

## Local elections 2021 and the fight against corruption at local level

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Local self-government is the foundation of democracy. As a form of government that is closest to citizens, municipalities should meet the interests and needs of citizens at local level.

Election campaigns are a time when the contenders for local government present their commitments, vision and development program for the next four years. In conditions of shaken citizens' trust in the institutions, the pre-election period is an opportunity to convince voters that local elections are still an opportunity to improve governance at local level.

Citizens believe that corruption is significantly present at local level. However, outside the election campaign, the fight against corruption at local level is only a partial priority of local authorities. At least on a declarative level, that commitment changes during the pre-election period when there is significant focus on the fight against corruption, both in terms of causes and its negative effects, which are particularly visible at local level.

However, the real question is: what are municipalities doing to fight corruption? The aim is for municipalities to adopt decisions, such as plans and permits that will be of public interest and not to its detriment. The goal for municipalities is to spend citizens' money in the best way possible, providing services and possibilities for the citizens through proper use of the funds.

The reality is that only a small number of municipalities have adopted anti-corruption documents or developed mechanisms to prevent corruption. This is contrary to citizens' expectations for an open and transparent fight against corruption at all levels. This fight is equally important for the local government. The fight against corruption needs to be transformed from a pre-election narrative into concrete steps after the elections. The mayors and members of municipal councils have an obligation, but also an opportunity, to fight corruption in their work and they should impose anti-corruption as a central topic in the work of the municipalities.

To begin with, municipalities need to assess the risks of corruption in their work in order to develop anti-corruption policies. This assessment is needed to identify weaknesses in the functioning of municipalities and the gap that arises between practice and the way the procedures are envisaged on paper. This way, municipal authorities can identify what needs to be improved and determine what capacities they need in order to be able to do that. Urban planning, economic development, licensing, employment and public procurement are all areas where these anti-corruption policies need to be prescribed in details and should pave the way for future development based on integrity and anti-corruption.

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