



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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1. Executive Summary

The Forum for Educational Change (FECH) is a grassroots civil society organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of higher education in North Macedonia and empowering students to actively participate in decision-making processes. Guided by a vision of driving reforms and modernization in education, FECH combines expertise, professional capacity, and activism to champion systemic change and ensure transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in higher education.

In 2024, FECH reached several milestones that reaffirmed its commitment to its mission. The highlight of the year was the **First National Student Forum**, held on **March 8–9, 2024**, in Skopje. This event brought together over 100 students, activists, and policymakers, culminating in the **establishment of the National Student Body**—a pivotal step towards unifying student representation across North Macedonia.

In the area of project development and implementation, FECH successfully concluded **two major projects** in 2024. Additionally, the organization secured **renewals for two international projects**, solidifying its continued impact and sustainability. These projects include “**Beyond Activism 2.0**”, supported by the **European Endowment for Democracy**, and “**Promoting Youth Engagement in Accountability of Public Institutions**”, funded by the **National Endowment for Democracy**.

Equally significant were FECH’s **advocacy efforts** to address and denounce irregularities within public universities. From exposing illegal academic advancements to advocating for systemic reforms, FECH’s work has set a precedent for accountability and integrity in the education sector. In 2024, FECH held **three press conferences** to shed light on academic misconduct and corruption cases. These efforts included exposing the illegal academic advancements of **Merita Mustafai**, who was unlawfully promoted to an assistant position, as well as addressing irregularities involving **Agron Alili** and **Vullnet Ameti**. By taking a firm stance on these issues, FECH brought these violations to public attention and underscored the urgent need for systemic reforms to restore integrity within higher education institutions.

These achievements, along with the organization's continuous efforts in capacity-building, digital transformation, and youth engagement, underline FECH's impact in driving change and fostering a culture of empowerment, activism, and excellence in education.

2. Internal improvements

In 2024, the **Governing Board of the Forum for Educational Change** demonstrated a steadfast commitment to enhancing the organization's internal capacities. Recognizing the critical role of robust structures and processes in achieving our mission, a **capacity-building retreat** was meticulously organized from **June 22–24, 2024**. This retreat focused on strengthening internal governance, fostering collaboration, and equipping the team with the tools needed to navigate future challenges.

In addition to capacity-building, the Governing Board took decisive steps to refine the organization's policies and strategies. The **Code of Conduct** was amended to ensure greater alignment with FECH's evolving values and operational requirements. Furthermore, the **#133 Proposal** was adopted — a key document aimed at optimizing operational practices to better address the dynamic needs of the organization and its stakeholders.

Looking ahead, 2025 promises to be a pivotal year for FECH. The organization faces the dual challenges of drafting and approving a **new Development Strategic Plan** to guide its growth from **2025–2030**, and hosting the regular 4th **General Assembly (GA)** session to elect a new Executive Director and Executive Board, as the current mandate concludes in **September 2025**. These milestones underscore the importance of the foundational work undertaken in 2024 to prepare FECH for the opportunities and challenges of the coming year.

3. Key highlights of 2024

In 2024, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) achieved significant milestones in its mission to empower students, advocate for education reform, and strengthen youth activism. The key achievements of the year include:

- **National Student Forum** (8–9 March 2024):
Successfully organized the first-ever forum, gathering **100 students** and prominent guest speakers from **Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina**.
- **Establishment of the National Student Body**¹:
A unified platform now represents **7 University Student Assemblies**, marking a major step forward for student representation in North Macedonia.
- **Student Rights Charter**²:
Published a comprehensive document outlining **68 student rights**, a crucial tool for advocating student interests.
- **Student Forum Resolution**³:
The resolution was approved during the Student Forum by the students, aiming to address 4 areas: student rights and student standards; digitalization of the services in public universities; quality education and financing higher education;
- **Youth Activism Center in Tetovo**:
Implemented **20+ activities** with over **70 participants** engaged throughout the year, fostering youth development and participation.
- **Amendments to the Law on Higher Education**:
Prepared and submitted **24 amendments** to improve and reform higher education policies in North Macedonia.
- **CreActive Academy** (20–23 September 2024, Mavrovo):
Organized an immersive academy for **22 participants**, focusing on social activism and leadership.

¹ <https://fech.mk/2nd-consecutive-meeting-of-the-national-student-body/>

² <https://fech.mk/publikohet-per-here-te-pare-karta-per-te-drejtat-e-studenteve/>

³ <https://fech.mk/the-student-resolution-is-now-public-it-contains-some-requests-and-suggestions-for-public-institutions/>

- **Stronger Student Union 2.0:**
Successfully implemented the **second edition** of the program, engaging **20+ student representatives** to strengthen their skills in advocacy, communication, and youth engagement.
- **#DigiU Platform:**
Drafted a **roadmap document** with concrete recommendations for accelerating the **digitalization of universities**, in collaboration with universities, the Ministry of Education and Science, MPs, and student representatives.
- **Advocacy Through Press Conferences:**
Held **3 press conferences** to expose illegal academic advancements and cases of misconduct at the **University of Tetovo** and **University Sveti Apostol Pavle in Ohrid**.
- **Policy Paper on Subsidized Student Transport⁴:**
Developed a comprehensive policy paper addressing the need for affordable transportation for students across North Macedonia, based on the Slovenian Model. On 19th of December 2024, a panel discussion was organized where MPs and the Deputy Minister of Education and Science participated on the promotion of this policy proposal.
- **Student Consumption Basket Research⁵:**
Conducted comprehensive Research analyzing **how much money is needed to study in Macedonia**, providing critical insights into the economic challenges faced by students.
- **Capacity-building for the National Student Body**
Organized dedicated capacity-building sessions to equip members of the National Student Body with essential advocacy skills. During the sessions, the group prepared a **roadmap** for strengthening their capacities, conducted a **SWOT analysis**, and reviewed the **Law on Student Organization** and **High**

⁴ <https://fech.mk/propozimi-per-transportin-e-subvencionuar-studentor/>

⁵

<https://fech.mk/publikohet-hulumtimi-per-harxhimet-studentore-shume-harxhime-pak-ose-aspak-ndihma-shteterore/>

School Student Organization, laying the groundwork for more effective representation and action.

- **Launch of In-Depth Columns:**

Introduced **In-Depth Columns** on FECH's website, creating a platform for students to express their opinions and analysis through a **critical lens**. These monthly columns provide students the opportunity to engage with ongoing societal, educational, and policy issues, fostering dialogue and critical thinking.

- **IN-DEPTH Podcast:**

Produced and released **6 episodes** of the **IN-DEPTH podcast**, each lasting approximately 20 minutes. These episodes covered key topics such as **corruption, student engagement**, and the **quality of education**, providing an accessible medium to discuss FECH's ongoing work, challenges, and solutions while engaging a broader audience. The reels had more than 100.000 views on our social media which achieved our target goal of engaging with a wider target group.

- **Comparative analysis PISA 2018 v. 2022⁶:**

Published a detailed **comparative analysis** of the **PISA results** from 2018 and 2022, highlighting key findings and significant differences in the performance of high school students over these years. The analysis provided valuable insights into trends, challenges, and areas for improvement in the education system of North Macedonia

- **School of Youth Activism** (September - October 2024):

Implemented in partnership with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, engaging **15 young people** from Tetovo in modules on **youth advocacy, communication, conflict resolution, and leadership skills**. As a follow-up, participants organized a **Mental Health Awareness workshop** and a **tree-planting activity** at the Economic High School "8 September".

⁶ <https://fech.mk/analize-krahasuese-e-rezultateve-te-testimit-pisa-ne-rmv-2018-v-2022/>

4. International cooperation

In 2024, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) adopted a strategic and forward-looking approach to international cooperation, recognizing the importance of building global partnerships and learning from best practices. These efforts aimed to position FECH as a key player in regional and international advocacy for education reform and youth empowerment, strengthening its capacity to drive meaningful change.

In January, the Executive Director of FECH participated in a working visit to Brussels, Belgium, from the 14th to the 17th. This visit offered an invaluable opportunity to meet with representatives from prominent European organizations and institutions, including the Bureau of European School Student Union (OBESSU), the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, and the European Union External Action. Additionally, meetings were held with Junior Achievement Europe and FECH's donors, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). These engagements provided an essential platform to exchange experiences, foster potential collaborations, and align FECH's advocacy efforts with European priorities on education and youth development.

In the final quarter of the year, FECH further expanded its international presence by participating in the 12th Global Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy, held from November 20th to 23rd. This significant gathering brought together NGOs and networks from across the globe, including participants from Paraguay, Venezuela, South Africa, the United States, and Europe. The assembly facilitated critical discussions on strengthening democracy and civic participation while offering FECH the opportunity to share its experiences and build meaningful connections with like-minded organizations.

These international engagements marked a major step forward for FECH, laying the foundation for future partnerships and enriching the organization's perspective on global challenges and solutions. By fostering international cooperation, FECH remains committed to enhancing its impact, strengthening its advocacy efforts, and advancing its mission to drive education reform and empower youth in North Macedonia and beyond.

In the dynamic landscape of international collaboration, the Forum for Educational Change's **Erasmus+ projects department**, led by **Kristijan Stefanovski**, achieved significant success in 2024. Through its active involvement as a partner organization, FECH facilitated the participation of **34 individuals from North Macedonia** in **five Erasmus+ projects** across **Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Spain, and Croatia**. These youth exchanges/training courses strengthened international partnerships and provided participants with invaluable experiences and opportunities for learning, cultural exchange, and personal development. The list of the implemented Erasmus+ projects in 2024:

List of implemented Erasmus+ projects in 2024			
EU programme	Year	Project ID. or Contract No.	Applicant
KA151-YOU-Mobility of youth workers	2024-2025	2023-2-SK02-KA153-YOU-000168205	Lead applicant / NGO INNONET n.o. [Hungary]
KA150-YOU-095906-Mobility of youth workers	2024	2023-1-RO01-KA151-YOU-000124189	Lead applicant / Be You European Youth Association (Romania)
KA150-YOU-095906-Mobility of youth workers	2024	2024-1-DE04-KA152-YOU-000233563	Lead applicant Let's Sustain e.V (Germany)
KA152-YOU-4FD6F623	2024	2024-4FD6F623	Lead applicant DrONE (Croatia)

5. Media report

In 2024, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) maintained a strong and consistent presence across media outlets online and on national television. The organization held **three press conferences** to expose illicit academic advancements and other irregularities in public universities, underscoring its commitment to transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the Executive Director and members of the Executive

Board actively participated in debates and discussions on prominent television networks, including **TV21**, **Alsat M**, **24 Vesti**, **Sitel**, and others, ensuring that key issues in education remained at the forefront of public discourse.

FECH's **online presence** also experienced remarkable growth throughout the year. On Instagram (**@fech.mk**), the follower count rose significantly from **668 on January 1, 2024**, to **1,788 by December 31, 2024**. This substantial increase reflects enhanced engagement, greater visibility, and a growing online community connected to FECH's mission and activities.

This robust media presence and FECH's expanding digital footprint have played a pivotal role in amplifying the organization's initiatives, reaching a wider audience, and fostering an informed and active community dedicated to driving educational reform in North Macedonia.

6. Financial Overview

In 2024, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) experienced significant financial development, underpinned by strategic project funding and effective resource management. Building on the financial foundation established in previous years, FECH continued to receive primary support from two projects: the **European Endowment for Democracy (EED)** and the **National Endowment for Democracy (NED)**. These projects ensured financial stability and facilitated the organization's capacity to expand its activities and impact. FECH's total income in 2024 amounted to **5,812,039 MKD**, marking a **45.23% increase** compared to 2023 when the organization generated **4,003,224 MKD**. This substantial growth reflects FECH's increasing capacity to secure funding, implement impactful projects, and sustain long-term initiatives in education reform and youth engagement.

Fiscal year	2021 ⁷	2022	2023	2024
Income from projects	0	1.120.331,00 MKD	4.003.224,00 MKD	5.812.039,00 MKD
Outcome	0	921.879,00 MKD	3.008.747,00 MKD	4.660.260,00 MKD

⁷ FECH legally got established from Central Registre on 22 October 2021.

7. Conclusion

As 2024 draws to a close, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) reflects on a year of significant achievements, impactful advocacy, and steadfast commitment to its mission. From organizing the inaugural National Student Forum to securing critical project renewals, FECH has continued championing systemic reforms in higher education, empowering youth, and promoting transparency and accountability in North Macedonia.

This year, FECH expanded its reach through increased media presence and international collaboration and strengthened its internal capacities, preparing the organization for future challenges. With the foundation laid in 2024, FECH is poised to embark on new initiatives in 2025, including developing a strategic plan for the next five years and hosting the second National Student Forum.

FECH's accomplishments in 2024 are a testament to the dedication of its team, the support of its partners, and the active participation of students and stakeholders. Together, we look forward to continuing this journey of positive change, fostering a culture of advocacy, integrity, and excellence in higher education for years to come.