

Joint EC-UNDP Thematic Workshop on Sustainability in Electoral Administration:

**Adequate Resourcing for
Credible Elections**

Voter Registration:

Sustainability and Cost Implications of Various Methodologies

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Presentation Outline

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Voter Registration: Overview (1)

- **A sound voter registration process is crucial for political participation in a democratic context; voter registration is fundamental to a successful election.**
- **Article 21 – Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**
 - **(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives...**
 - **(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in PERIODIC and GENUINE elections which shall be by UNIVERSAL and EQUAL suffrage and shall be held by SECRET VOTE or by equivalent free voting procedures.**
- **Voter registration is highly complex and is generally the single most expensive activity within the framework of elections.**

Voter Registration: Overview (2)

To safeguard the electoral franchise, voter registration should be:

- **UNIVERSAL** – including every adult person belonging to the citizenry.
 - Citizenship;
 - Legal age of majority (this may differ from country to country);
 - Residency requirements, if applicable;
 - Any other additional grounds for disqualification (e.g.: prisoners in detention, persons with a criminal record, mentally disadvantaged...)
- **EQUAL** – The vote of every citizen should have the same value without discrimination (Electoral Systems: MAJORITY/PROPORTIONAL/MIXED);
- **DIRECT** – The right to vote should be personally exercised by every individual citizen at the polling station.
- **SECRET** – Secrecy of the vote must be guaranteed both legally and in practice.

Purpose of Voter Registration

- **The main purpose of voter registration is to identify persons who are eligible to cast a ballot on election day – application of the universal suffrage principle.**
- **Other common reasons for VR include:**
 - **Data for the establishment of equitable electoral district boundaries;**
 - **Election planning and logistics (allocation of voters to polling stations, determining the number of polling stations and polling staff, as well as the volume of election materials/equipment);**
 - **Public outreach and civic/voter education;**
 - **Prevention of fraudulent and/or multiple vote;**
 - **Assessment of voter turnout and electoral participation; and**
 - **Transparency of the electoral process;**

VR: Systems & Methodologies

- Different VR systems and methodologies are used throughout the world, and within each category there are numerous variations:
 - CONTINUOUS (permanent) vs. PERIODIC (ad hoc basis for a specific election)
 - VOLUNTARY vs. COMPULSORY
 - STATE-INITIATED vs. PERSONAL-INITIATED
 - STAND ALONE VR vs. VR derived from the civil registration
 - ACTIVE vs. PASSIVE registration
 - MANUAL PAPER-BASED vs. COMPUTERIZED (electronically captured and stored registration data) VR Systems
- The choice of a VR system/methodology and technologies should be based on the particular circumstances in each country, taking into consideration:
 - the historical and political context
 - the applicable legal framework
 - the available time and financial resources, and
 - the level of skills and other capabilities

Quality Standards of Voter Registers

A Good Voter Register should be:

- **Complete**
- **Current**
- **Accurate**
- **Inclusive (with appropriate exclusions)**
- **Responsive to local conditions**

Voter Registration: Costs (1)

- The Cost of Registration and Elections project identified three costs associated with voter registration:
 - **CORE COSTS**: routine costs directly associated with implementing a voter registration process in a stable environment (training, transportation, fees for registration staff, VR equipment and materials, voter education during the registration period);
 - **DIFFUSE COSTS**: costs at other agencies related to voter registration that cannot be separately identified from their budgets (difficult or impossible to accurately assess even if properly identified);
 - **INTEGRITY COSTS**: additional costs necessary to provide safety, integrity, political neutrality and accessibility to voter registration.
- Significant cost differences exist between routine elections in stable democracies, elections in transitional democracies, and elections during special peacekeeping operations.

Stable		Transitional		Post-conflict	
Core	Integrity	Core	Integrity	Core	Integrity
HIGH	Not Relevant	HIGH	RELEVANT	RELEVANT	HIGH

Voter Registration: Costs (2)

Parameters determining the costs of VR process and operations:

- Size of country and population (citizens and electorate)
- Political/Social/Economic situation of the country
- Electoral systems (legal framework)
- Types of VR systems (continuous or periodic)
- Types of technologies and equipment/materials used
- Types of funding (government or international assistance)
- Timeframes for planning and procurement
- Human resources
- Security

Voter Registration: Sustainability

There are multiple aspects to the sustainability of any electoral process and thus to VR:

1. Institutional sustainability
2. Financial and economic sustainability
3. Human resource sustainability
4. Technological sustainability
5. Political sustainability
6. Environmental sustainability

Challenges and Opportunities

- **The main barrier to the exercise of the right to vote has historically been and continues to be, in certain countries, non-inclusion of significant segments of the population in electoral registers (women, youth, disabled, illiterate, disadvantaged persons).**
- **Other complex issues:**
 - **National identity and establishment of citizenship or residence**
 - **Porosity of national borders (Africa)**
 - **Absence of reliable civil registry**
 - **Manipulation of VR for undue political gain**
 - **De-registration of deceased persons**
 - **Registration of young voters**

Conclusion

- **In conclusion, voter registers serve as a fundamental instrument for the political expression of the sovereign, i.e., the electorate.**
- **All-inclusive, clean voter registers should be considered as a safeguard to the integrity of the suffrage, and therefore an essential condition for the legitimacy, transparency and credibility of democratic/electoral processes, as well as for the political stability of a country.**
- **Voter registration systems should aim for cost-effectiveness – using the most economical means to register voters while achieving effectively democratic principles.**
- **Sustainability is necessary to guarantee the future of the voter registration framework, systems, methodologies, technologies and processes.**
- **Both costs and sustainability of VR have causal relationships with particular system used and typical context of a country.**