

Retrospect of FECH's 2023

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

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Retrospect of FECH's 2023

1. Introduction

As we approach the close of 2023, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) takes a moment to contemplate the journey traversed throughout the year—acknowledging the opportunities seized and challenges surmounted. This annual report serves as a retrospective lens, illuminating the key activities and outcomes that have shaped FECH in 2023. We embark on this reflection with an earnest gaze, recognizing the evolution and resilience displayed in response to the dynamic educational landscape.

In the pages that follow, we unfold the narrative of FECH's endeavors, illustrating the impact of our initiatives and the strides made towards educational transformation. Each achievement and every lesson learned becomes a cornerstone for our future path. As we bid farewell to 2023, our sights are already set on the horizon of 2024, where we aspire not only to continue but to amplify our efforts in fostering positive change within the educational sphere as we plan to organize the first ever Students Forum within the country.

2. Internal improvements

In 2023, the Governing Board of the Forum for Educational Change demonstrated a steadfast commitment to enhancing the internal capacities of our organization. Recognizing the importance of organizational growth, two comprehensive capacity-building (3-5 March 2023 & 21-23 September 2023) were meticulously organized, aimed at fortifying our internal structures and processes. In tandem with the capacity-building efforts, the Governing Board took decisive steps in refining our organizational guidelines and strategies. Several pivotal documents were adopted, each contributing to the strengthening of our internal matters. These documents serve as guiding principles, aligning our collective efforts towards a unified vision for educational change:

- FECH's Code of Conduct - comprising a set of norms and rules for members and volunteers, was finalized and implemented.
- FECH's Membership Strategy - is a guiding document that lays out our roadmap for nurturing a vibrant community dedicated to educational change.
- FECH's Administrative Manual - is a guide to enhance the transparency and efficiency of our financial and administrative processes, with a particular focus on the management of grants.
- FECH's Procurement Procedure - is designed to ensure that all procurement activities are conducted in a transparent, competitive, and cost-effective manner in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and with the highest ethical standards.

3. Executive Summary

In the narrative of the Forum for Educational Change (FECH), the year 2023 unfolds as a pivotal chapter, marked by transformative moments and unprecedented advancements in our influence within the country. As we embark on a retrospective journey through the accomplishments and endeavors of this remarkable year, the contours of our impact become unmistakably clear. In 2023, FECH ceased to be a passive observer of change; instead, we emerged as architects of transformation, actively reshaping the discourse and impact within the realms of Civil Society in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In 2023, we continued with the implementation of the “Beyond Activism” project supported by the European Endowment for Democracy. As part of the project, we have implemented:

- We organized more than 35 activities within the Youth Activism Center, having 24 volunteers within the center and more than 150 participants visiting our space. The activities implemented in the Youth Activism Center in Tetovo were movie nights, #YouthActivismTalks, workshops.
- Organized the first-ever public debate at the Youth Activism Center between candidates for Rector in the University of Tetovo, where each candidate had the opportunity to share their platform before the election took place.
- Published more than three comprehensive research: Report on the efficiency of students assemblies, Report on the digitalization level in public universities in North Macedonia and the Monitoring Report on the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policy.
- Contributed to drafting the Action Plan of the National Youth Strategy 2023-2027 of Republic of North Macedonia.
- Organized the public debate “Brain Drain in Higher Education: workforce for the EU?” with panelists the Minister of Education and Science, Jeton Shaqiri, former Minister of Administration and Informatics, Admirim Haliti, and EU Ambassador to North Macedonia, David Geer.
- Monitored the elections for rector in the University of Tetovo, where raised attention about huge pressures from the previous establishment.

In January 2023, Forum for Educational Change co-initiated the creation of the #DigiU platform, which aims to unify the NGOs that work on the topic of digitalization of education, specifically public universities. Within the platform, we have the Institute for Good Governance and Euro-Atlantic Perspective and the Youth Empowerment Association. Since the foundation of the #DigiU platform as part of the Beyond Activism project, we have:

- In April 2023, we published comprehensive research on the digitalization level in the public universities in the Republic of North Macedonia.
- On 27th of April we organized the #DigiUForum with stakeholders, students and NGOs to discuss the future steps on the journey of digital transformation of public universities.
- Organized a series of events with the University Goce Delcev in Stip, to promote their #DigiU is one of the most digitized public universities within the country.

- Conjointly with members of the parliaments in North Macedonia, on 20th of December 2023 we organized the public debate with all stakeholders to discuss and approve what are the amendments that must be approved in the Law of Higher Education in order to allow a more smooth digital transformation of the universities. The amendments will be adopted in January 2024 after the holidays.
- On December 18-19, conjointly with Friedrich Naumann Foundation we organized the #DigiU-hackathon with student representatives to prepare a conclusion document with solutions for the digitalizing of public universities.

The creation of the #DigiU platform underscores FECH's commitment to fostering collaborative endeavors that drive impactful change. As we navigate the digital frontier, these milestones in 2023 exemplify our dedication to shaping an innovative and technology-driven future for higher education in North Macedonia.

In March 2023 we applied with the project "Promoting Youth Engagement in Accountability of Public Institutions" to the National Endowment for Democracy. The project was approved in June 2023 and started with implementation in July 2023. For the last 6 months we have:

- Organized two modules of the "Stronger Students' Union" with 20 student representatives from five public universities. The first module was organized in Veles from 4-7 October and the second module was organized in Ohrid, from 10-12 November. These modules aimed at strengthening the capacity of student structures to be more advocacy oriented and informed about the trends of public policy creation.
- Published the policy-paper on introducing the vetting process in higher education as a tool on the fight against the corruption in higher education institutions.
- On the 7th of December, we organized the panel discussion #Corruptiversity that aimed to increase the interest of media and public opinion on the topic of corruption in higher education. Some of the panelists were the Minister of Justice, Mr. Krenar Lloga and Minister of Education and Science, Mr. Jeton Shaqiri.
- We launched the website for the first ever Students' Forum in our country that will be held on 8-9 March 2024.

In staunch adherence to the advocacy spirit that defines the Forum for Educational Change (FECH), the organization demonstrated unwavering commitment by hosting a series of press conferences. These events served as a platform to shed light on reported illegal academic advancements within the University of Tetovo, with a particular focus on the case of Agron Alili. Adding to this, the organization collaborated closely with experts to prepare the concept of vetting in higher education. The organization's commitment translated into tangible action, as FECH submitted over 6 complaints to the State Education Inspectorate regarding illegal academic advancements. Confirming the prevalence of such issues, FECH received validation in two cases, underscoring the significance of its advocacy efforts in addressing challenges within the academic sphere.

In the dynamic landscape of international collaboration, the Forum for Educational Change's Erasmus+ projects department, under the coordination of Kristijan Stefanovski, experienced a year of triumphs and meaningful partnerships. In 2023, we proudly mark a historic milestone as the Forum for Educational Change engaged, for the first time, in four Erasmus+ projects, fostering collaborative efforts with esteemed organizations from Spain, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Italy, and Serbia. In a nutshell, 22 participants from North Macedonia took part in four Erasmus+ projects implemented as a partner organization by FECH.

List of implemented Erasmus+ projects in 2023			
EU programme	Year	Project identification or Contract No	Applicant/ Beneficiary Name
KA153-YOU - Mobility of youth workers	2023	KA153-YOU-FF57DFD0	Lead applicant / NGO La Vibria (ESP)
KA152-YOU - Mobility of young people	2023	KA152-YOU-AEE93485	Lead applicant / NGO La Vibria (ESP)
KA151-YOU – Mobility of young people	2023	2022-1-RO01-KA151 -YOU-000057389	Lead applicant / NGO Be You (Romania)
KA151-YOU – Mobility of young people	2023	2023-1-RO01-KA151 -YOU-000116129-A2	Lead Applicant / Fundatia pentru Tineret Buzau (Romania)

In the realm of international cooperation, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) has set its sights on a strategic and forward-looking approach, emphasizing the significance of study and work visits that will shape the organization's trajectory in the years to come. In a milestone move, Blendi Hodai, the Executive Director of FECH, took a pioneering step by participating in the organization's first work visit in Europe, specifically in Tallinn, Estonia. Meetings took place with members of Estonia Riigikogu, civil society sector, e-Estonia briefing center, University of Tallinn, Estonian start-up community and so on. After the visit, the organization prepared a document with remarks from the visit in Tallinn, that was shared with the public opinion in North Macedonia.

This marked the initiation of a journey to deepen collaboration with the Estonian Civil Sector, laying the groundwork for meaningful partnerships. Additionally, FECh in May 2023 participated in the third edition of Students Congress in Pristina, Kosovo, organized by our colleagues at ORCA. In November 2023, FECh participated in the second edition of the Students Congress in Tirana, Albania, organized by Qendresa Qytetare.

As FECH expands its global footprint, these strategic engagements exemplify our dedication to building bridges, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and collaboratively shaping the future of education. Through these international endeavors, we not only strengthen existing partnerships but also pave the way for new and impactful collaborations that transcend borders.

4. Media report

In 2023, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) strategically harnessed media channels to advance its mission of advocating for positive change within the education sector. Notably, FECH organized impactful press conferences addressing illegal academic advancements at the University of Tetovo, presenting the vetting process, showcasing a proactive commitment to transparency and accountability in academia. Collaborating with both local and national media outlets, FECH effectively disseminated information and amplified its advocacy initiatives, ensuring widespread reach and increased visibility. In 2023 we showcased in more than 25 news articles and more than 15 times in National Televisions in North Macedonia. Our Executive Director, Blendi Hodai participated in more than 3 political debates in Alsat TV, Telma, Nistori.

FECH's dynamic media presence extended to international engagements, with active participation in Students Congress events in Pristina, Kosovo, and Tirana, Albania. These contributions generated media coverage, furthering the organization's impact in the global discourse on education. The active management of social media platforms, coupled with the release of comprehensive research reports, solidified FECH's media footprint, reaching diverse audiences and reinforcing its commitment to transformative education and CSO. As FECH looks ahead, the strategic use of media remains integral to amplifying its voice and fostering a collective commitment to reshaping the future of education.

5. Financial overview

In 2023, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) experienced a notable financial transformation, primarily driven by strategic project funding. Predominantly financed by two key projects, namely the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), FECH witnessed substantial growth in its income.

This substantial increase in funding underscores FECH's successful pursuit of strategic partnerships and grant opportunities, allowing the organization to not only sustain its operations but also to amplify its impact in the field of educational advocacy. The diverse and robust financial portfolio in 2023 positions FECH for continued growth and resilience, ensuring the sustained implementation of impactful initiatives and the fulfillment of its overarching mission. The year's financial success serves as a testament to FECH's commitment to financial sustainability, strategic resource allocation, and the pursuit of projects aligned with its core values and objectives.

Income¹ for 2023	4.003.224,00 MKD
Outcome for 2023	3.008.747,00 MKD

Beyond financial achievements, FECH's success in 2023 is also evident in its organizational expansion. The engagement of six part-time members in pivotal roles, including project director, project coordinator, communications manager, office coordinator, financial officer, and graphic designer, underscores the organization's commitment to assembling a skilled and dedicated team. This strategic personnel investment reinforces FECH's operational capacity, allowing for the effective execution of projects aligned with the organization's core values and objectives.

6. Conclusion

As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of education, the invaluable lessons and achievements of 2023 propel the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) forward with renewed vigor and a resolute vision for the future. Rooted in our unwavering commitment, FECH stands as a steadfast advocate for quality higher education, envisioning public universities that are not only centers of academic excellence but also bastions of openness and transparency.

¹The income is from grants, projects, and donations.