



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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1. Executive Summary

The year 2025 marked a period of strategic consolidation and heightened impact for the Forum for Educational Change (FECH). Building upon its growing reputation as a leading civil society organization in the field of higher education governance, transparency, and youth empowerment, FECH advanced systemic reforms through evidence-based advocacy, high-quality research, and meaningful youth-led initiatives at both national and regional levels.

Throughout the year, FECH implemented two core multi-annual projects: **Beyond Activism II** (European Endowment for Democracy) and **Promoting Youth Engagement in Accountability of Public Institutions** (National Endowment for Democracy). In October, FECH secured continuation funding through **Beyond Activism vol. 3**, supported by the **Open Society Foundations - Western Balkans**, ensuring the sustainability of its empowerment and accountability efforts. Additionally, FECH partnered with NGO Solucija to launch **Glass Half Full**, the region's first constructive journalism initiative supported by Erste Stiftung and OSF-WB.

FECH's work in 2025 included significant contributions to policy dialogue, high-visibility anti-corruption interventions, the production of two flagship national reports, the convening of the largest Student Forum to date, and the strengthening of key youth structures, including the National Student Body. These achievements were accompanied by internal institutional development processes, including the adoption of FECH's **Development Strategic Plan 2026 – 2030**, renewed leadership, and the introduction of the organization's **Visual Identity Guidelines**, which formalize FECH's public communication standards.

FECH emerges from 2025 as a more resilient, structured, and visible organization, one positioned to lead long-term reforms that advance accountability, academic integrity, and the rights of students.

2. Organisational overview

The Forum for Educational Change (FECH) was founded in 2021 by a group of young activists determined to address a fundamental challenge: how can a society confront corruption when its students are educated within opaque and unaccountable institutions? FECH emerged with the conviction that higher education in North Macedonia must operate transparently, uphold public responsibility, and meaningfully involve students in decision-making processes. Since its establishment, FECH has grown into a national actor advancing reforms through research, monitoring, public advocacy, and youth empowerment. The organization has exposed irregularities in public universities,

championed digitalization and transparency initiatives, supported whistleblowers, and strengthened student representation by helping establish the National Student Body. FECH also operates the Youth Activism Center in Tetovo, a dedicated space for civic engagement and community learning. The principle guides FECH's work that evidence must lead to action. By identifying systemic problems, investigating them rigorously, and translating findings into policy advocacy and public dialogue, FECH serves both as a watchdog and a constructive partner for institutional reform. Our mission is to promote integrity, accountability, and democratic participation in higher education so that students can shape, not merely experience, the systems that define their future.

3. Governance and Institutional Development

Fifth Strategic Retreat & Fourth General Assembly

In June 2025, FECH held its **Fifth Strategic Retreat**, combined with the **Fourth General Assembly**, marking a key milestone in the organization's institutional development. The Retreat served as a structured platform for reviewing organizational progress, evaluating ongoing programmes, and planning forward-looking reforms aligned with FECH's mission and the evolving context of higher education governance. During the Assembly, FECH members formally adopted the **Development Strategic Plan 2026–2030**, establishing the organization's long-term strategic orientation. The plan outlines FECH's programmatic focus, internal development goals, and monitoring framework for the next five years, reflecting European standards of evidence-based strategic planning and stakeholder participation. The #DEVSTRA2030 has four internal and four external objectives.

- Leadership Renewal

The Assembly also conducted leadership elections for the new mandate. Members expressed **unanimous confidence** in the existing leadership, re-electing **Blendi Hodai as Executive Director for the 2025–2028 term**. His renewed mandate reflects the Assembly's recognition of the successful institutional development, strengthened partnerships, and expanded public impact achieved between 2021 and 2025. The continuity of leadership ensures stability as FECH enters a phase of strategic growth and heightened regional engagement.

- Adoption of Visual Identity Guidelines

In October 2025, FECH formalized its public communication by adopting the **FECH Visual Identity Guidelines**, establishing unified standards for branding, typographic consistency, social media representation, and public-facing materials. The guidelines enhance FECH's visibility, coherence, and recognizability across digital and print platforms, contributing to professionalization and compliance with contemporary communication practices within European civil society organizations.

- **Strengthened Internal Coordination**

The Strategic Retreat also focused on refining internal procedures, improving cross-departmental coordination, and strengthening documentation, reporting, and institutional learning processes. These developments contribute to FECH's resilience and its ability to manage increasingly complex programmes.

A notable development for strengthening internal capacity was the onboarding of a Peace Corps Volunteer, **Gregory Severin**, who joined FECH in December 2025. The volunteer contributes expertise in research, policy development, and analytical work, and supports several organizational processes and initiatives. This collaboration enhances FECH's operational capacity and brings additional international perspective and methodological rigor to the organization's programmes.

4. Key Achievements in 2025

FECH's activities in 2025 contributed significantly to strengthening transparency, integrity, and youth participation in higher education. Through advocacy, research, and long-term programmes, the organization advanced reforms and enabled meaningful engagement of students and young people.

- **Advocacy**

FECH continued to play a leadership role in promoting integrity within higher education. Throughout the year, the organization advanced the proposal for **Vetting in higher education, engaging directly with the Minister of Education and Science to advocate for integrity checks and greater accountability among** academic staff and university leaders. FECH also contributed to regional cooperation by facilitating the **Joint Declaration on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Western Balkans** and by establishing the **Troika Mechanism**, a coordinated platform between FECH, the National Student Body, and the Union of School Students.

The organization remained active in holding institutions accountable. FECH publicly exposed the illegal academic promotion of **Faton Murseli**, organized a symbolic protest against the continued academic engagement of **Koco Angjushev**, and submitted a formal

letter to the European Commission contesting the appointment of **Petar Bogoevski** as Director of the National Erasmus+ Agency, an appointment withdrawn months later following civil society pressure. FECH also amplified youth perspectives through **nine student-written op-eds** and piloted FECHism, a creative caricature series that sparked a national discussion on systemic political failures. FECH also facilitated structured policy dialogue by organizing two public roundtable discussions. In **February 2025**, the roundtable *#CorruptED* focused on identifying and unpacking different forms of corruption in higher education. In **November 2025**, the roundtable *Public (Non) Information* presented the **first-ever Transparency Index of Public Universities** to an audience of deans, rectors, academic experts, and institutional representatives, fostering direct dialogue on transparency obligations and reform pathways. Following the publication of the Index, FECH undertook targeted field advocacy to engage universities directly. The organization held meetings with the **South East European University**, presenting the findings of the Index, acknowledging its first-place ranking, and discussing concrete steps toward achieving full transparency. Notably, **South East European University subsequently included FECH's Transparency Index and its top ranking as an institutional achievement in its official Annual Report**, demonstrating tangible uptake of the Index and confirming its relevance and credibility as an accountability tool. FECH also visited the **University "Goce Delčev" in Štip**, ranked second, where the Index was presented to the university leadership and faculty deans, reinforcing the role of constructive engagement alongside public accountability.

- **Research and Monitoring**

FECH strengthened public oversight by publishing two flagship monitoring reports:

- **Wage and Add-Ons of Academia**, which documented the disproportionate remuneration of senior academic staff, and
- **The Transparency Index of Public Universities** is the first national tool evaluating transparency across 29 indicators. The Transparency Index revealed significant systemic shortcomings: no university achieved full transparency; four were assessed as moderately transparent, two as partly transparent, and one as non-transparent. The index has since become a reference point for public discussions on university governance.
- FECH conducted a **desk research review of net-worth declarations** published by the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (DKSK), focusing on the rectors and deans of the University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius." As senior officials responsible for managing public institutions, their asset declarations are of legitimate public interest. The findings generated considerable public reaction and contributed to broader debates on ethics, integrity, and accountability in university leadership.

Further monitoring uncovered irregularities at the **University of Tetova**, including the absence of fiscal reports for multiple years and €40,000 of unexplained spending on restaurants and bars in nine months. These findings were widely covered in the media and reinforced the need for stronger financial governance.

- **Flagship Programme Implementation**

A major highlight of 2025 was the continued implementation of FECH's flagship programmes and youth engagement initiatives. The **Stronger Student Union – Advanced Training**, held for the third consecutive year from 2–5 October in Mavrovo, brought together 20 student representatives for intensive training in advocacy, governance, and anti-corruption practices. The programme has become a cornerstone of FECH's work in building student leadership and strengthening democratic participation within universities.

FECH also organized the **Student Forum 2025**, which gathered over 180 participants from six Western Balkan countries for thematic workshops, panel discussions, and the signing of regional and national frameworks that reinforce student cooperation and policy dialogue.

A key institutional development was FECH's support for the **National Student Body**. From **5 to 7 December 2025**, FECH facilitated a **strategic capacity-building retreat**, during which the NSB adopted a new strategic direction and elected **Angela Vasilevska** as its new Chairperson. This process solidified the NSB's role as a representative and accountable national student structure.

Throughout the year, the **Youth Activism Center in Tetovo** continued to operate as an active civic space, hosting a total of 29 workshops, screenings, and creative activities for young people.

FECH further expanded its programme portfolio by launching **Glass Half Full**, a constructive journalism initiative implemented with NGO Solucija and supported by Erste Stiftung and OSF-WB. Through this programme, **12 young people will be trained to produce eight television episodes for Macedonian Television**, addressing pressing social issues and promoting fact-based, solutions-oriented storytelling in the media landscape.

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- **International Collaboration**

In 2025, FECH significantly expanded its international engagement, strengthening its role in European cooperation frameworks and increasing opportunities for young people from North Macedonia to participate in transnational learning experiences.

A notable milestone was the participation of FECH's Executive Director in several high-level European platforms, most prominently the **10th Ministerial Conference on Youth**, held from 7–9 October 2025 in Malta under the auspices of the Council of Europe. Representation at this level positioned FECH as a credible and respected actor in European youth policy and demonstrated the organization's growing influence beyond national borders. In addition, on **15 December 2025**, FECH conducted a **working visit to the Accreditation Agency in Prishtina, Kosovo**, to exchange experiences and learn from the agency's best practices in quality assurance in higher education. The visit aimed to inform FECH's ongoing advocacy efforts to strengthen the **Agency for Quality in Higher Education in North Macedonia**, drawing on successful regional models to promote greater independence, efficiency, and compliance with European standards.

FECH also experienced a remarkable expansion in its involvement in the **Erasmus+ Programme**. In 2025, the organization partnered in a record **17 Erasmus+ projects**, compared to only **5 projects in 2024**. As a result, FECH supported **73 young people** to participate in international mobility activities in 2025 – more than triple the number of participants sent in the previous year, when **20 young people** took part. This growth reflects FECH's strengthened capacity, enhanced visibility, and expanding partnerships across Europe.

For the first time, FECH also became a partner in a **KA210 small-scale cooperation project**, titled *TechGuardians: Fostering Resilience and Well-being Through Tech*, marking an important step in diversifying the organization's engagement in Erasmus+ beyond mobility activities.

Throughout the year, FECH collaborated on projects implemented across a wide range of European countries, including Croatia, Poland, Czechia, Italy, Spain, France, Slovakia, Hungary, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, and Romania. These partnerships provided young people with valuable opportunities to develop new skills, engage in intercultural dialogue, and strengthen their civic participation capacities.

5. Financial overview

In 2025, the Forum for Educational Change (FECH) maintained a stable financial position supported primarily by international project funding. The organization's income was generated through four core funding streams, including support from the **European Endowment for Democracy** (with the *Beyond Activism II* project concluding in June 2025), the **National Endowment for Democracy**, the **European Commission**, and the **Open Society Foundations – Western Balkans**. These partnerships continued to provide the financial backbone for FECH's advocacy, research, and youth engagement activities.

Total income in 2025 amounted to **5,011,181 MKD** (approximately **€81,482**), compared to **5,812,039 MKD** (approximately **€94,500**) in 2024, representing a **decrease of approximately 14.7%**. This reduction reflects the completion of a major funding cycle in mid-2025 and the transition period between projects, rather than a contraction of FECH's operational scope or donor trust. Despite the lower income, FECH sustained a high level of programmatic activity throughout the year.

Total expenditures in 2025 reached **5,066,816 MKD**, compared to **4,660,260 MKD** in 2024, marking an **increase of approximately 7.6%**. The rise in expenditures corresponds to expanded activities in 2025, including large-scale public events, intensified research and monitoring efforts, increased international cooperation, and investments in institutional development and capacity strengthening. In addition, a portion of the expenditures in 2025 relates to funds contracted and committed in 2024 but implemented in the following year, in line with multi-annual project planning and donor agreements.

Overall, FECH demonstrated responsible financial management and resilience in 2025, maintaining operational continuity and delivering substantive results despite fluctuations in annual income. The approval of new funding streams toward the end of the year, including *Beyond Activism vol. 3* and expanded Erasmus+ engagement, provides a solid foundation for financial sustainability and programmatic continuity in 2026.

Fiscal Years	2024	2025	%
Income	5.812.039,00 MKD	5.011.181,00 MKD	-14.7%
Outcome	4.660.260,00 MKD	5.066.816,00 MKD	+7.6%

6. Media report

In 2025, the Forum for Educational Change maintained a strong and consistent presence across national television and online media platforms, participating in numerous debates and interviews to promote its work on higher education reform, transparency, and youth engagement. FECH's issues and activities received regular media attention, reinforcing the organization's role as a credible source of expertise and commentary in the public sphere.

Media monitoring data further demonstrates this visibility. In the national news aggregator, **time.mk**, FECH was mentioned **more than 30 times in news headlines** during 2025, reflecting sustained media interest and confirming the media as a key ally in amplifying FECH's advocacy and research findings. This level of coverage contributed to

broader public awareness of systemic challenges in higher education and the role of civil society in addressing them.

FECH's digital presence also experienced significant growth throughout the year. On Instagram (@fech.mk), the organization's following increased from **1,788 followers on 1 January 2025** to **2,882 followers by 31 December 2025**, representing an increase of **approximately 61%**. This growth indicates strengthened online engagement, improved visibility of FECH's campaigns and publications, and the expansion of an active digital community aligned with the organization's mission.

7. Conclusion

The year 2025 represented a period of consolidation, credibility, and expanded impact for the Forum for Educational Change. Through a combination of principled advocacy, rigorous research, and sustained youth engagement, FECH strengthened its role as a leading civil society actor working to improve transparency, integrity, and democratic participation in higher education in North Macedonia.

FECH's work during the year demonstrated that evidence-based activism can lead to tangible institutional responses. The uptake of the Transparency Index by universities, meaningful engagement with policymakers, expanded regional and European cooperation, and the growing recognition of FECH's expertise in public and media discourse all point to an organization whose work resonates beyond individual projects. At the same time, long-term programmes such as the Stronger Student Union and the development of the National Student Body continued to invest in the next generation of student leaders and civic actors.

Internally, FECH strengthened its governance, adopted a new multi-year strategic plan, professionalized its public communication, and expanded its institutional capacity through international cooperation, including the engagement of a Peace Corps Volunteer. These developments provide a solid foundation for sustainability and future growth.

As FECH enters 2026, the organization does so with increased visibility, stronger partnerships, and a clear strategic direction. Building on the lessons and achievements of 2025, FECH remains committed to advancing higher education as a public good - one that is transparent, accountable, and shaped by the active participation of students and citizens.