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Legal Empowerment as Political Education: Bridging Legal Awareness and Democratic Participation through the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC)

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Abstract: *While legal awareness is essential for access to justice, its connection to democratic participation through community legal empowerment remains underexplored. This qualitative case study examines how community legal empowerment functions as political education, enabling citizens to exercise rights and participate in local governance. Focusing on the Association LET STATION, a civil society organization in North Macedonia, the research analyzed legal education and advocacy addressing environmental justice, social rights, and transparency. Findings reveal that legal awareness alone cannot sustain democratic participation; instead, empowerment practices translate legal knowledge into practical capability, civic agency, and institutional dialogue. To capture this dynamic, the study introduces the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC). This conceptual framework illustrates pathways connecting education to institutional accountability and local resilience, highlighting legal empowerment as an essential dimension of democratic citizenship.*

Keywords: *Legal Awareness; Legal Empowerment; Political Education; Democratic Participation; Community Legal Education; Civil Society*

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): *SDG 4: Quality Education; SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*

INTRODUCTION

Democracy depends not only on free elections and effective institutions but also on citizens who are informed, engaged, and capable of exercising their rights. In recent years, concerns about democratic backsliding, declining trust in public institutions, political polarization, and reduced civic participation have renewed scholarly and policy interest in political education as a cornerstone of democratic resilience. Traditionally, political education has been associated with formal education systems, where civic knowledge, democratic values, and political participation are fostered through structured learning. However, democratic learning does not end in the classroom. Citizens continue to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary for democratic participation throughout their lives, particularly through their interactions with public institutions, civil society organizations, and local communities. Within this broader understanding of political education, legal awareness, as the ability to understand, recognize, and exercise legal rights and responsibilities, can be regarded as an important democratic competency.

Legal awareness enables individuals to navigate legal and administrative systems, recognize situations in which their rights may be affected, and engage more effectively with public authorities. Its importance is particularly evident among marginalized and underserved

communities, where legal complexity, limited access to information, and institutional barriers can constrain individuals' ability to claim their rights or participate in public decision-making. Over the past two decades, legal empowerment has emerged as an influential approach that combines legal education, community engagement, advocacy, and practical support to improve access to justice and strengthen citizen agency. Civil society organizations have become important actors in this process by translating formal legal rights into accessible knowledge and practical opportunities for engagement, including through legal information, community education, paralegal assistance, advocacy, and institutional dialogue.

Although legal awareness is widely recognized as an important component of access to justice, its relationship with democratic participation has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Research on legal empowerment has primarily examined its role in improving access to justice, protecting human rights, and addressing social exclusion. At the same time, scholarship on political education has focused predominantly on civic education and formal learning environments. Consequently, less attention has been paid to how community-based legal empowerment practices may contribute to the development of democratic competencies and create opportunities for citizens to participate in local governance. This gap is particularly relevant in contexts where civil society organizations operate as intermediaries between citizens and public institutions, supporting access to information, participation, accountability, and rights protection.

This paper addresses this gap by examining community legal empowerment as a potential form of political education. It explores the proposition that legal awareness should be understood not only as a prerequisite for accessing justice but also as a foundation from which citizens may develop the knowledge, capabilities, and confidence required for democratic participation. From this perspective, community legal empowerment is understood as a process that connects legal education and practical legal support with opportunities for collective engagement, institutional dialogue, and participation in public affairs.

The study is guided by the following research question: How can community legal empowerment contribute to the transformation of legal awareness into meaningful democratic participation at the local level?

To explore this question, the paper examines the experience of the Association LET STATION, a civil society organization based in Prilep, North Macedonia, whose work has included initiatives in access to justice, environmental governance, transparency and accountability, social rights, and community participation. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study analyzes organizational documentation and documented community activities to identify practices and processes connecting legal education and awareness with opportunities for citizen engagement and participation.

The primary objective of the study is to explore the relationship between legal awareness and democratic participation through the lens of community legal empowerment. Specifically, it aims to: (1) examine community legal awareness as a potential form of political education; (2) analyze how community-based legal empowerment practices create opportunities for democratic participation; (3) identify organizational practices and mechanisms through which civil society organizations facilitate citizen engagement with public institutions; and (4) develop a conceptual framework that explains potential pathways between community legal empowerment and democratic participation.

The significance of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to scholarship on political education by extending consideration beyond formal educational settings and examining community-based legal empowerment as a site of democratic learning. At the same time, it contributes to the legal empowerment literature by examining legal awareness not only in relation to access to justice but also in relation to citizen participation and institutional engagement. Rather than assuming that legal awareness automatically produces empowerment or democratic participation, the study explores the organizational practices and conditions through which such outcomes may potentially develop. Practically, the analysis offers insights for civil society organizations, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to design community-based initiatives that connect legal education with citizen participation and engagement with public institutions.

Based on the qualitative analysis, the paper develops the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC) as a proposed conceptual framework. The framework identifies a potential sequence of interconnected stages through which community legal education may create pathways toward legal awareness and capability, citizen agency and confidence, democratic participation, institutional accountability, and renewed community engagement. The cyclical character of the framework emphasizes that participation and institutional engagement may, in turn, generate new opportunities for learning, awareness, and community action. CLEC is therefore presented not as an empirically validated causal model, but as a conceptual framework generated from the analysis of an organizational case and intended to provide a basis for further empirical examination.

By positioning community legal empowerment within the broader field of political education, the study seeks to establish a conceptual connection between two areas that have often been examined separately. The case of LET STATION provides an empirical basis for exploring how legal education, rights awareness, community engagement, and institutional interaction may intersect in everyday democratic practice. The proposed Community Legal Empowerment Cycle consequently offers a framework through which future research can examine whether and under what conditions community-based legal empowerment contributes to sustained democratic participation and local democratic resilience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political education has traditionally been understood as a process through which citizens acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, and competencies necessary for participation in democratic life. Classical approaches have often associated political education with formal educational institutions, emphasizing civic knowledge, democratic values, constitutional principles, and the development of responsible citizenship. Nussbaum (2025), for example, emphasizes critical thinking, the capacity to question authority, and the ability to understand and engage with perspectives different from one's own as important dimensions of education for democratic citizenship. Biesta (2011, 17–32) similarly challenges an understanding of democratic education as the simple transmission of knowledge, arguing that democracy is learned through participation and through encounters with others in public and social life.

More recent scholarship has strengthened this broader understanding by conceptualizing civic learning as an ongoing process that takes place across formal and informal

settings. Jennings et al. (2021, S2–S4) define civic learning in terms of how citizens learn about collective problems and develop the capacity to make decisions concerning their responsibilities as members of a democratic community. Importantly, they emphasize that such learning can occur through everyday social interactions and through participation in democratic governance, rather than exclusively through educational institutions. Bringle and Clayton (2021) similarly conceptualize civic learning as involving knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behaviors developed through engagement with public life. This literature therefore shifts attention from education as the transmission of political information toward learning through participation, interaction, deliberation, and practical engagement.

The relationship between participation and learning is particularly important for the present study. Kiess (2022, 75–94), examining the experience of democracy in educational settings, finds that opportunities to practice democratic processes can be associated with political trust and participation. While his study concerns formal educational environments, its broader theoretical implication is relevant here: democratic competencies are not necessarily acquired before participation occurs; participation itself can constitute a learning experience. Civic learning may therefore be understood as a reciprocal process in which citizens develop knowledge and capacities through engagement while their engagement simultaneously contributes to the reproduction of democratic practices.

This broader understanding of democratic learning creates an important theoretical connection with legal empowerment. Whereas political education focuses on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with citizenship and participation, legal empowerment emphasizes people's practical capacity to understand, use, and influence legal and institutional processes. Golub (2003, 6–7) challenged conventional rule-of-law approaches by arguing that strengthening legal institutions alone is insufficient when citizens lack the knowledge, confidence, and practical means necessary to use the law to protect their interests. Legal empowerment consequently places ordinary people, particularly disadvantaged and marginalized groups, at the center of justice processes.

The concept was subsequently developed through both theoretical and empirical work. The Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor (2008, 77) defined legal empowerment as a process through which disadvantaged populations become capable of using legal systems to protect and advance their rights and interests. This approach connects access to justice with broader questions of participation, accountability, governance, and social inclusion. Community legal education, paralegal assistance, legal aid, rights-based advocacy, and community organizing can therefore be understood not simply as mechanisms for resolving individual legal problems but also as means through which citizens acquire practical knowledge and capacity to interact with institutions.

Goodwin and Maru's (2017, 157–194) systematic review of 199 studies remains an important empirical contribution to this field. Their review identifies evidence concerning improvements in legal knowledge and capacity, while also documenting outcomes associated with collective action, access to justice, and engagement with institutions. At the same time, the authors emphasize the diversity of legal empowerment interventions and the difficulty of establishing uniform causal relationships between interventions and broader social change. This caution is important for the present study because it suggests that legal empowerment should not automatically be equated with political participation. Rather, attention should be given to

the mechanisms and conditions through which legal knowledge may become practical capability and collective engagement.

The OECD's more recent work similarly distinguishes legal capability from legal empowerment. Legal capability refers to the knowledge, skills, and attributes required for people to decide whether and how to use law and legal processes to address their legal needs or resolve justice problems. Legal empowerment, by contrast, extends beyond these individual capabilities by providing the means and support for individual and community participation in justice issues affecting their lives and opportunities over a broader and longer-term basis (OECD 2025, 38). The OECD further identifies practical legal capability as a foundational component of legal empowerment and emphasizes the importance of participation by people and communities in the design, delivery, and evaluation of justice services (OECD 2025, 38). This distinction is particularly relevant to the present study because the proposed Community Legal Empowerment Cycle does not conceptualize legal awareness as an end in itself. Instead, legal awareness represents one stage within a broader process involving practical capability, agency, participation, institutional interaction, and continued engagement.

The contemporary legal empowerment movement also emphasizes the role of non-lawyers and community-based actors. Chapman (2018, 183–185) describes legal empowerment as strengthening the ability of communities to "understand, use and shape the law," emphasizing the role of paralegals, community advocates, and other non-lawyer actors in helping people engage with legal and institutional processes. This is particularly relevant to community-based civil society organizations, whose activities may combine legal information, counseling, advocacy, community organizing, and institutional dialogue rather than treating these as separate forms of intervention.

A related perspective appears in Justice Initiatives: Legal Empowerment, published by the Open Society Justice Initiative (2013). The publication presents legal empowerment as increasing the capacity of ordinary people to exercise their rights individually and collectively and documents approaches combining legal knowledge, community support, advocacy, and engagement with decision-makers. Rather than treating legal information as an isolated intervention, this approach situates legal empowerment within processes through which individuals and communities address everyday justice problems and seek institutional change. Taken together, these strands of literature suggest an important conceptual distinction between knowing one's rights and being able to act upon them. Legal awareness can provide knowledge about rights, obligations, procedures, and available remedies, but knowledge alone does not necessarily produce participation. Legal capability introduces a practical dimension: citizens must also know how institutions operate, identify appropriate procedures, communicate with relevant authorities, and access sources of support. Legal empowerment extends this process further by emphasizing the capacity of individuals and communities to act collectively and, where possible, to influence the institutions and structures affecting their lives. This distinction provides a theoretical basis for connecting legal empowerment with political education. If civic learning involves developing the knowledge and capacities necessary to participate in collective decision-making, then community legal empowerment may constitute one context in which such learning occurs. Citizens who learn how to identify a legal problem, understand an institutional responsibility, prepare a request, participate in a consultation, communicate with

public officials, or advocate for a community concern are acquiring forms of practical knowledge relevant not only to access to justice but also to democratic participation.

The connection should nevertheless not be understood as automatic or deterministic. Legal education does not necessarily lead to political participation, and legal capability does not inevitably produce collective action. Jennings et al. (2021) emphasize that civic learning depends upon social and institutional conditions that enable citizens to participate, communicate, deliberate, and act. Similarly, Kiess (2022, 75–94) demonstrates the importance of experiencing democratic practices rather than merely receiving information about them. The relevant analytical question is therefore not whether legal awareness automatically produces participation, but what processes and conditions may connect legal knowledge and capability with citizen engagement.

This distinction is central to the present study. It provides a basis for examining community legal empowerment as a possible form of experiential political education: a process in which citizens learn about rights and institutions while simultaneously acquiring practical experience in navigating, communicating with, and participating in relation to those institutions. The role of civil society is particularly relevant to this process. Civil society organizations can provide information, create spaces for dialogue, facilitate community organizing, and connect citizens with public institutions. In this sense, they may function as intermediaries between formal democratic institutions and citizens who encounter barriers to participation. However, scholarship on civil society also cautions against treating civil society organizations as inherently democratic or uniformly representative of community interests.

Recent research on Central and Eastern Europe places civil society within a context of democratic backsliding, political polarization, and changing opportunities for civic engagement. Labanino and Dobbins (2023) situate civil society organizations and organized interests within broader processes of democratic backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe, highlighting the changing relationship between organized actors and political institutions. Pietrzyk-Reeves (2023) similarly examines new forms of civic activism in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of democratic backsliding, shrinking public space, and polarization. This literature suggests that civic participation should be understood within its institutional and political context rather than as an inherently progressive process.

Despite the growing literature on civic learning, legal empowerment, legal capability, and civil society, these bodies of scholarship remain only partially connected. Political and civic education research has increasingly recognized that democratic learning occurs through participation, deliberation, and everyday social interaction. Legal empowerment scholarship, meanwhile, has developed increasingly sophisticated understandings of legal capability, community-based support, collective action, and institutional engagement. Research on civil society adds a further dimension by demonstrating that the capacity of organizations to facilitate participation is shaped by institutional, political, and funding environments. What remains insufficiently explored is how these processes may connect at the community level. In particular, there is limited conceptual attention to how community legal education may move from the provision of legal information toward the development of practical legal capability, citizen agency, democratic participation, interaction with public institutions, and continued community engagement. The existing literature provides important components of such an explanation, but they are generally examined within separate analytical traditions.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining community legal empowerment as a potential form of political education. Rather than treating legal awareness solely as a prerequisite for accessing justice, the study explores how community legal education, legal counseling, practical support, advocacy, and institutional engagement may create opportunities for citizens to develop legal capability and participate in local democratic processes. Drawing on the qualitative case of the Association LET STATION in North Macedonia, the study examines documented organizational practices across several fields of intervention. It identifies recurring processes connecting legal education, practical capability, citizen agency, participation, and institutional engagement.

On this basis, the study develops the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC) as a conceptual framework consisting of six interconnected stages: Community Legal Education; Legal Awareness and Legal Capability; Citizen Agency and Confidence; Democratic Participation; Institutional Accountability; and Renewed Community Engagement. The framework is inductively developed from the empirical material rather than imposed as an a priori causal model. Its purpose is to provide a conceptual vocabulary for examining how legal empowerment may operate as a form of experiential political education and how different forms of community engagement may reinforce one another over time.

The CLEC is therefore proposed as a conceptual contribution rather than an empirically validated causal model. It does not assume that every legal empowerment intervention progresses through all six stages or that movement from one stage to another is automatic. Instead, the cycle identifies a set of potentially interconnected processes through which legal knowledge may become practical capability, agency, participation, and institutional engagement, while recognizing that these processes are shaped by social, organizational, and institutional conditions. Further empirical research involving participants, communities, public officials, and comparative cases will be necessary to test, refine, and assess the applicability of the proposed framework across different contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how community legal empowerment can contribute to the development of democratic participation at the local level and to identify processes connecting legal awareness with citizen engagement. A qualitative approach was selected because the study examines practices, processes, and meanings associated with legal education, legal capability, citizen agency, participation, and interaction with public institutions rather than seeking to measure statistical relationships between variables. The case study design enabled these processes to be examined within the organizational and local context in which they occurred.

The study focuses on the experience of the Association LET STATION, a civil society organization based in Prilep, North Macedonia, which has implemented community-based legal empowerment initiatives since its establishment in 2018. LET STATION was selected purposively as an analytically informative case because its work combines legal education and support with community engagement, advocacy, and interaction with public institutions across several thematic areas. Its activities encompass access to justice, gender justice, environmental governance, political participation, transparency and anti-corruption, organizational

strengthening, and youth empowerment. The case therefore provides an opportunity to examine how legal empowerment practices operate across different local issues and groups rather than within a single policy field.

The study does not treat LET STATION as statistically representative of civil society organizations in North Macedonia or elsewhere. Rather, the case is used as an exploratory setting through which recurring practices and potential mechanisms connecting community legal empowerment with democratic participation can be identified and conceptually organized. The empirical corpus comprised documentation relating to 40 projects and initiatives implemented or ongoing within LET STATION's work during the 2018–2026 period, across six program areas: Access to Justice; Gender Justice; Just Green Transition; Political Participation, Transparency and Anti-Corruption; Organizational Strengthening; and Youth Empowerment. The project-level corpus was supplemented by more than 100 documented community legal education, outreach, advocacy, and community engagement activities associated with these and related initiatives. A comprehensive inventory of the projects, implementation periods, program areas, and documentary materials included in the analysis is provided in Appendix I. The documentary materials included, where available, project proposals and applications, implementation and narrative reports, monitoring documentation, activity records, educational and legal awareness materials, advocacy documents, records of community events and consultations, public communication materials, and organizational reports. Publicly available materials published by LET STATION were also used where they provided relevant documentation of activities, community engagement, or institutional interaction. The selection of documents was guided by their relevance to the research question and their capacity to provide evidence concerning practices that connect legal education and awareness with community engagement and interaction with public institutions. Materials from different thematic and program areas were included in order to identify recurring patterns across the organization's work rather than to evaluate the effectiveness of any single project. The full corpus was analyzed as a body of documentary evidence. Individual projects discussed in the Results section were selected as illustrative examples of patterns identified across the broader corpus. Their inclusion in the Results does not imply that they constituted the sole or primary empirical basis for the development of the CLEC framework.

Qualitative document analysis was used as the primary analytical method, complemented by inductive thematic analysis. The analytical process involved three principal stages. First, the available project documentation and activity records were collected and organized according to project, implementation period, program area, and type of material. The materials were then reviewed for evidence concerning community legal education, legal awareness, practical legal capability, citizen agency, collective engagement, participation in public processes, institutional interaction, accountability-related practices, and continued community engagement. Second, the materials were coded using an inductive thematic approach. Initial coding remained close to the documentary material and identified recurring practices, forms of engagement, and concepts. The coding was informed by concepts developed in the literature on political education, civic learning, legal empowerment, legal capability, and participatory democracy, but the six stages of the CLEC were not imposed on the corpus as a predetermined model. Third, related codes were grouped into broader analytical themes and compared across projects and program areas. Particular attention was given to recurring

relationships between legal education and awareness, the development of practical capability, expressions of citizen agency, participation in collective or public processes, interaction with institutions, and subsequent community engagement.

The coding process therefore combined theoretically informed sensitizing concepts with inductive identification of patterns emerging from the documentary material. A single document or activity could contain evidence relevant to more than one analytical theme or CLEC stage. The stages were consequently not treated as mutually exclusive categories.

The coding framework developed through the analysis is summarized in Table 1. It organizes the recurring dimensions identified in the documentary corpus into six analytical stages of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle.

Table 1: Coding Framework for the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle – CLEC (Source: Own depiction)

CLEC Stage / Analytical Category	Operational Definition	Key Codes / Concepts	Documentary Indicators / Evidence	What The Coding Does Not Establish
1. Community Legal Education	Activities through which citizens or communities are provided with accessible legal information, rights education, practical guidance, or opportunities for dialogue about legal and institutional issues.	Legal information; rights education; legal literacy; workshops; community education; legal counseling; outreach; awareness-raising; dialogue	Training/workshop materials; educational resources; workshop agendas; counseling documentation; outreach records; awareness campaigns; community discussions; information materials	Does not establish that participants acquired or retained the information, or that knowledge produced subsequent behavioral change.
2. Legal Awareness and Legal Capability	Evidence that legal information is connected to citizens' recognition of rights, institutional responsibilities, procedures, available remedies, or practical mechanisms for exercising rights.	Recognition of rights; institutional responsibilities; legal procedures; administrative procedures; legal remedies; referrals; practical problem-solving; access to information	Legal advice/counseling records; guidance materials; documented referrals; descriptions of assistance with procedures; information on mechanisms for claiming rights; examples of citizens being supported to navigate institutions	Does not establish individual-level increases in legal knowledge or capability unless directly documented through participant-level evidence.
3. Citizen Agency and Confidence	Evidence of citizens moving from receiving information or assistance toward initiating, expressing, or supporting actions concerning individual or	Agency; confidence; initiative; willingness to act; self-advocacy; community leadership; mobilization; peer support; advocacy	Citizen requests or submissions; participation initiated by community members; advocacy activities; community-led actions; documented recommendations; peer dissemination of information;	Does not establish psychological confidence or empowerment as an individual outcome where these are not directly evidenced by participants.

	community interests.		involvement in organizing activities	
4. Democratic Participation	Documented engagement by citizens or communities in collective discussion, consultation, advocacy, public hearings, or other processes through which they can contribute to public decision-making.	Public consultation; community forum; public hearing; deliberation; collective action; advocacy; recommendations; local decision-making; civic engagement	Attendance/participation records; forum documentation; public hearing participation; recommendations submitted to authorities; consultation records; collective advocacy; stakeholder meetings; contributions to local plans or policies	Does not establish that participation changed a policy or decision unless a documented institutional outcome demonstrates this.
5. Institutional Accountability	Evidence of interaction through which public institutions are asked to provide information, explain decisions, respond to concerns, consider recommendations, or demonstrate responsiveness to community demands.	Transparency; institutional response; responsiveness; follow-up; information requests; institutional dialogue; monitoring; accountability	Official correspondence; institutional responses; meeting records; requests for information; follow-up activities; responses to recommendations; documented commitments; monitoring of institutional action	Does not establish improved institutional accountability in a broader systemic sense merely because contact with an institution occurred.
6. Renewed Community Engagement	Evidence that previous engagement is followed by continued participation, follow-up, peer dissemination, new activities, or further community involvement, creating conditions for another cycle of legal learning and engagement.	Continued engagement; follow-up; peer learning; diffusion; repeated participation; community mobilization; new initiatives; sustained engagement	Follow-up meetings; subsequent advocacy; repeat participation; new community activities; participants sharing information with others; later initiatives building on earlier activities; continued cooperation with institutions	Does not establish long-term sustainability or durable behavioral change without longitudinal or participant-level evidence.

The coding framework was used as an analytical device for organizing and interpreting the documentary evidence rather than as a measurement instrument. The assignment of a code indicates that a relevant practice, activity, or form of engagement was documented in the empirical material; it does not, by itself, demonstrate that an individual participant experienced a measurable change in knowledge, confidence, behavior, or political participation. Accordingly, the analysis distinguishes between documented organizational practices and claims concerning individual-level outcomes that would require direct participant-based evidence.

The six CLEC stages were derived through the synthesis and comparison of recurring themes across the documentary corpus. The framework was not applied as a predetermined model for testing. Instead, the coding process identified recurring dimensions of community legal empowerment, which were subsequently organized into the six-stage CLEC framework. The framework therefore represents an inductive conceptualization emerging from the case material. Across the corpus, the analysis identified a recurring pattern in which community legal education provided opportunities for the acquisition of accessible legal knowledge and practical guidance; these practices were associated in the documentation with the development of legal awareness and capability; such knowledge and practical experience could create conditions for greater citizen agency and confidence; agency and confidence could facilitate participation in community and public processes; participation could create opportunities for dialogue with public institutions and contribute to processes of accountability; and continued engagement could generate further opportunities for legal learning, community action, and civic participation.

These dimensions are conceptualized as a cycle rather than a fixed linear sequence. The stages may overlap, occur in different orders, or be absent from particular initiatives. Some projects address only one or several dimensions, while others provide documentary evidence relevant to multiple stages. The purpose of the cycle is therefore not to suggest that every project or participant progresses through all six stages, but to capture recurring relationships identified across the wider case.

The Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC) is consequently presented as a proposed conceptual framework, rather than an empirically validated causal model. It provides an analytical proposition for understanding how community-based legal empowerment may create pathways from legal learning and capability toward citizen agency, democratic participation, institutional engagement, and renewed community involvement. The framework does not establish causal relationships between the six stages and does not permit conclusions about the prevalence or magnitude of individual-level change. Its explanatory value and broader applicability require further examination through participant-level, comparative, and longitudinal research.

The author's professional affiliation with the Association LET STATION represents an important aspect of the methodological context of the study. This insider position provided extensive familiarity with the organization's programs, terminology, institutional environment, and historical development, while also creating a potential risk of confirmation bias and overly favorable interpretation of organizational practices. The positionality is therefore explicitly acknowledged, and the study is not presented as an independent evaluation of LET STATION's effectiveness. Rather, LET STATION constitutes the empirical case through which community legal empowerment practices are examined.

Several measures were adopted to establish analytical distance. The analysis relied primarily on documentary materials rather than personal recollections or anecdotal observations, and coding was organized around the research question and theoretically informed analytical concepts. Organizational statements concerning intended or reported impact were not automatically treated as independent evidence of individual-level change. The analysis instead distinguished between documented organizational activities, documented forms of community and institutional engagement, and the subsequent analytical interpretation of

potential mechanisms connecting these practices with legal empowerment and democratic participation.

The documentary corpus did not involve direct research with individual participants. No interviews, surveys, or focus groups were conducted specifically for this study, and the analysis did not seek to identify or reproduce personal information concerning individuals who accessed LET STATION's services or participated in its activities. Where materials concerned sensitive issues or potentially vulnerable groups, the analysis focused on the nature, structure, and documented processes of the interventions rather than identifiable individual cases. Claims concerning individual experiences, psychological changes, or sustained behavioral outcomes were not made where the documentary evidence could not substantiate them.

The analysis therefore distinguishes between three levels of evidence and interpretation. The first concerns documented organizational activities, including legal education, legal counseling, community forums, advocacy, and participation in public consultations. The second concerns documented forms of community and institutional engagement, including participation in public processes, communication with public authorities, collective advocacy, and recorded institutional responses. The third concerns the analytical interpretation of potential mechanisms connecting these practices with legal empowerment and democratic participation. The CLEC operates primarily at this third level: it is a conceptual framework derived from recurring patterns in the documentary evidence rather than a direct measure of participant outcomes.

The documentary corpus is subject to limitations inherent in organizational and project documentation, which is produced for purposes including project management, accountability, communication, and reporting to partners and funders. Such materials may reflect organizational priorities and reporting requirements and should therefore not be treated as neutral or comprehensive accounts of community experience. These limitations are particularly relevant to the interpretation of concepts such as confidence, empowerment, behavioral change, and institutional responsiveness, which cannot be established reliably through organizational documentation alone.

Within these methodological boundaries, the study uses the LET STATION case to identify recurring practices and potential processes through which community legal empowerment may contribute to political education and democratic participation. The resulting Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC) is consequently presented as an exploratory conceptual proposition rather than an empirically validated causal model, requiring further examination through participant-level, comparative, and longitudinal research.

RESULTS

The Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC)

The analysis covered the complete documentary corpus identified in Appendix I, comprising 40 projects implemented between 2018 and 2026. The examples presented below are illustrative rather than exhaustive and were selected because the available documentation provided particularly clear evidence corresponding to the analytical codes and CLEC stages. The thematic analysis identified recurring patterns across the community legal empowerment

initiatives implemented by the Association LET STATION between 2018 and 2026. Although the initiatives addressed diverse thematic areas, including access to justice, environmental governance, social rights, transparency, and citizen participation, the analysis identified common practices connecting community legal education with opportunities for citizen engagement and interaction with public institutions. Rather than treating these activities as isolated instances of legal information provision or advocacy, the analysis suggests that they can be understood as interconnected elements of a broader process of democratic learning.

Based on these recurring patterns, the study developed the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC) as a proposed conceptual framework for understanding how community-based legal empowerment may create pathways from legal awareness toward democratic participation. The framework emerged inductively from the analysis of documented organizational practices and is not intended to establish a causal relationship between its individual stages. Instead, it provides a conceptual interpretation of how different forms of community legal empowerment may be connected and how participation and institutional engagement may create further opportunities for legal learning and community action. The Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (Figure 1) consists of six interconnected stages:

1. **Community Legal Education**, through which citizens are provided with accessible legal information, practical guidance, and opportunities to discuss rights and responsibilities;
2. **Legal Awareness and Legal Capability**, through which legal information may develop into a more practical understanding of rights, responsibilities, institutional procedures, and available mechanisms for seeking protection or redress;
3. **Citizen Agency and Confidence**, referring to the potential development of citizens' willingness and perceived capacity to use their rights, articulate concerns, and engage with public institutions;
4. **Democratic Participation**, encompassing opportunities for citizens to participate in public consultations, community initiatives, advocacy activities, local decision-making processes, and other forms of civic engagement;
5. **Institutional Accountability**, referring to processes through which citizen engagement creates opportunities for public institutions to provide information, respond to concerns, and engage in dialogue with communities; and
6. **Renewed Community Engagement**, through which experiences of participation and institutional interaction may create further opportunities for community learning, collective engagement, and continued involvement in rights-based activities.

The six stages are presented as interconnected rather than strictly linear. Community legal education may contribute to legal awareness and capability, which may in turn create conditions for greater citizen agency and opportunities for participation. Participation can generate interaction with institutions and opportunities for accountability, while continued community engagement may create new demand for legal information, education, and collective action. The cycle therefore emphasizes the possibility of reciprocal reinforcement between legal learning, citizen engagement, and institutional interaction rather than assuming that every individual or initiative progresses through all six stages.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual relationship between the six dimensions identified through the analysis. The cycle should be understood as an analytical representation of recurring patterns in the case material rather than as a measurement instrument or empirically validated causal model. The following sections examine each stage in greater detail and provide examples from LET STATION's documented activities. These examples illustrate how the different dimensions of community legal empowerment were operationalized in practice and how they created opportunities for citizens to acquire knowledge, engage with community issues, participate in public processes, and interact with institutions.

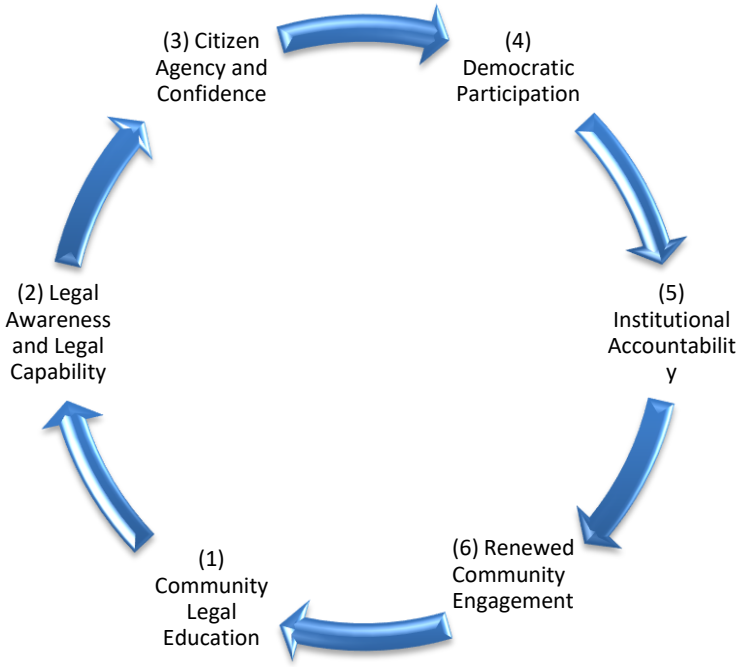


Figure 1: The Community Legal Empowerment Cycle – CLEC (Source: Own depiction)

Community Legal Education

The analysis identified community legal education as the entry point of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC). Across the initiatives implemented by LET STATION, community legal empowerment commonly began with activities designed to increase citizens' understanding of their legal rights, institutional responsibilities, and available mechanisms for exercising those rights. Rather than focusing solely on the dissemination of legal information, the activities combined accessible legal knowledge with practical guidance, dialogue, and problem-solving, connecting legal norms with issues affecting citizens' everyday lives.

The analysis identified a variety of approaches through which community legal education was implemented, including legal awareness workshops, community outreach activities, public discussions, individual legal counseling, information campaigns, and cooperation with local stakeholders. These activities addressed diverse topics, including access to social protection,

environmental rights, transparency and accountability, gender equality, protection from gender-based violence, and citizen participation in local decision-making. The thematic diversity of the activities indicates that community legal education was not limited to conventional legal topics but was applied to issues where citizens' rights intersected with social, environmental, and governance concerns.

For example, in December 2024, LET STATION, together with partner organizations, implemented the School for Gender Equality as part of the project "Her Voice - Her Power: Empowering Marginalized Women and Girls in Pelagonia." The program brought together 20 young people from nine municipalities of the Pelagonia region. It used interactive workshops, lectures, group discussions, and case studies to address gender equality, women's rights, discrimination, and community advocacy. The program also included practical components related to organizing local initiatives and engaging in public dialogue, with participants being prepared to act as gender promoters within their communities (LET STATION 2024). The activity illustrates an approach in which legal and rights-based knowledge was combined with practical civic skills and opportunities for community engagement.

A recurring pattern across the analyzed activities was the connection of legal education with concrete problems experienced by citizens and communities. Rather than presenting legal concepts exclusively in abstract terms, LET STATION's initiatives frequently situated rights within practical contexts, including access to social services, participation in environmental decision-making, engagement with local authorities, and addressing community concerns through existing legal and institutional mechanisms. This contextualized approach enabled legal information to be presented in relation to situations in which citizens could potentially apply the knowledge acquired through the activities.

The Training for Eco-Ambassadors, held in October 2025, provides another illustration of this approach. The training involved 10 participants from different social, economic, ethnic, and age backgrounds and addressed civic advocacy, communication with local authorities, environmental legislation, and national and local environmental policies. Through interactive exercises, simulations, and discussion of community challenges including waste management, environmental inspection, and the implementation of local environmental action plans, the training connected knowledge of environmental rights and responsibilities with practical forms of civic engagement (LET STATION 2025). The activity demonstrates how community legal education can combine rights awareness with practical knowledge about institutional procedures and civic advocacy.

The analysis further indicated that community legal education served not only an informational function but also created opportunities for participatory learning. Community forums, public discussions, and consultations provided spaces in which citizens could discuss shared concerns, exchange experiences, and identify issues affecting their communities. In several activities, the focus extended beyond individual legal problems toward questions concerning community needs, institutional responsibilities, and possible collective responses.

A clear example is the series of Community Forums on the Lack of Preschool Facilities in the Municipality of Prilep, held in November and December 2023. The forums brought together parents, residents, representatives of public institutions, and civil society organizations to discuss the limited availability of preschool facilities and its implications for children's rights, gender equality, and equal access to public services (LET STATION 2023). The documented activities

included discussion of citizens' rights and the responsibilities of local government, as well as the formulation of recommendations and direct engagement with municipal representatives. The forums therefore illustrate how a community concern could be framed through a rights-based perspective and brought into a structured process of dialogue with public institutions.

Taken together, these examples suggest that community legal education within the LET STATION case extended beyond the transmission of legal information. The activities combined rights-based knowledge with practical guidance, participatory discussion, and opportunities for interaction with community and institutional actors. From the perspective of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle, these practices represent the initial conditions from which legal awareness and legal capability may develop. The analysis therefore positions community legal education as the entry point of the cycle, while recognizing that the available documentation does not by itself establish the extent to which individual participants experienced sustained changes in knowledge, confidence, or behavior. The next section examines the second stage of the cycle: Legal Awareness and Legal Capability.

Legal Awareness and Legal Capability

The thematic analysis identified the development of legal awareness and practical legal capability as the second stage of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC). Across the analyzed initiatives, community legal education was frequently connected to activities through which citizens could recognize situations in which their rights were affected, understand the responsibilities of relevant public institutions, and identify legal or administrative mechanisms available for addressing individual and community concerns. The analysis therefore identified a progression in the activities from the provision of legal information toward its practical application in specific social, institutional, and community contexts. Legal awareness in the analyzed initiatives was not limited to knowledge of legal provisions. It also involved understanding how rights could be exercised, which institutions were responsible for particular issues, what procedures were available, and where citizens could seek further information or support. In this sense, legal awareness represented an important foundation for what can be understood as legal capability: the practical capacity to use knowledge of rights and procedures when addressing a concrete problem or engaging with an institution.

Across different thematic areas, the application of legal knowledge to everyday situations was a recurring feature of the activities. Educational sessions and community outreach activities encouraged participants to discuss concrete challenges, consider available legal or institutional responses, and become familiar with procedures for communicating with public authorities. This approach situated legal rights within practical contexts and created opportunities for participants to connect legal information with problems affecting themselves, their families, or their communities. The significance of this process lies in the distinction between knowing that a right exists and understanding how that right can be exercised through available institutional mechanisms.

An illustrative example is the implementation of the project "Together Against Violence: Improving Community Awareness and Response," implemented from December 2024 to July 2026. The project combined community education and awareness-raising activities addressing gender-based and domestic violence, including public information activities, community

discussions, educational workshops, and cooperation with relevant institutions and service providers. The documented activities addressed women's and victims' rights, available protection mechanisms, and the roles and responsibilities of institutions involved in prevention and protection (LET STATION 2026a). The project therefore illustrates how rights-based information can be connected to practical knowledge concerning available forms of support, institutional responsibilities, and mechanisms for seeking protection. The example is particularly relevant to the CLEC because it illustrates the distinction between legal information and legal capability. Knowing that protection from violence is a legally recognized right represents an element of legal awareness. Understanding where to seek assistance, which institutions have responsibilities, what forms of support are available, and how to initiate an institutional response represents a more practical dimension of legal capability. The documented activities therefore illustrate an approach in which legal awareness was connected to the practical navigation of institutional systems rather than treated as an end in itself.

The analysis also identified a community dimension to legal capability. In several initiatives, legal knowledge was not presented exclusively as an individual resource but was shared through community activities, discussions, outreach, and peer engagement. This created opportunities for citizens to exchange information about rights and institutional procedures and to identify concerns affecting more than one individual. Such processes are relevant to the subsequent stages of the CLEC because knowledge that is shared within a community may provide a basis for collective discussion and engagement. However, the available documentation does not allow the study to establish the extent or durability of such effects among individual participants.

The distinction between legal awareness and legal capability is therefore important for understanding the proposed cycle. Legal awareness refers primarily to the recognition and understanding of rights, responsibilities, institutions, and available mechanisms. In contrast, legal capability concerns the practical ability to translate that understanding into action when addressing a concrete issue. The analyzed activities suggest that community legal empowerment becomes more practically significant when these two dimensions are connected through accessible guidance, institutional information, and opportunities to apply rights-based knowledge to real-life situations.

Overall, the analysis positions Legal Awareness and Legal Capability as the second stage of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle. This stage represents the movement from exposure to legal information toward a more practical understanding of how rights can be exercised and how institutions can be approached. While the available documentary evidence does not permit a direct measurement of individual-level changes in legal capability, the recurring structure of the analyzed activities provides a basis for identifying legal capability as an important intermediate dimension between community legal education and the subsequent development of citizen agency and confidence. The next section examines this third stage of the CLEC.

Citizen Agency and Confidence

The thematic analysis identified citizen agency and confidence as the third stage of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC). Following the development of legal awareness

and practical legal capability, several of the analyzed initiatives created opportunities for citizens to apply their knowledge through direct interaction with public institutions, participation in public processes, and engagement with community concerns. In this context, citizen agency is understood not simply as knowledge of rights but as the perceived and practical capacity to articulate concerns, seek institutional responses, and participate in processes affecting one's community.

Across the analyzed initiatives, opportunities to exercise rights in practice were an important component of community legal empowerment. Citizens were supported in preparing requests and communications to public institutions, participating in consultations and community forums, contributing to advocacy initiatives, and engaging in dialogue with municipal representatives and other institutional actors. These activities provided practical contexts in which legal knowledge could be applied. The analysis suggests that such experiences can create conditions for citizens to move from understanding their rights toward using available institutional mechanisms to address individual or community concerns.

An illustrative example emerged from the implementation of the project "Eco Initiative: Citizens and Local Government in Action for Environmental Protection." The initiative combined community legal education, legal counseling, environmental rights workshops, and engagement with local stakeholders. One documented outcome of this engagement was LET STATION's contribution to the development of the Local Action Plan for the Green Agenda of the Municipality of Prilep, where recommendations developed through community engagement were presented to local authorities as part of the municipal planning process (LET STATION 2026b). The example illustrates a transition from rights-based learning toward participation in a local policy process: environmental concerns were articulated as community priorities and subsequently brought into an institutional planning process.

A second example concerns LET STATION's participation in the public hearing on the Environmental Impact Assessment for Corridor 10-D, Prilep–Bitola section. The organization used the public consultation process to raise issues related to environmental protection, transparency, and citizen participation in decision-making (LET STATION 2026c). The example is significant for the CLEC because it illustrates the use of an established institutional mechanism through which environmental concerns could be articulated and addressed within a formal decision-making process. Rather than limiting legal empowerment to individual assistance, this form of engagement positioned legal and environmental knowledge as a basis for participation in a broader public policy process.

Taken together, these examples illustrate two dimensions of citizen agency identified in the case material. The first involves the capacity to articulate and communicate community concerns, while the second involves the willingness and practical ability to use available institutional mechanisms for participation. The distinction is important because legal empowerment does not necessarily require citizens to act outside existing institutional structures. On the contrary, meaningful agency may involve the ability to recognize available participation mechanisms and use them to communicate concerns, provide recommendations, request institutional responses, or contribute to public decision-making.

The analysis also identified instances in which community legal empowerment extended beyond direct interaction between individual citizens and institutions. Community-based activities created opportunities for participants to exchange information, discuss common

concerns, and involve other members of their communities. In some initiatives, participants were subsequently positioned to share information and experiences with peers or contribute to further community activities. These patterns suggest the possibility of a multiplier effect in which legal knowledge and practical experience circulate beyond the individuals initially involved in an activity. However, because the study relied primarily on organizational documentation, the extent and sustainability of such effects cannot be independently established.

The concept of confidence is particularly relevant at this stage of the CLEC. Confidence in this context does not refer to a psychological characteristic measured through a standardized instrument. Rather, it refers to the observable or documented willingness to communicate with institutions, ask questions, express concerns, participate in public processes, and use available mechanisms for civic engagement. The analyzed activities provide examples of these forms of engagement, but they do not permit a quantitative assessment of changes in participants' confidence over time. Accordingly, the study treats increased confidence as a potential dimension of citizen agency that may emerge through repeated opportunities to apply legal knowledge in practice.

The relationship between legal capability and citizen agency is therefore central to the proposed cycle. Legal awareness provides citizens with knowledge about rights and institutional responsibilities, while legal capability provides practical understanding of how those rights can be exercised. Citizen agency represents a further dimension in which this knowledge and capability are potentially translated into willingness and capacity to act. The environmental governance examples demonstrate how such action can take place through formal mechanisms of public participation, including policy consultations, public hearings, and engagement with local authorities.

Overall, the analysis positions Citizen Agency and Confidence as the third stage of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle. This stage represents the movement from understanding and navigating rights toward using available institutional and community mechanisms to articulate concerns and participate in public processes. The evidence does not establish that all participants experienced a uniform or sustained increase in agency or confidence. Rather, it demonstrates that the community legal empowerment activities created practical opportunities through which such agency could be exercised and developed.

Democratic Participation

The thematic analysis identified democratic participation as the fourth stage of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC). At this stage, the legal awareness, legal capability, and opportunities for agency identified in the preceding stages were connected to concrete forms of civic engagement. Across the analyzed initiatives, citizens and community actors participated in public consultations, community forums, advocacy activities, stakeholder meetings, environmental decision-making processes, and other forms of interaction with public institutions. Democratic participation therefore emerged in the case material not simply as communication with authorities, but as a set of practices through which community concerns could be articulated, discussed, and brought into public decision-making processes.

The analysis identified several forms of democratic participation within LET STATION's activities. These included participation in public consultations and community forums,

submission of recommendations to local authorities, engagement in advocacy campaigns, participation in environmental governance processes, cooperation with municipal institutions, and involvement in initiatives addressing transparency, gender equality, social rights, and access to public services. The diversity of these activities is significant because it demonstrates that local democratic participation can take place through multiple institutional and community channels rather than being limited to electoral participation.

An important pattern identified in the analysis was the connection between rights-based knowledge and participatory opportunities. In several initiatives, community concerns were initially addressed through legal education, awareness-raising, or counseling and were subsequently brought into forums where citizens could communicate with institutional actors. This connection is central to the CLEC because it illustrates how legal empowerment can provide citizens with both substantive knowledge about their rights and procedural knowledge concerning the mechanisms through which they can participate.

The series of Community Forums on the Lack of Preschool Facilities in the Municipality of Prilep provides an illustrative example. The forums brought together parents, residents, representatives of municipal institutions, and civil society organizations to discuss the limited availability of preschool facilities and its implications for children's rights, equal access to public services, and gender equality. The documented process included discussion of the causes and consequences of the problem, consideration of institutional responsibilities, and formulation of recommendations directed toward improving local policies (LET STATION 2023). The significance of this example within the CLEC lies in the movement from a community concern toward a structured process of public deliberation. The issue was not treated solely as an individual problem concerning access to a service but was framed as a question involving rights, public responsibilities, and local policy. The participation of institutional representatives also created an opportunity for direct interaction between citizens and decision-makers. In this sense, the forums illustrate how community legal empowerment can create spaces in which citizens articulate shared concerns and engage in dialogue concerning possible institutional responses.

Similar patterns were identified in the environmental governance activities analyzed in the study. Community members and civil society actors participated in processes concerning environmental planning, contributed recommendations to the development of the Local Action Plan for the Green Agenda of the Municipality of Prilep, and engaged in discussions concerning environmental protection and local governance (LET STATION 2026b). These activities demonstrate a form of participation in which community knowledge and concerns were brought into a local policy-development process. The contribution of recommendations is particularly relevant because it represents participation not only through expressing concerns but also through proposing possible policy responses.

A further example is LET STATION's participation in the public hearing on the Environmental Impact Assessment for the Corridor 10-D, Prilep–Bitola section. The public hearing provided a formal institutional mechanism through which environmental concerns, questions concerning transparency, and issues related to citizen participation could be raised in relation to an infrastructure planning process (LET STATION 2026c). Within the CLEC, this example illustrates the importance of procedural knowledge and legal capability: participation becomes possible not only because citizens are aware that an issue affects their rights or

interests, but also because they know that formal mechanisms exist through which concerns can be presented to relevant institutions.

The analysis further suggests that democratic participation within community legal empowerment frequently involves a shift from individual concerns to shared community interests. Legal problems and rights violations may initially be experienced individually, but community-based activities can create opportunities for participants to identify common patterns and formulate collective concerns. Community forums, public discussions, and advocacy initiatives provide spaces in which these concerns can be discussed and translated into recommendations or requests directed toward public institutions. This collective dimension is important because democratic participation involves not only the exercise of individual rights but also the articulation and negotiation of interests within the public sphere. At the same time, the case material indicates that participation should not be understood as synonymous with institutional influence. Participation in a consultation, public hearing, or community forum establishes an opportunity to communicate with decision-makers, but it does not by itself demonstrate that a particular policy or institutional decision changed as a result.

This distinction is important for interpreting the findings. The evidence analyzed in this study demonstrates the creation and use of participatory opportunities and documents citizens' and civil society actors' engagement with institutional processes; it does not provide sufficient evidence to establish the extent to which individual contributions directly affected final institutional decisions. It also reinforces the conceptual role of democratic participation within the CLEC. The cycle does not assume that legal empowerment automatically produces successful policy outcomes. Instead, it identifies participation as the stage at which legal knowledge and citizen capability are brought into the public sphere. Whether participation subsequently produces institutional responsiveness depends on additional factors, including the openness of institutions, the existence of functioning participation mechanisms, the willingness of decision-makers to engage with citizens, and the broader political and institutional context.

Another important dimension is the relationship between individual and collective participation. The analyzed activities demonstrate that community legal empowerment can provide opportunities for individual citizens to express concerns while simultaneously creating spaces for collective deliberation. This combination is particularly relevant at the local level, where many governance issues are experienced collectively and where citizens can engage directly with municipal institutions. Community-based participation can therefore serve as a practical setting in which citizens learn not only how to exercise individual rights but also how to formulate shared priorities, communicate collectively, and engage in constructive institutional dialogue.

From this perspective, democratic participation represents more than an endpoint of legal education. Participation itself can become a learning experience. When citizens engage in consultations, public hearings, community forums, or advocacy processes, they encounter institutional procedures, learn how decisions are made, and gain practical experience of the opportunities and limitations of civic engagement. This reinforces the cyclical character of CLEC: legal education may facilitate participation, while participation can generate new knowledge, questions, relationships, and demands for further community engagement.

Democratic Participation as the fourth stage of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle represents the movement of legal awareness, capability, and agency into concrete forms

of civic and public engagement. The LET STATION case provides documented examples of citizens and community actors participating in consultations, forums, policy discussions, advocacy initiatives, and environmental decision-making processes. While these examples do not establish a direct causal relationship between legal empowerment and changes in public policy, they illustrate how community-based legal empowerment can create pathways through which citizens use rights-based knowledge and practical capabilities within democratic processes.

Institutional Accountability and Renewed Community Engagement

The final stage of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC) concerns the relationship between citizen participation, institutional accountability, and continued community engagement. The analysis indicates that the initiatives examined in the study did not treat engagement with public institutions as an isolated event. Rather, community forums, public consultations, advocacy activities, and follow-up actions created opportunities for continued interaction between citizens, civil society organizations, and institutional actors. These processes are particularly relevant to the CLEC because they connect citizen participation with questions of transparency, institutional responsibility, and continued civic engagement.

Institutional accountability in the context of this study is understood primarily as the existence and use of mechanisms through which public institutions can be asked to provide information, explain decisions, respond to community concerns, and consider recommendations. The analyzed activities included examples of citizens and civil society actors communicating concerns to public authorities, submitting recommendations, participating in consultations, requesting information, and engaging in dialogue with institutional representatives. Such practices create channels through which institutional decisions and responsibilities become more accessible to public scrutiny.

Across the analyzed initiatives, accountability was therefore reflected not only in formal institutional responses but also in the creation of opportunities for communication and follow-up. Community forums, public consultations, stakeholder meetings, and advocacy initiatives provided settings in which institutional representatives could be directly engaged by citizens and civil society organizations. These processes are significant from a democratic perspective because accountability depends not only on the formal existence of institutions but also on the availability of mechanisms through which citizens can question decisions, communicate concerns, and seek explanations or responses.

The environmental governance activities provide an illustrative example. The contribution of community recommendations to the Local Action Plan for the Green Agenda of the Municipality of Prilep created an opportunity for community priorities to enter a local policy-development process (LET STATION 2026b). Similarly, participation in the public hearing concerning the Environmental Impact Assessment for the Corridor 10-D, Prilep–Bitola section, provided a formal setting in which environmental concerns and questions concerning transparency and citizen participation could be raised (LET STATION 2026c). In both cases, participation involved an interaction between community or civil society actors and institutional processes rather than remaining at the level of internal community discussion.

The case material also identified the importance of continuity and follow-up. Several initiatives involved activities extending beyond a single educational session, forum, or consultation. Subsequent meetings, communication of findings, advocacy activities, and continued engagement with relevant stakeholders provided opportunities to maintain attention to issues after an initial participatory event. Such continuity is significant for the CLEC because accountability cannot necessarily be achieved through a single interaction. Where citizens have opportunities to follow up on recommendations, seek additional information, or continue dialogue with institutions, participation can become an ongoing process rather than a one-time intervention.

At the same time, the documentary evidence requires a distinction between creating accountability opportunities and demonstrating institutional change. The analyzed materials provide evidence of citizens and civil society organizations using participatory and advocacy mechanisms and engaging with public institutions. They do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that institutional responsiveness systematically increased across the entire period or that specific institutional decisions were directly changed as a result of citizen participation. Accordingly, the CLEC conceptualizes institutional accountability as a potential outcome and an institutional dimension of the empowerment process rather than as an automatically achieved result of participation.

The second component of this stage is renewed community engagement. The analysis identified instances in which activities were connected to subsequent community initiatives, additional educational activities, advocacy, or continued engagement with local issues. Community-based legal empowerment can therefore generate relationships, knowledge, and practical experience that provide a basis for further engagement. However, the available documentation does not allow the study to establish that participation systematically produced long-term behavioral changes among individual participants. Instead, it demonstrates that the organizational model repeatedly created opportunities for citizens and community actors to remain engaged beyond individual activities.

The possibility of renewed engagement is particularly important to the cyclical character of CLEC. If participation creates new questions, identifies unresolved community concerns, or reveals the need for additional information, these experiences can generate demand for further legal education and community organizing. Similarly, new community concerns may require citizens to acquire additional legal knowledge, seek legal counseling, engage with institutions, or organize collective responses. The cycle therefore does not end when a citizen participates in a public consultation or receives an institutional response. Instead, participation can generate new learning needs and new opportunities for engagement.

The relationship between institutional accountability and renewed community engagement can consequently be understood as potentially reciprocal. On one side, informed and organized citizen participation can create opportunities for institutions to provide information, respond to concerns, and engage with communities. On the other, institutional responses, or the absence of adequate responses, can generate further questions, advocacy, monitoring, and community action. In this sense, accountability is not conceptualized solely as an outcome imposed upon institutions but as an ongoing interaction between citizens and institutional actors.

This dimension also reinforces the distinction between individual empowerment and broader democratic change. A citizen's ability to identify a right, participate in a consultation, or communicate with a public authority represents an important form of agency, but it does not necessarily translate immediately into institutional reform. Democratic resilience depends on the interaction between capable citizens and institutions that provide meaningful opportunities for participation and accountability. The CLEC therefore incorporates both dimensions: citizen capability and participation on one side, and institutional openness and responsiveness on the other.

The analysis further suggests that civil society organizations can occupy an important intermediary position within this process. In the LET STATION case, the organization frequently operated as a bridge between legal knowledge, community concerns, and institutional mechanisms. This intermediary role involved providing information and support, facilitating dialogue, communicating community recommendations, and maintaining engagement with relevant stakeholders. Such a role can help reduce the distance between citizens and institutions while also enabling communities to use existing democratic mechanisms more effectively.

Institutional Accountability and Renewed Community Engagement represent the final stage of the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle, but not its endpoint. The analysis indicates that community legal empowerment can create opportunities for citizens to engage institutions through accountability and participation mechanisms while simultaneously creating conditions for continued community engagement. The cyclical dimension emerges from the possibility that these experiences generate new knowledge needs, unresolved concerns, institutional interactions, and opportunities for further participation. The cycle therefore returns to community legal education and renewed legal awareness, illustrating community legal empowerment as an ongoing process of democratic learning rather than a linear intervention with a predetermined endpoint.

Taken together, the documentary analysis identified recurring relationships among six dimensions of community legal empowerment. The evidence shows that LET STATION's interventions frequently combined legal information with practical guidance, opportunities for community engagement, interaction with public institutions, and follow-up activities. These recurring combinations provided the empirical basis for organizing the findings into the six dimensions of the CLEC. The analysis does not establish that every project or participant followed the same sequence, nor that participation necessarily produced institutional change. Rather, the cycle represents an analytical synthesis of recurring practices and potential relationships identified across the documentary corpus.

DISCUSSION

Community Legal Empowerment as a Form of Political Education

The findings of this study suggest that community legal empowerment can be understood as more than an access-to-justice intervention. Across the LET STATION documentary corpus, legal education, practical legal support, community engagement, advocacy, and interaction with public institutions appeared as interconnected practices through which opportunities for democratic learning were created. The significance of these findings lies

not in demonstrating that every participant progressed through a particular sequence, but in identifying recurring organizational practices that connect knowledge of rights with opportunities to use that knowledge in community and institutional settings.

This interpretation extends the conventional understanding of political education. Political education is often associated with the acquisition of civic knowledge and democratic values, particularly within formal educational institutions. However, scholarship on democratic learning has increasingly emphasized experiential, participatory, and lifelong dimensions of citizenship. From this perspective, citizens may develop democratic competencies through participation in social and institutional environments, including community organizations, public consultations, advocacy processes, and collective problem-solving (Nussbaum, 2025; Biesta, 2011). The LET STATION case provides an empirical illustration of such a non-formal learning environment: legal education was frequently connected to practical situations in which citizens could discuss rights, identify institutional responsibilities, formulate concerns, and engage with public authorities.

The findings therefore support a distinction between legal information and politically meaningful legal knowledge. The documentary evidence suggests that activities were most closely connected to democratic participation when legal information was contextualized within concrete community concerns and accompanied by opportunities for practical engagement. Workshops concerning environmental rights, social rights, gender equality, or access to public services did not operate exclusively as informational activities. In several cases, they were connected to community forums, advocacy, consultations, communication with institutions, or collective initiatives. This pattern is consistent with the legal empowerment literature, which emphasizes that empowerment depends not simply on knowledge of legal rules but on people's capacity to use rights and institutional mechanisms in practice (Golub, 2003; Goodwin and Maru, 2017).

At the same time, the present study qualifies the stronger version of this argument. The documentary corpus does not permit the conclusion that legal education itself produced increased confidence, political participation, or institutional responsiveness among individual participants. Rather, it demonstrates that LET STATION's interventions created or facilitated opportunities in which such capacities could potentially develop. This distinction is important because it avoids equating the existence of an empowerment activity with evidence of an empowerment outcome. The contribution of the present study is therefore to identify a plausible and recurring pathway rather than to establish an empirically verified causal sequence.

In this respect, community legal empowerment may be understood as a form of experiential political education: a process in which citizens encounter legal norms through concrete problems, learn how institutions operate, acquire practical knowledge about available mechanisms, and may then have opportunities to apply this knowledge through participation. Democratic learning thus takes place through practice. This interpretation is consistent with approaches to citizenship education that emphasize participation as a constitutive element of democratic learning rather than simply an outcome of prior civic instruction (Biesta, 2011).

The findings also highlight the role of civil society organizations as intermediaries between citizens and institutions. LET STATION's activities frequently combined education, legal assistance, community mobilization, and institutional engagement. Such organizations can therefore provide spaces in which citizens encounter public institutions, collectively articulate

concerns, and learn how participatory mechanisms function. This does not imply that civil society organizations automatically strengthen democracy or that their interventions necessarily produce durable political change. Rather, the case demonstrates their potential role as facilitators of civic learning and institutional interaction.

The Citizen–Institution Relationship

An important implication of the CLEC is that democratic participation cannot be understood exclusively as a characteristic of citizens. Participation requires both citizens who possess sufficient knowledge and capability to use available mechanisms and institutions that provide meaningful opportunities for engagement.

The documentary evidence illustrates this reciprocal relationship. Community forums, public consultations, advocacy initiatives, and communication with municipal institutions created spaces in which community concerns could be articulated and discussed. In such settings, legal empowerment provided citizens and community actors with knowledge about rights, responsibilities, procedures, and institutional mechanisms, while institutional openness created the possibility for this knowledge to be translated into participation.

This observation extends the access-to-justice perspective of legal empowerment toward a broader conception of democratic governance. Legal rights become politically significant when citizens have accessible mechanisms through which those rights can be exercised and when public institutions are capable of responding to legitimate claims. Consequently, legal empowerment cannot by itself guarantee participation or accountability. Its potential democratic contribution is conditional on the existence and accessibility of institutional channels through which civic action can have public relevance.

The environmental and local governance examples examined in the Results section illustrate this point particularly clearly. Participation in environmental consultations or municipal planning processes involved not only knowledge of environmental rights and policies but also access to procedures through which concerns and recommendations could be communicated to decision-makers. Similarly, the community forums concerning preschool facilities created a setting in which a community concern could be connected to questions of rights, institutional responsibility, and public policy.

These examples should therefore not be interpreted as proof that particular policy outcomes were caused by LET STATION's interventions. Their analytical significance lies in demonstrating how legal knowledge, community deliberation, and institutional mechanisms can become connected in practice. The CLEC captures this connection by placing democratic participation between citizen capability and institutional accountability.

Institutional Accountability and the Limits of Organizational Evidence

The relationship between participation and accountability requires particular caution in interpreting the findings. Organizational documentation provides evidence that citizens and community actors participated in consultations, communicated concerns, submitted recommendations, or engaged with public institutions. Where institutional responses were documented, these provide evidence of interaction and, in some cases, responsiveness.

However, such documentation cannot establish the extent to which these interactions produced substantive institutional change or durable improvements in accountability.

This distinction is especially important because organizational reports and communication materials are generally produced for purposes such as project management, donor reporting, public communication, and accountability. They may therefore emphasize activities, outputs, and positive developments while providing less information about unsuccessful advocacy, institutional resistance, or longer-term outcomes. The documentary corpus should consequently be understood as evidence of documented practices and processes, rather than as a comprehensive assessment of democratic change.

This limitation also points toward a broader issue concerning the role of civil society organizations in contemporary development practice. Civil society organizations frequently operate within funding structures that shape project duration, objectives, indicators, reporting requirements, and definitions of success. Critical scholarship on the professionalization and "NGO-ization" of civil society has drawn attention to the possibility that dependence on project-based funding can influence organizational priorities and the ways social change is represented and evaluated. The present study does not seek to determine whether LET STATION's activities reproduce or challenge these broader tendencies. Nevertheless, acknowledging this institutional context is important when interpreting organizational documentation as empirical evidence.

For this study, this means that the CLEC should not be understood as a model of organizational effectiveness or as evidence that externally funded civil society interventions necessarily generate democratic transformation. Rather, it identifies practices through which legal empowerment and civic participation may become connected. Whether these practices produce durable democratic effects depends on factors that extend beyond the organization itself, including institutional openness, political context, community resources, continuity of engagement, and the availability of meaningful participatory mechanisms.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The principal theoretical contribution of the study is therefore not the claim that legal empowerment causes democratic participation, but the proposition that community legal empowerment can be analytically understood as a form of experiential political education. This proposition contributes to the legal empowerment literature by directing attention beyond access to justice and individual rights-claiming toward processes of civic learning and institutional participation. At the same time, it contributes to scholarship on political education by identifying community-based legal practice as a potentially important site of democratic learning outside formal educational institutions.

The CLEC provides a conceptual bridge between these fields. It suggests that legal knowledge can have a broader democratic significance when it is connected to practical capability, opportunities for collective action, institutional interaction, and continued community engagement. In this interpretation, exercising legal rights is not only a legal act. It can also constitute a form of learning about institutions, procedures, collective interests, public deliberation, and the possibilities and limits of citizen participation.

The cyclical dimension of the framework further distinguishes the CLEC from a simple linear model of education. Participation may generate new questions and new demands for

legal knowledge; institutional interaction may reveal additional community concerns; and experiences of collective engagement may create opportunities for further education and organizing. The cycle therefore captures the possibility that democratic learning is reproduced through continued engagement rather than completed once legal information has been delivered.

At the same time, the framework should be regarded as an analytical proposition generated from one case, not as a validated theory. Its theoretical value lies in providing concepts and relationships that can be examined empirically in other settings. Participant-level research could determine whether the proposed stages correspond to individuals' experiences; comparative research could examine whether similar patterns emerge in other civil society organizations and political contexts; and longitudinal research could examine whether participation and learning are sustained over time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The findings have several implications for the design and evaluation of community legal empowerment initiatives. First, legal empowerment programs may benefit from treating legal education not as an endpoint but as an entry point into broader civic engagement. Where appropriate, educational activities can be connected to practical opportunities for citizens to communicate with institutions, participate in consultations, identify collective concerns, and use existing accountability mechanisms.

Second, evaluation frameworks should distinguish between outputs, documented engagement, and outcomes. Numbers of workshops, consultations, legal counseling sessions, or participants provide useful information about implementation, but they do not by themselves demonstrate increased agency, democratic participation, or institutional accountability. The CLEC can therefore serve as a basis for developing more differentiated indicators that distinguish the provision of legal education from evidence of legal capability, participation, institutional response, and sustained engagement.

Third, the findings suggest that the democratic potential of community legal empowerment depends partly on the institutional environment in which it operates. Citizen capacity alone cannot guarantee meaningful participation where institutions are inaccessible, non-responsive, or lack effective participatory mechanisms. Conversely, formal participation mechanisms may remain underused when citizens lack the knowledge and practical capability required to navigate them. Community legal empowerment therefore occupies a potentially important position at the intersection of citizen capacity and institutional responsiveness.

Finally, the study suggests that civil society organizations should be understood not only as service providers or advocacy actors but also as potential sites of democratic learning. Their contribution may include creating spaces where citizens acquire practical knowledge, deliberate collectively, interact with institutions, and develop experience with democratic processes. However, this role should not be romanticized: organizational dependence on project funding, institutional constraints, uneven community participation, and limited opportunities for independent evaluation can affect both the implementation and assessment of such work.

Taken together, the discussion supports a cautious interpretation of the CLEC. The LET STATION case does not establish that community legal empowerment necessarily produces

democratic participation or institutional accountability. Rather, it demonstrates a recurring set of practices through which legal education, practical capability, civic engagement, and institutional interaction can become connected. The Community Legal Empowerment Cycle offers a conceptual vocabulary for examining these connections and provides a basis for future empirical research into whether, when, and under what conditions community legal empowerment functions as a form of political education.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the research is based on a single qualitative case study of LET STATION, a civil society organization operating in North Macedonia. The case provides an in-depth examination of community legal empowerment practices within a specific organizational and socio-political context, but it does not permit statistical generalization. The Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC) should therefore be understood as an analytically derived and contextually informed conceptual framework rather than as a universally applicable or empirically validated model.

Second, the study relied primarily on documentary evidence produced in the context of organizational activities, including project documentation, educational materials, advocacy documents, monitoring reports, and records of community engagement. Although the documentary corpus covered a substantial number of initiatives implemented between 2018 and 2026, it did not include primary data collected specifically for this research from participants, community members, or institutional actors. Consequently, the study can identify documented practices and forms of engagement, but it cannot independently establish changes in individual participants' knowledge, confidence, political behavior, or long-term civic engagement. Such outcomes would require direct participant-level research.

Third, the researcher's professional affiliation with LET STATION represents an important limitation as well as a source of contextual knowledge. The insider position provided extensive familiarity with the organization's practices and development, while also creating a potential risk of interpretive bias. Reflexive measures were therefore incorporated into the research design, including reliance on documentary evidence, explicit differentiation between documented activities and inferred outcomes, and the treatment of organizational claims regarding impact with appropriate caution. Nevertheless, the possibility of institutional perspective shaping the available evidence cannot be eliminated.

Fourth, the study does not establish causal relationships between the six stages of the CLEC. The thematic analysis identified recurring patterns linking community legal education, legal awareness and capability, citizen agency, democratic participation, institutional engagement, and renewed community engagement. However, the documentary evidence does not demonstrate that all projects or participants followed the same sequence, nor that progression from one stage to another was caused by the preceding stage. The CLEC should therefore be understood as a conceptual proposition describing potential relationships identified through the case analysis.

These limitations point to several directions for future research. Comparative case studies involving multiple civil society organizations and different national or local contexts could

examine whether the patterns identified in the LET STATION case are observable elsewhere and could contribute to refining the CLEC. Comparative research within Southeast Europe may be particularly relevant for examining how community legal empowerment interacts with different institutional, political, and civil society environments.

Future studies should also incorporate participant-level perspectives through interviews, focus groups, surveys, or other forms of primary research. Such research could examine whether and how participation in community legal empowerment initiatives affects legal knowledge, perceived agency, confidence in engaging with institutions, civic participation, and subsequent community engagement. Perspectives of public officials and other institutional actors could additionally provide evidence concerning the institutional dimension of the CLEC, particularly the relationship between citizen participation and institutional responsiveness.

Longitudinal research would further strengthen understanding of the cyclical dimension of the framework by examining whether experiences of participation generate sustained engagement and whether participants subsequently become involved in new forms of community education or collective action. Mixed-methods research could complement such qualitative evidence with indicators of civic participation, institutional trust, or engagement with public decision-making processes.

Finally, future research could examine the applicability of the CLEC across different fields of community legal empowerment, including environmental justice, gender equality, social protection, anti-corruption, and access to public services. Such comparative and empirical testing would help determine which elements of the proposed cycle are context-specific and which may represent more general mechanisms linking legal empowerment with political education and democratic participation.

CONCLUSION

This study explored community legal empowerment as a potential form of political education and examined how it may contribute to the transformation of legal awareness into meaningful democratic participation at the local level. Drawing on a qualitative case study of the Association LET STATION, the research analyzed community legal empowerment initiatives implemented between 2018 and 2026 across areas including access to justice, social rights, environmental governance, transparency, and citizen participation. The analysis suggests that legal awareness, while an important foundation for accessing rights and justice, does not by itself ensure meaningful democratic participation. Its broader democratic potential may emerge when legal knowledge is connected with practical support, opportunities for community engagement, institutional dialogue, and meaningful avenues for exercising rights.

The study was guided by the question: How can community legal empowerment contribute to the transformation of legal awareness into meaningful democratic participation at the local level? The findings suggest several interconnected processes through which legal awareness may acquire practical and democratic significance. Community legal education can contribute to legal awareness and capability, which may create conditions for greater citizen agency and confidence. These capacities can facilitate engagement in community forums, consultations, advocacy initiatives, and other participatory processes. Engagement with institutions may, in turn, create opportunities for transparency and accountability, while

experiences of participation can generate further learning and renewed community engagement. These relationships are understood as interconnected and potentially mutually reinforcing rather than as a fixed or deterministic sequence.

The principal conceptual contribution of the study is the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle (CLEC). The framework connects six dimensions: Community Legal Education; Legal Awareness and Legal Capability; Citizen Agency and Confidence; Democratic Participation; Institutional Accountability; and Renewed Community Engagement. Rather than presenting legal empowerment as a linear intervention with a predetermined outcome, CLEC conceptualizes it as an iterative process in which learning, capability, participation, institutional interaction, and renewed engagement may reinforce one another. In this sense, the framework provides a conceptual bridge between legal empowerment and political education by highlighting how the practical exercise of rights may become a site of democratic learning.

The findings also indicate that the relationship between legal awareness and democratic participation should not be understood as automatic or deterministic. Knowledge of rights may acquire greater democratic significance when accompanied by practical capabilities, confidence, opportunities for participation, and accessible institutional mechanisms. At the same time, the extent to which participation contributes to accountability depends partly on the responsiveness and openness of public institutions. Community legal empowerment may therefore create pathways toward participation and institutional engagement, but it cannot by itself guarantee institutional change or successful policy outcomes.

The study further highlights the potential role of civil society organizations as facilitators and spaces of democratic learning. By connecting legal knowledge with everyday concerns and creating opportunities for engagement with public institutions, community-based organizations can support the development of both rights awareness and practical competencies associated with democratic participation. Community legal empowerment can thus complement formal civic and political education by enabling citizens to encounter and practice democratic processes through direct experience.

The practical implications extend beyond the LET STATION case. For civil society organizations, CLEC provides a framework for designing and evaluating initiatives that seek to move beyond the dissemination of legal information toward practical citizen empowerment and sustained participation. For policymakers and local governments, the findings underline the importance of accessible, transparent, and meaningful mechanisms through which citizens can communicate concerns and contribute to public decision-making. For organizations working on democracy and access to justice, the framework suggests the value of considering not only immediate legal or service-delivery outcomes but also the civic capacities and participatory opportunities that community-based legal empowerment may create.

The study's contribution should nevertheless be considered in light of its qualitative single-case design and reliance on documentary evidence. CLEC is proposed as a conceptual and analytical framework, not as an empirically validated causal model. The relationships identified through the LET STATION case should therefore be understood as potential pathways rather than established causal effects. Further research involving multiple organizations and contexts, primary data from participants and institutional actors, and longitudinal or mixed-methods designs is needed to examine, refine, and potentially extend the framework.

At the end, the study suggests that political education need not be confined to formal educational institutions or understood solely as the transmission of civic knowledge. Democratic learning may also occur through citizens' everyday encounters with rights, institutions, communities, and public decision-making processes. Community legal empowerment represents one setting in which such learning may take place. By connecting legal knowledge with practical capability, citizen agency, participation, institutional engagement, and renewed community involvement, the Community Legal Empowerment Cycle offers a framework for understanding the potential democratic function of community legal empowerment. Its central proposition is not that legal awareness automatically produces active citizens, but that when legal knowledge is accompanied by practical capabilities and meaningful opportunities for participation, community legal empowerment may create conditions conducive to sustained democratic learning and civic engagement.

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APPENDIX I (Documentary Corpus: LET STATION Projects and Initiatives, 2018–2026)

No.	Program	Project	Implementation period	Donor / supporting organization	Documentary material analyzed*
1	Access to Justice	Legal support and education on social rights of vulnerable citizens in the Pelagonija region	May–September 2026	Citizens' Association Institute for Human Rights Skopje; European Union	Project proposal; educational/outreach materials; activity records, periodic narrative reports.
2	Access to Justice	Legal Empowerment Fund – institutional support	July 2024–June 2025	Fund for Global Human Rights / Legal Empowerment Fund	Project proposal / institutional documentation; periodic and final narrative reports.
3	Access to Justice	Promoting Inclusion and Tolerance through Interfaith Cooperation in the Western Balkans	January–December 2024	National Democratic Institute (NDI) – North Macedonia	Project proposal; activity records; educational materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
4	Access to Justice	Economic and Social Empowerment of Roma Returnees in Prilep	February–September 2024	UNDP	Project proposal; activity records; educational materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
5	Access to Justice	Local Service for Enhanced Reintegration and Resocialization	June 2023–August 2024	Macedonian Young Lawyers Association / European Union	Project proposal; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
6	Access to Justice	Strengthening National Protective Mechanisms Against Hate Speech in the Republic of North Macedonia	March 2023–March 2025	Helsinki Committee for Human Rights / European Union	Project proposal; educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
7	Access to Justice	Empowerment of Roma Returnees through Equal Access to Economic and Social Rights	December 2022–May 2023	UNDP	Project proposal; activity records; educational materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
8	Access to Justice	Legal Empowerment Fund – institutional support	June 2022–June 2024	Fund for Global Human Rights / Legal Empowerment Fund	Project proposal / institutional documentation; periodic and final narrative reports.
9	Access to	Community	April–November	National	Project proposal; activity

	Justice	Organizing for Increased Inter-Religious Communication and Tolerance	2022	Democratic Institute (NDI)	records; educational materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
10	Access to Justice	Through the Inclusion of Roma towards an Advanced Contact Tracing Process for Prevention during a Pandemic	May–August 2022	Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women (ESE)	Project proposal; activity records; awareness materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
11	Access to Justice	Access to Justice for the Most Marginalized	January 2022–July 2023	European Union – EIDHR; Foundation Open Society Macedonia; HOPS	Project proposal; legal/educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
12	Access to Justice	Center for Access to Justice	October 2021–December 2022	Foundation Open Society Macedonia	Project proposal; legal support records; periodic and final narrative reports.
13	Access to Justice	Civic Priorities, the Foundation of Public Services and Policies	September–December 2021	Association ESE / Government of the Republic of North Macedonia	Project documentation; community activity records; advocacy materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
14	Access to Justice	Intersectional Discrimination in North Macedonia	May 2021–September 2022	MCIC – Civica Mobilitas; Helsinki Committee for Human Rights; HOPS	Project proposal; educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
15	Access to Justice	Advancement of the Recovery Process and Timely Reaction of the Roma Community in Crisis Situations, through Participatory and Proactive Action	May–September 2021	Association ESE	Project proposal; activity records; community materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
16	Access to Justice	Mobile Office for Paralegal Aid	February–December 2021	Ukrainian Legal Aid Foundation	Project proposal; outreach/activity records; legal education materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
17	Access to Justice	COVID-19 Grassroots Justice Project	December 2020–August 2021	Fund for Global Human Rights	Project proposal; community outreach records; awareness

					materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
18	Access to Justice	Access to Justice for the Most Marginalized	January 2020–July 2021	European Union – EIDHR; Foundation Open Society Macedonia	Project proposal; legal/educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
19	Access to Justice	Center for Access to Justice	January 2020–June 2021	Foundation Open Society Macedonia	Project proposal; legal support records; periodic and final narrative reports.
20	Access to Justice	Community Organizing to Respond to the Crisis	June 2020–May 2021	Foundation Open Society Macedonia	Project proposal; community activity records; advocacy materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
21	Gender Justice	Safe Retreat: Inclusive Support for Women from Marginalized Groups	February–July 2026	European Union / HERA and partners	Project proposal; service/outreach materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
22	Gender Justice	Integrated Support and Empowerment of Women Victims of Violence for a Stronger Voice and a Secure Future	October 2025–February 2029	Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation / National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence	Project proposal; service/activity records; educational materials; periodic narrative reports.
23	Gender Justice	Path to Safety: Strengthening Psychosocial Support Services for Women and Children	June 2025–May 2026	Austrian Development Agency (ADA) / International Partnerships Austria / National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence	Project proposal; service/activity records; educational materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
24	Gender Justice	Together Against Violence: Improving Awareness and Community Response	December 2024–May 2026	European Union / National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence	Project proposal; awareness materials; activity and advocacy records; periodic and final narrative reports.
25	Gender Justice	Her Voice – Her Power: Strengthening Marginalized Women and Girls in	July 2024–June 2026	Civica Mobilitas; Center for Civic Initiative (CGI); Multiethnic Association for All	Project proposal; educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.

		Pelagonia		Ages	
26	Just Green Transition	Eco Initiative: Citizens and the Local Government in Action for Environmental Protection	August 2025–May 2026	European Union / Macedonian Young Lawyers Association and partners	Project proposal; educational materials; activity and advocacy records; periodic and final narrative reports.
27	Just Green Transition	Smart Green Village for a Sustainable Future	December 2024–August 2025	Open Society Foundations – Western Balkans	Project proposal; educational materials; community activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
28	Just Green Transition	Determining the Impacts of Social and Economic Determinants on the Roma Environment	January–December 2022	Association ESE / WHO project	Project documentation; community/educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
29	Just Green Transition	Climate Justice for Marginalized Citizens	May–December 2021	Foundation Open Society Macedonia	Project proposal; educational materials; community activity records
30	Political Participation, Transparency and Anti-Corruption	A Stronger System for Fairer Protection: Reducing Corruption in Healthcare	September 2025–February 2027	Expertise France / French Development Agency; Association ESE and partners	Project proposal; advocacy materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
31	Political Participation, Transparency and Anti-Corruption	Democracy Strengthening Initiative: Strengthening Political Engagement and Participation in the Republic of Macedonia	April–May 2024	National Endowment for Democracy / NOVUS Center for Research and Analysis	Project proposal; educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
32	Political Participation, Transparency and Anti-Corruption	Civic Engagement for a Better Future	November 2022–April 2023	IFES through MCIC	Project proposal; community activity records; educational materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
33	Political Participation, Transparency and Anti-Corruption	Legal Education to Fight Corruption	June 2020–March 2021	USAID – Civic Engagement Project / Foundation Open Society Macedonia	Project proposal; legal/educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
34	Political Participation,	Reducing Corruption in Health and	November 2019–October	Foundation Open Society Macedonia;	Project proposal; educational materials;

	Transparency and Anti-Corruption	Education at the Local Level	2020	Center for Civil Communications; Community Center of the Municipality of Struga	advocacy/activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
35	Organizational Strengthening	Social Enterprise LET CLUB	January 2021–January 2022	Foundation Open Society Macedonia	Project proposal; organizational reports; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
36	Organizational Strengthening	Transparent Action for Accountable Conducting	June–November 2020	Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation (MCIC)	Project proposal; organizational/advocacy materials; periodic and final narrative reports.
37	Organizational Strengthening	Response Hub Grants	June–October 2026	European Fund for the Balkans	Project proposal; organizational/activity records; periodic narrative reports.
38	Youth Empowerment	Youth Clubs – Debate and Learning Law	September 2023–ongoing	Youth Educational Forum	Project proposal; educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
39	Youth Empowerment	Socio-Economic Empowerment of Youth from the Municipality of Dolneni	June–November 2023	Macedonian Enterprise Development Foundation / European Union	Project proposal; educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.
40	Youth Empowerment	Youth Together for Peacebuilding, Interethnic Tolerance and Conflict Management	March–May 2024	RYCO	Project proposal; educational materials; activity records; periodic and final narrative reports.