

GPECS II



Global Project for Electoral Cycle Support II



REGIONAL COMPONENT



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Global Project for Electoral Cycle Support: Latin America and Caribbean

Thirty five years after the third wave of democracy started in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), democracy is now the default system on the continent. Despite some rare exceptions, the handover of power has occurred without the trauma and political violence that often accompanied regime changes in the past. Today, democratic elections are regular events in the region and conducted frequently and on all levels. Yet, in-depth analyses of regional democracy usually highlight that there are still various issues hampering the quality of democratic institutions and practices in the region. Challenges frequently named include a crisis of representation, institutional weakness, inequality, corruption, weak rule of law, high levels of violent crime, as well as threats to the freedom of expression. A further major and growing concern is the inclusion and participation of all parts of the society. While legal provisions granting equal participation in elections and political processes are integral to the constitutions of most countries, *de facto*, women, youth, indigenous peoples and afro-descendants still face major challenges in regard to participating in politics, and are often excluded from decision-making processes, especially on national level.

Hence, outreach to and inclusion of marginalized groups is a key objective in UN electoral assistance, which is currently being delivered to **Bolivia, El Salvador,**

Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Peru, Paraguay and Suriname. Since the capacities of electoral management bodies in the LAC region are essentially higher than in other regions, technical assistance to electoral institutions focuses only on selected areas such as supporting the reform of electoral and political party legislation, with the explicit objective to promote the inclusivity of electoral processes. Priorities to be delivered during the lifespan of GPECS Phase II in the LAC region include:

Gender mainstreaming in electoral processes

Only eight countries in the region have reached the global 30 per cent target of women representation in Parliament, and in some countries in the region such as Belize, Brazil, Haiti and Panama women representation in Parliament is below 10 per cent. Challenges for female participation go beyond their numbers in parliament, but also affect women voters and women in electoral administrators. Phase II will support regional initiatives to mainstream gender into the electoral processes, by supporting gender assessments/audits and BRIDGE gender and elections trainings. The LAC regional component will also focus on the political and electoral participation of indigenous women, which are in certain countries basically excluded from decision-making processes.



Youth political and electoral participation throughout the electoral cycle

Despite the fact that population in the region is very young, youth participation in formal political processes is significantly low. Less than two per cent of the members of parliament in the region are younger than thirty. In the last few years, several countries such as Brazil, Chile and Mexico have experienced student and youth mobilizations and protests expressing their dissatisfaction with the existing democratic institutions. Especially in Central American countries like El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, youth marginalization has contributed to extraordinary high degrees of urban violence and gang (maras) structures, which result in extremely high homicide rates.

GPECS Phase II will include activities that advocate for legislation and policies to enable youth participation, promoting dialogue among youth and policy makers in the region, and contribute to the creation of opportunities for youth to participate constructively in the socio-economic development of their communities. The increase in youth participation will gradually contribute to a reduction of violence and marginalization.

Envisaged activities of GPECS II include regional dialogue fora, bringing together youth, civil society organizations and electoral practitioners, regional trainings, and the development of new knowledge. It will also support existing regional platforms and networks, with special emphasis on indigenous and afro-descendant youth. The objective is to bring citizens from different backgrounds together in order to discuss electoral systems and constitutional reforms. GPECS aims at triggering better governance through the facilitation of open and inclusive discussions on the various electoral and political systems, which can be drivers towards more representative institutions on central and local level.

Regional Research and Knowledge Management

Regional and global exchange and knowledge transfers are part of the regional priorities. Within the framework of GPECS I, a comprehensive study on campaign financing has been conducted in cooperation with the Mexican INE (see textbox). Future support to research and debate on campaign finance mechanisms, sanctions and capacities of enforcement within the region is foreseen within GPECS II. Phase II of the GPECS will also focus on the role of political parties in regard to inclusion, as well as on innovative solutions to the problem of youth exclusion

Research on Campaign Financing in Latin America

In a regional effort, involving 18 EMBs from Central and South America, UNDP and the Mexican EMB INE conducted a study on election campaign regulations. Analyzing the existing laws and regulations in the region and highlighting the challenges of establishing a "level-playing-field" on the one hand and assuring the flow of private funds into the democratic system on the other hand, the publication offers a general and comparative overview of the current situation and outlooks related to electoral campaign regulations in **Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay** and **Venezuela**. The study's publication is available in Spanish and English and hence widely accessible to EMB staff and other stakeholders throughout the LAC region.