zayna;” and advocating for disability rights through international treaties. Additionally, IFES has established a network of Democracy Resource Centers (DRCs) throughout Libya operated by local civic society organizations. The DRCs provide opportunities for citizens to engage effectively with electoral stakeholders and disseminate important civic and voter information on behalf of the HNEC and other transitional government bodies.

IFES regularly works to increase understanding of electoral processes and promote public awareness and civic engagement among a wide variety of election stakeholders. For example, it recently trained a cadre of journalists on mechanisms for promoting inclusive media coverage and representation in Libya and is creating a smartphone application and website that enable civic discourse, discussion and exchange of information and ideas.

Morocco: 2007-17

IFES worked closely with the National Human Rights Council to improve the electoral legal framework in Morocco. This included analyses of and technical support on legal reform issues with respect to the country’s obligations to international agreements, trainings for poll station workers, development of an electoral lexicon in Moroccan sign language for persons with disabilities and creation of an interactive mobile phone application of the lexicon in French, Arabic and Moroccan sign language. Past projects have included work with civil society organizations to improve the status of women in Morocco and increase access to the political process for persons with disabilities.

Palestine: 2005-10

IFES provided direct technical assistance to the Central Election Commission (CEC) for the conduct of the presidential and legislative elections in 2005 and 2006 as well as four rounds of local elections in 2006. Between 2007 and 2010, IFES enhanced the CEC’s capacity through technical assistance and training, supported electoral preparations for the then-cancelled January 2010 general elections and July 2010 local elections, and analyzed opportunities for electoral reform. IFES also supported media training and the work of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Delimitation of Electoral Boundaries.

Syria: 2013-Present

The Syria program focuses on dual pillars seeking to foster participation and reengagement of Syrian citizens in transitional dialogue. One facet of the project supports Syrian citizens inside Syria through the creation of Civic Education Centers (CECs), safe spaces at established civil society organizations, while the other focuses on dialogue activities for Syrians living in Turkey and farther abroad. CECs serve as neutral venues for Syrians to engage one another on topics related to civic education, governance, conflict resolution, and reconciliation, and house educational and support resources. IFES has also partnered with a number of Syrian organizations in Gaziantep, Turkey, to host Musharaka, a forum focusing on grassroots level engagement and fostering participation and dialogue among the Syrian population in Turkey. Musharaka draws together Syrians from across the spectrum of stakeholders to engage on issues of citizenship, political transition and democratic norms. Musharaka maintains a permanent venue in Gaziantep and holds continual events under its four program streams: women, youth, adolescents and political dialogue.

Tunisia: 2011-Present

IFES has trained Tunisian civil society organizations, government officials, judges, lawyers and journalists on electoral topics since 2011. IFES provides technical support during the drafting and amendment of the legal framework for elections, and increases the capacity of stakeholders to adjudicate electoral disputes and monitor and control campaign finance. IFES has provided trainings and an e-learning curriculum to build the professionalism of electoral institutions, including the High Independent Election Authority, to administer credible elections that reflect the will of the people.

IFES' programming also aims to strengthen a culture of democracy in Tunisia through organized activities related to the International Day of Democracy, development of a civic education curriculum for primary school students and partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs to create a module on civic rights for illiterate adults. IFES and its civil society partners organize street theater performances, a mobile radio show and other outreach campaigns to better inform youth and marginalized communities – including illiterate Tunisians, women and black Tunisians – about elections and decentralization. Through IFES' Hack4Democracy camps, young Tunisians learn about their civic rights and responsibilities and collaborate to develop prototypes of technological tools that promote increased civic or political engagement. IFES also trains journalists from community radio stations and local newspapers to effectively provide information and analysis about elections.

Yemen: 1993-2015

In Yemen, IFES worked to improve the capacity of the Supreme Commission for Referendums and Elections (SCER), political party officials, and civil society officials to respond to the operational and strategic needs of electoral events. Between 2012 and 2015, IFES assisted a range of electoral stakeholders to effectively manage Yemen's national transition process and implement key Gulf Cooperation Council Agreement benchmarks. IFES provided capacity building assistance to government institutions, provided technical support during the drafting of the legal framework for elections, assisted the Constitutional Drafting Committee, and worked with partners to develop a framework for evaluating electoral disputes and drafting new electoral legislation. IFES also provided ongoing and comprehensive technical support to the SCER on a range of critical areas, including operational planning, election dispute resolution and development of a biometric voter registry.

Regional Projects

Enhancing Political Finance Transparency in the Arab Region: 2011-13

IFES and the Arab Region Parliamentarians Against Corruption conducted an innovative and detailed review of transparency and political campaign regulation in eight countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. The project enabled the development of a common methodological tool in target countries for monitoring political finance in order to promote civic oversight of and access to information on electoral fundraising and spending.

Political Participation of People with Disabilities in the Middle East and North Africa Region: 2004-09

IFES, in partnership with disability experts and civil society organizations from the Middle East and North Africa, undertook a series of awareness-raising activities in Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen and Morocco to promote greater political and electoral participation of citizens with disabilities. For example, in Lebanon, IFES partnered with the Lebanese Physical Handicap Union (LPHU) and the Youth Association for the Blind (YAB) for the “My Right Campaign” which conducted voter education and focus groups and consulted with election officials about electoral reform. It also prepared and distributed guides on disabilities and voting to the media, election observers and election workers. LPHU and YAB created model polling stations equipped with all the components needed to ensure people with disabilities could cast a vote. LPHU also worked with the Lebanon Alliance for Democratic Elections to train and deploy people with disabilities to serve as election monitors in the 2005 parliamentary elections. In Yemen, IFES partnered with the SCER to develop a voter education campaign encouraging people with disabilities to register as voters and to update voting facilities and operations to increase access. The SCER also established a Disability Unit to incorporate disability issues in its training of election committees, including how to improve access to voting centers and to polling stations within the centers.

The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa: 2008-12

“The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa” project measured gender gaps in political and civic participation, and worked with local partners to implement responsive advocacy campaigns. Over the course of the program, IFES partnered with local organizations to evaluate existing data on women’s issues and conduct surveys in Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen; held a total of 16 in-country trainings with local women’s nongovernmental organization (NGO) members focusing on data dissemination, advocacy techniques, finance and proposal writing and information graphics; funded local NGOs to conduct their own advocacy campaigns; and produced a series of topic briefs and country reports offering in-depth evaluations of the data collected and the status of women.

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