



International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems

# **Elections in North Macedonia**

## *2021 Local Elections*

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Eurasia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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## **When is Election Day?**

The Republic of North Macedonia will hold local elections on October 17, 2021. Voting will take place from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. in 3,480 polling stations across the country. One day prior to Election Day, voting will be organized for voters who are homebound; in prison, detention or home arrest; in non-family care institutions; internally displaced persons; and those in quarantine or self-isolation. If needed, second-round elections will be held on October 31, 2021.

## **Why are these elections important?**

The upcoming elections will provide an opportunity for voters to elect members of the municipal councils and mayors in the 80 municipalities and the City of Skopje, which will constitute the local government for the next four years.

Depending on the number of inhabitants in each of the 80 municipalities, the number of council members varies from nine to 33, while the City of Skopje has 45 members. The latter consists of ten municipalities (which are part of the overall number of 80 municipalities).

Local elections are primarily regulated by the 1991 Constitution and the 2006 Electoral Code. The Electoral Code has been amended substantially since 2017 and was most recently amended on September 15, 2021.

## **Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?**

Citizens are voting for mayors and municipal counselors in North Macedonia's 80 municipalities and the capital city, Skopje. Mayors are elected through a majoritarian system. If a mayoral candidate does not receive more than 50 percent of votes, a runoff election between the two highest finishers in the first round will be held two weeks after Election Day. In addition, for the mayoral election to be valid, one-third of registered voters must turn out for the first round. Municipal counselors are elected under the proportional representation system, with closed lists in each municipality. The turnout requirement does not apply to possible second rounds or municipal council elections. The allocation of seats for each municipal council will be determined via the d'Hondt method.<sup>1</sup>

## **Who is eligible to run as a candidate?**

Every citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia may run if he or she is at least 18 years old and has legal capacity. Citizens who have been sentenced to more than six months in prison

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<sup>1</sup> The d'Hondt method is used to determine seat allocation in party-list proportional representation. The total votes cast for each party in the electoral district (in the case of Serbia, throughout the country) is divided iteratively, first by one, then by two, then by three, etc., until the maximum numbers calculated corresponds to the number of seats that need to be distributed.

and have not started serving the sentence, and those in prison for committing a criminal offense, cannot run.

## **Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?**

There are no reserved seats for women. However, there is a quota requirement for the less represented gender on candidate lists in North Macedonia. The quota requires that at least 40 percent of the candidate list be comprised of the less represented gender and has a predetermined placement rule for candidates. At least one of every three places is reserved for women, with at least one in 10 additional places. Currently, only six mayors are female. For these local elections, 8.31 percent of candidates for mayors are women (25 of 299 candidates); 45 percent of candidates for municipal councils are women.

## **How long is the campaign period?**

The election campaign in North Macedonia is defined as a public presentation of candidates and their programs during the period before the elections. The election campaign lasts 20 days and ends 24 hours before Election Day. No campaigning is allowed on Election Day.

For these local elections, the campaign began on September 27, 2021, and will end on October 15. October 16 is a day of silence, free of campaigning. The political parties signed the Code for Fair and Democratic Elections on October 17.

## **What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?**

Individuals can donate up to 3,000 Euros (approximately \$3,390 USD) to election campaigns, and legal entities can donate up to 30,000 Euros (approximately \$33,897 USD). Media campaign expenditures from the state budget cannot exceed 2 Euros per registered voter for the municipality for the first round and an additional 1 Euro per registered voter in the municipality where the voting takes place for the second round, if it occurs.

## **What is the election management body? What are its powers?**

Elections in North Macedonia are organized by the State Election Commission (SEC). The SEC is composed of seven members, two of whom are women. The ruling majority and opposition political parties nominate SEC members, including a president from the opposition and a vice president from the ruling coalition.

The SEC is aided by lower-level commissions, which include 80 municipal election commissions (MECs) and the Election Commission of the City of Skopje, and approximately 3,480 electoral boards (EBs) in North Macedonia.

MECs and EBs have been recently appointed (2021). MECs comprise five members and their deputies, selected randomly from public servants, for a five-year term. EBs have a mandate of

four years and consist of three public servants, two political appointees and their deputies. The SEC, MECs and EBs are responsible for the complete administration of the electoral process, maintaining the voter list and voter registration, counting and tabulating results, resolving election disputes, managing election security arrangements and election observation and other duties specified by the government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Special electoral boards are created to facilitate the voting for persons in quarantine or self-isolation who express a desire to vote. Each special EB is composed of three health workers and representatives of political parties. They will wear protective equipment and follow the health protocols in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **How is the election management body protecting the elections and voters from COVID-19?**

The election administration will follow existing health protocols and Electoral Code provisions that regulate the conduct of elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, on Election Day, the members of municipal election commissions and electoral boards will wear protective gloves and masks, and all people in the polling station (voters, observers and authorized representatives of candidate lists) should maintain a physical distance of one to 1.5 meters, disinfect their hands upon entry and wear masks during voting.

### **What is the election management body doing to strengthen its technology and procedures to resist vulnerabilities and improve transparency and public trust in the electoral process?**

The State Election Commission (SEC) allows citizens to check their data in the online voter register. They can also go online to obtain information about the accessibility of individual polling stations<sup>2</sup> and see the candidate lists for mayors and municipal councils.<sup>3</sup> Municipal election commissions enter election results as soon as they are received from the electoral boards (EBs), and the results are transmitted immediately to the SEC website. This process facilitates voters' access to the electoral process, increases transparency and improves the timelines of and public trust in the election results. Voters and submitters of candidates' lists can also use an online platform to file complaints related to the voter list, the right to vote, voting, tabulation and determination of the results.

For the first time, North Macedonia will employ biometric voter identification on Election Day. This technology was introduced in the Electoral Code provisions in February 2020 and further specified in the April 2021 amendments. Biometric voter identification devices will be uploaded with voters' data for their respective polling stations and will be used to match voters'

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<sup>2</sup> <https://izbirackispisok.gov.mk/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://candidatelist.sec.mk/>

fingerprints to the fingerprints in the devices. The EB president or vice president will operate the devices. In case of technical challenges, the EB insert voters' fingerprints in the dedicated spaces on the printed voter lists.

In June 2021, with the support of a multi-stakeholder working group, the SEC developed its first Information and Communication Technology Strategy, which aims to analyze the state of the SEC's information system and determine the requirements for further development and increased cybersecurity during and between elections. These efforts will help make the overall process more efficient for the SEC and increase the transparency of the electoral process and the work of the election administration at all levels. The SEC is supported by a number of service providers and software developers in North Macedonia, including partners of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, to ensure robust, safe and effective use of election technology.

## **Who can vote in these elections?**

All citizens who are at least 18 years old on Election Day who possess a valid identification card or travel document have the right to vote. This includes all citizens who are temporarily employed or residing abroad, except those whom a court decision has deprived of legal capacity to vote. All citizens who are at least 18 years old, reside in North Macedonia and possess a valid identification card or passport (including an identity that expired between the announcement of elections and Election Day and a passport that expired after July 31, 2020) will be included in the voter register.

## **How many registered voters are there?**

Registration for in-country voting is passive. The State Election Commission compiles voter lists based on data from the Ministry of Interior. Voters were able to inspect the lists from August 21 to September 9. On September 24, the SEC concluded and closed the voter list, with all the changes from the public inspection and additional data provided by the relevant institutions. A total of 1,824,864 voters are registered for the 2021 local elections. Of those, 1,740,147 are registered in the regular voters' lists, 82,461 in the special excerpts of voters (those temporarily living or working abroad), 1,899 in prisons and 351 in non-family facilities. Six are internally displaced persons.

## **What provisions are in place to support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups?**

Assisted voting is allowed by law, and voters who are unable to vote due to a physical disability or illiteracy can choose another person to help them cast their ballots. Electoral boards are required to provide reasonable accommodations at polling stations for voters with disabilities. For example, to facilitate voting by persons who are blind or have low vision, the State Election Commission (SEC) created a tactile ballot guide that will be available in all polling stations across the country on Election Day.

Persons with disabilities can check the accessibility of polling stations on the SEC website. Based on this information, they may decide to vote from home or to vote in person with assistance or independently.

To facilitate voting on Election Day, polling stations are set up within three kilometers of from the farthest address in an urban settlement and five kilometers in a rural settlement. A polling station will not be established in settlements with fewer than 10 voters; where a settlement includes more than 1,000 voters, a new polling station will be established.

Voters who are unable to vote at a polling station because they are incapacitated or ill can notify the Municipal Election Commission during the seven days prior to Election Day. They will be able to vote using a mobile ballot box on the day before Election Day.

Voters in non-family care institutions can actively register to vote in the institution based on a request to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy not later than the end of the public inspection of the voters' list. They will vote the day before Election Day.

Each gender shall be represented by at least 30 percent of members of election management bodies, and all ethnicities that comprise at least 20 percent of the municipal population shall be represented. Women shall comprise at least 40 percent of the candidates' lists for municipal councils.

The Electoral Code calls for the provision of voting materials in any language spoken by more than 20 percent of a municipal population. Therefore, voting materials will be provided on Election Day in the Macedonian and Albanian languages in 26 municipalities and in other minority languages, such as Turkish in three municipalities, Serbian in one municipality and Roma in one municipality.

## **Is out-of-country voting allowed?**

Out-of-country voting is not facilitated for local elections. Voters living abroad are included in special excerpts of the voters' list and can vote on Election Day at the in-country polling stations.

## **Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?**

The State Election Commission (SEC) determines the procedure for election observation. International organizations, representatives of foreign countries and domestic and foreign organizations that were established at least one year prior to Election Day and whose statutes include the protection of human rights can observe Election Day administration and procedures.

Interested observers may apply for accreditation to the SEC at least 10 days before Election Day. If it approves an application, the SEC must issue observer authorizations within seven days after receipt of the request. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has a 13-member core team of experts on the ground and has deployed 20 long-term observers throughout the country since September 15. They will be supplemented with short-term observers on Election Day. ODIHR has also requested the deployment of 250 short-term observers immediately prior to the October 17 elections.

## **Who is managing security on Election Day?**

On Election Day, the police will secure the polling stations continuously from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. In addition, upon the closing of each polling station and during the counting of votes, the police will secure the buildings where polling stations and the election boards (EBs) are located. The police will also escort EB representatives transporting election materials during handovers to municipal election commissions. During Election Day, an EB may ask for police assistance to restore order at polling stations. Also, upon request from an EB president or vice president, the police may remove unauthorized persons from the building or the room where voting takes place or within 100 meters of radius the building.

## **Where are vote counting and tabulation held?**

After voting ends, election board (EB) members at each polling station will immediately start the procedure for counting ballots and summarizing the results. The first step is to count the number of people who voted, including those who used biometric identification devices or provided a signature or fingerprint upon check-in. Then, all unused ballots are counted. Finally, the ballot box is opened, and the individual counting of ballots commences. One EB member, selected by drawing lots, opens each ballot and hands it to the EB president, who then shows it to the other EB members and observers. The EB decides if the ballot is valid before recording the vote. Once the EBs finish counting and fill in the results protocols, they give the protocols to the corresponding municipal election commission (MEC) as part of the process of handing over the election materials.

The MEC will tabulate voting results within five hours of receiving the ballots from the EBs. Once all MECs have completed tabulation, the election materials, including results protocols, are handed over to the State Election Commission.

## **When will official results be announced?**

Each election board (EB) submits the protocols and all other voting materials to the corresponding municipal election commission (MEC) within five hours after the closure of polling stations. MECs enter the results electronically as soon as they are received. The results are made available immediately on the SEC website. The MECs also submit the protocols and all other voting materials to the SEC within five hours of receiving them from the EBs. Initial results are announced within 12 hours after the completion of voting, provided the State Election Commission (SEC) has received official protocols from the MECs. The SEC announces the final results immediately, or no later than 24 hours after they become final.



## **How will election disputes be adjudicated?**

Any citizen whose individual voting right has been violated during the election process may submit a complaint to the State Election Commission (SEC) directly or through the relevant municipal election commission (MEC) within 48 hours of Election Day. The MEC must reach a decision within four hours of receiving the complaint. Any voter whose rights have been violated during the voting procedure may file a complaint to the MEC within 12 hours. The MEC must make a decision within two hours of receiving the complaint. If a voter meets the requirements for registration in the voters' list, he or she will be permitted to exercise the right to vote if voting is in process.

Each submitter of a candidate list also has the right to submit a complaint to the SEC within 48 hours after the end of voting or the announcement of preliminary results regarding irregularities in the procedures for voting, tabulating and determining the results. The SEC must decide on the complaint within 72 hours from the receipt of a complaint. An appeal of the SEC's decision may be submitted to an administrative court within 48 hours from receipt of the determination. The administrative court must make a decision and publish it on its website within 24 hours of announcement of the verdict. All published decisions must also include a record of how each judge voted in that particular case.

## Resources

- [Electoral Code of North Macedonia](#) (English)

## About IFES in North Macedonia

North Macedonia has made considerable democratic progress since its independence in 1991, as evidenced by its active and diverse civil society, legal system reforms and strengthened legislative branch. In supporting North Macedonia's ongoing democratic development, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) delivers targeted assistance to both state bodies and nongovernmental stakeholders to improve electoral practice and citizens' engagement with their government. To that end, IFES is currently implementing two long-term projects and recently completed one short-term intervention. The first of the current initiatives is the five-year Support to Electoral Reforms in North Macedonia program, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The program strengthens election institutions' conduct of fair and efficient election processes, helps political parties to formulate issue-focused platforms and empowers citizens to hold political parties and elected officials accountable. The second is the three and one-half year "North Macedonia Electoral Support Activity," funded by the United States Agency for International Development, which provides long-term technical support to election management bodies, facilitates discussion among key stakeholders and increases their awareness of electoral issues and electoral reform processes in North Macedonia.

## Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Macedonian election authorities as of October 14, 2021, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.