

Key Considerations and challenges regarding voter registration

Listed below are some considerations that should be kept in mind when planning support to voter registration processes.

Considerations for Voter Registration

- Voter registration activities should be implemented and conducted with enough time to allow for revision of the lists, public posting, challenges or other processes under the law. Depending on the specific context, there may be a possibility to develop a permanent electoral register that can be updated periodically to reflect population movements, cancellation of deceased voters and enrolment of new ones.
- There may be a possibility during the voter registration process to establish synergies with other relevant institutions (and UNDP projects) such as the Ministry of Interior, Bureau of Statistics, and the agencies in charge of the civil registry and the census, for example.
- The choice of technology has implications for the timing and feasibility of the registration process.
- Before voter registration starts, proper development of procedures and adequate provision for staff training initiatives are necessary. Such procedures include, for example, the complaints and appeals process.
- Voter registration should be integrated with civic and voter education and voter information efforts where possible.
- If a boundary delimitation process is being undertaken, efforts should be made to ensure that it is done through a transparent and consultative process by an independent body comprising neutral appointees. This independent body could be the EMB.
- Efforts should be made — starting at the legal framework level — to develop voter registration processes that are fair, inclusive and ensure that minorities, indigenous and tribal peoples, migrant workers, women, internally displaced people and refugees have the opportunity to register.
- Adequate provision should be made to ensure that the data-gathering processes include as much as personal data as possible to guarantee its usability regardless of future electoral reforms. For example, the registration in Afghanistan had to be redone completely when the electoral system changed from proportional representation to single transferable vote.
- Voter registration can be conducted on a rolled-out, region-by-region basis. This allows for early errors to be corrected; reduces demand and costs for resources such as cameras and other voter registration equipment; and allows the register to be gradually built up.

Challenges to Voter Registration

- Restrictive citizenship laws and national identification documentation requirements may make it difficult or impossible for certain groups to register (e.g., refugees, ethnic or religious minorities, indigenous and tribal peoples or internally displaced persons). Inaccurate and incomplete voter lists can lead to the potential disenfranchisement of voters.
- Loose legal provisions and national identification documentation requirements may result in the enrolment of ineligible voters (e.g., under-age voters and alien residents). Such developments negatively affect the integrity of the voters' list and the overall credibility of the electoral process.
- While the use of information technology can help make voter registration more efficient and cost effective, it is not cure-all. The advantages, disadvantages and potential costs and benefits of using technology need to be carefully identified and weighed. In particular, the need for systems to be supported on an ongoing basis should be factored in at the outset. It must be ensured that any technology introduced for registration could be applicable for other related activities (e.g., voter list production and results aggregation) and beyond the specific election in question.
- Registration plans may be incompatible with the electoral calendar. In general, voter registration must be completed early enough to carry out tasks such as assigning voters to polling stations and allocating ballot papers, but not so early that significant numbers of voters reach the voting age between the registration exercise and the election.
- Physical access of voters to the voter registration process should be considered.
- Existing infrastructures might not be suitable or not in adequate condition to support reform of the voter registration system.
- Potential voters may have limited knowledge and understanding of the voter registration process, the requirements to qualify to register, and various relevant procedures. Such limits are particularly likely if elements have changed between the previous and current elections.