# DIVISION OF ELECTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

# ACTIVITY REPORT

## 2020

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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URSO
Useful
Relevant
Sustainable
Owned
Council of Europe methodology for electoral cooperation

ELECLAB
Council of Europe Electoral Laboratory

CivicLab
Be the change

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 9 November 2020

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Item 8 of the agenda

# EUROPEAN COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE (CDDG)

# DIVISION OF ELECTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY 2020 ACTIVITY REPORT

Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by the
Directorate General of Democracy
Elections and Civil Society Division

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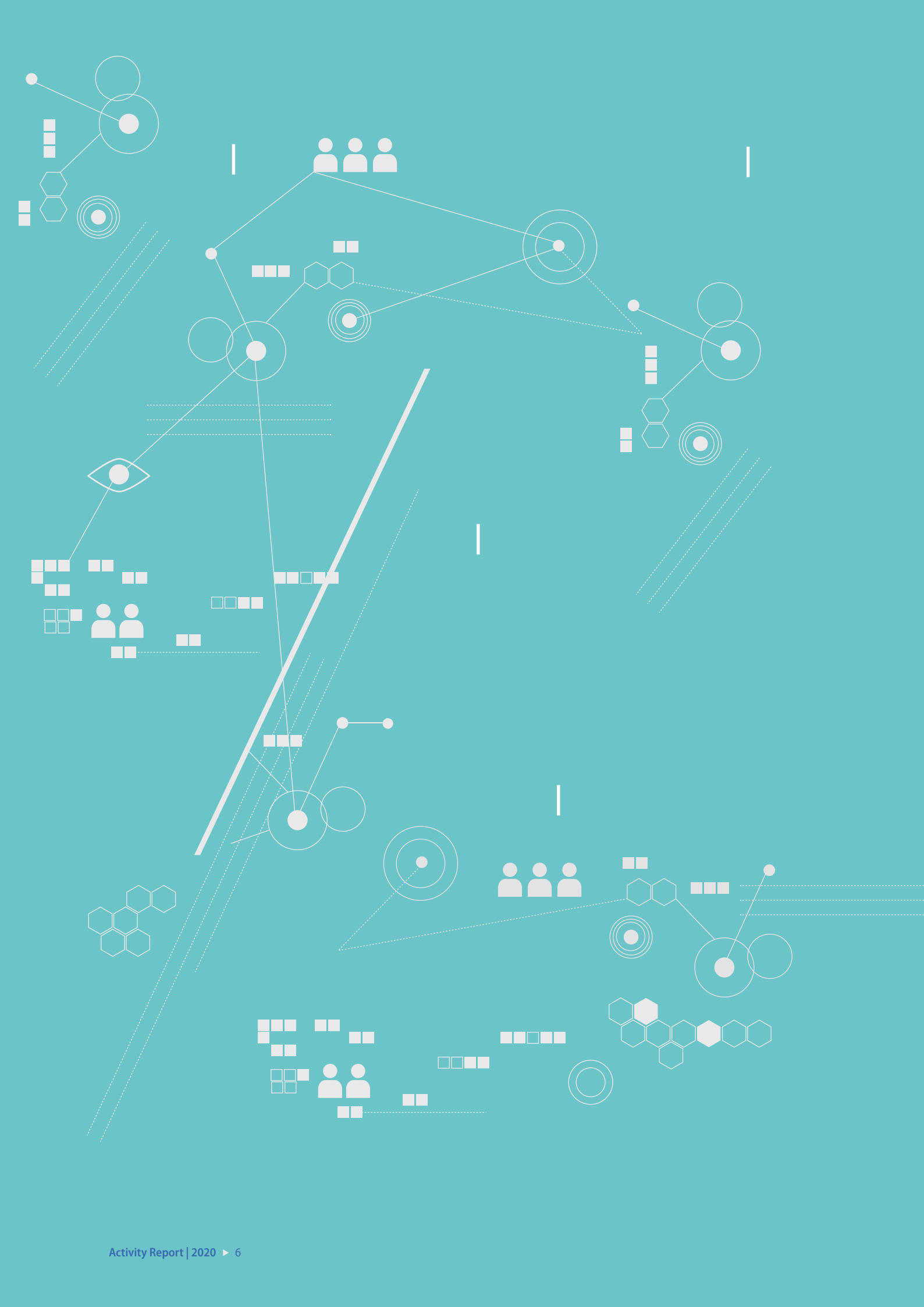


# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **ADA** | Austrian Development Agency |
| **BRIDGE** | Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections |
| **CCET** | Centre for Continuous Electoral Training by the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Moldova |
| **CDDG** | European Committee on Democracy and Governance |
| **CEC** | Central Election Commission |
| **CECG** | Central Election Commission of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia |
| **CM** | Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe |
| **CSOs** | Civil society organisations |
| **DG** | Directorate General |
| **EDR** | Electoral dispute resolution |
| **EOM** | Election Observation Mission |
| **ISFED** | International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy |
| **NGOs** | Non-governmental organisations |
| **NYCM** | National Youth Council from the Republic of Moldova |
| **ODIHR** | Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights |
| **OSCE** | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| **PACE** | Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe |
| **PB** | Participatory budgeting |
| **PGG** | Partnership for Good Governance |
| **SAO** | State Audit Office of Georgia |
| **ToT** | Training of Trainers |
| **URSO** | Useful, Relevant, Sustainable and Owned |

# INTRODUCTION

## Division of Elections and Civil Society

The Division of Elections and Civil Society which is part of the Department of Democracy and Governance (Directorate General of Democracy – DGII) provides advice and technical assistance to the member states on various aspects of elections and civil participation.

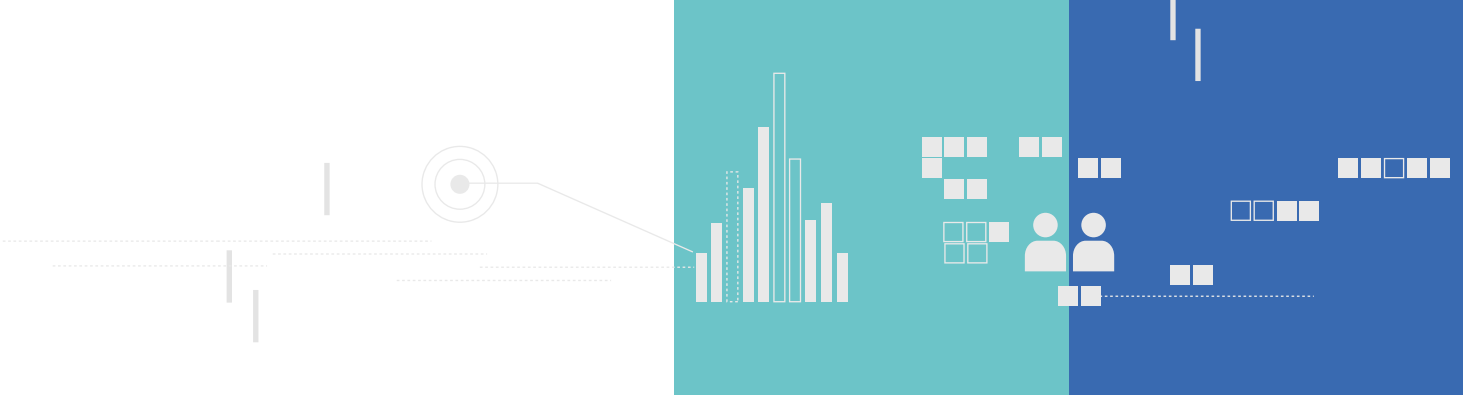
The Department of Democracy and Governance was reformed/re-structured at the beginning of 2020, aimed at streamlining its activities and bringing them more in line with the work of intergovernmental structures where member states are active. In addition with the new democratic challenges and the growing number of initiatives on new forms of participatory democracy, the Division has also been tasked with developing and implementing co-operation projects in respect of citizens' participation in decision-making. The Division will regularly present its activities for discussion and guidance to the CDDG.

This document is the first annual report prepared for the CDDG. For the most part it highlights the activities implemented and results obtained for the reference year (2020); in a very limited number of cases, for the sake of coherence of the presentation, some 2019 activities are also briefly mentioned.

The key mission of the Division, which is composed of 2 complementary parts, is to encourage and stimulate the participation of citizens in decision-making, whether directly or through elections, to promote free and fair elections as well as participatory mechanisms.

**To achieve these goals, the Division implements various activities in the Council of Europe member states:**

- increase the general electoral culture and effectiveness through capacity-building of election commissions at all levels and electoral stakeholders;
- contribute to the improved legal and institutional framework for more transparent, free, fair, integral and inclusive electoral processes;
- awareness-raising of under-represented categories of citizens;
- use innovative tools to enhance civil participation (UChange, School PB, etc.);
- technical assistance on e-voting to update the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)5;
- secure access to information for domestic observers.



The basic assumption being that with a more effective and sustainable participation of citizens in the decision-making processes, the legitimacy of the institutions will be greater. The more electoral processes are professionally managed and organised, transparent and inclusive, integral and competitive, the more trust citizens will have towards the elections results and, consequently, the actions of their representatives.

All the activities implemented by the Division are designed in order to ensure that citizens have greater trust in their representatives and that the representatives associate the citizens to their decisions in an inclusive and transparent manner.

Through its actions and activities, the Division of Elections and Civil Society directly contributes to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16 as well as indirectly to a number of others.

# 1. ELECTORAL CO-OPERATION

## 1.1. Role of the electoral co-operation

**The electoral co-operation is based on the principle of a virtuous circle between standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation.**

The Division of Elections and Civil Society in its work is guided and oriented by recommendations, opinions and documents developed and adopted by various Council of Europe institutions, including the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Venice Commission.

The Council of Europe's *acquis* in electoral matters creates the legal background for the good conduct of the electoral processes and enriches the European Electoral Heritage **(standards setting)**. The Venice Commission is an undisputable reference for electoral standards and guidelines and identifies legal and institutional gaps in the electoral process.

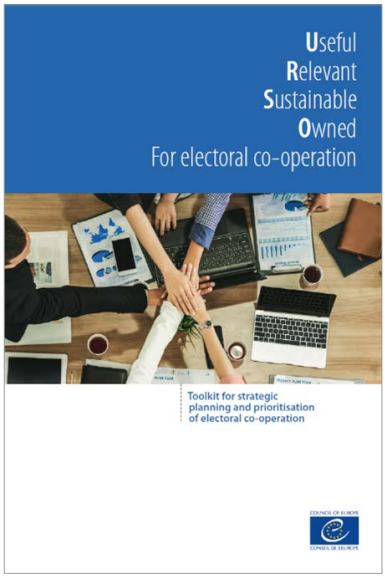
Election observation mission reports which monitor elections (prepared by the PACE, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and other international organisations) provide recommendations that address the shortcomings detected in the electoral process. They **identify gaps in the practice and organisation of elections** and indicate areas where improvements are needed.

The Division of Elections and Civil Society intervenes based on reports from the election observation missions (EOMs), as well as the Venice Commission's opinions in order to help the member states in **resolving the shortcomings**, including on the basis of the best practices identified in the Council of Europe member states. The action to strengthen the capacity of electoral administrations or electoral stakeholders as well as the respective training or awareness-raising campaigns are designed accordingly.

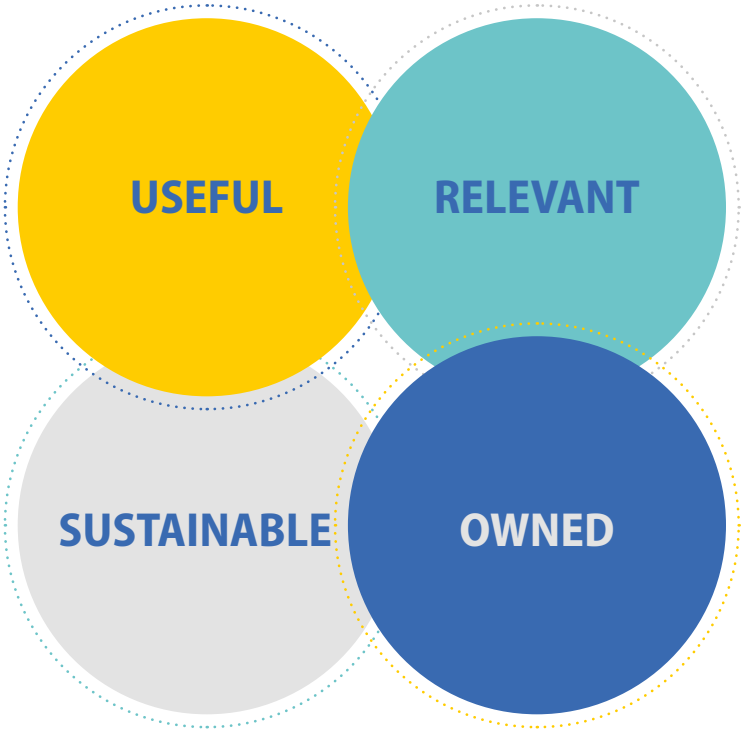
## 1.1.1. URSO Methodology

Useful
Relevant
Sustainable
Owned
Council of Europe methodology for electoral cooperation

"URSO for electoral co-operation" is a toolkit for strategic planning and the prioritisation of electoral co-operation. Its purpose is to foster the democratic environments by providing hands-on tools and practitioner-oriented guidelines that are useful, relevant and sustainable, and which ensure ownership by public authorities and practitioners who may wish to implement the Useful, Relevant, Sustained, Owned (URSO) paradigm.




Moreover, this toolkit aims to contribute to a shift in mindsets regarding the Council of Europe's role in overall electoral support to member states, from electoral assistance to electoral co-operation. In order to do so, this new electoral co-operation framework aims to offer support that goes beyond standard assistance targeted at the procedures of a specific electoral cycle.

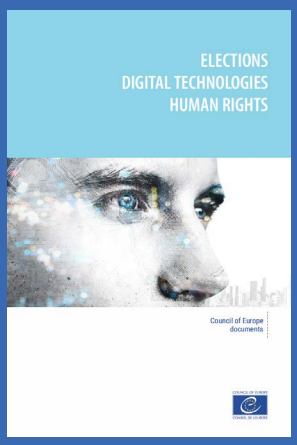


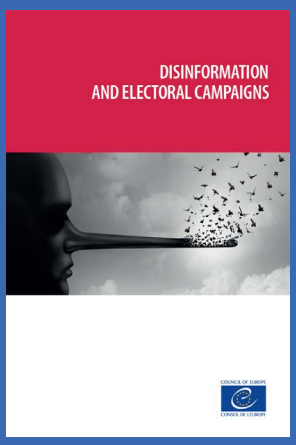
# 1.2. ElecLab

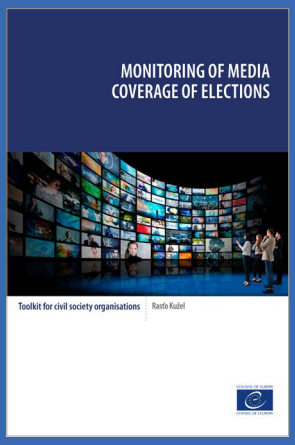
ELECLAB
Council of Europe Electoral Laboratory

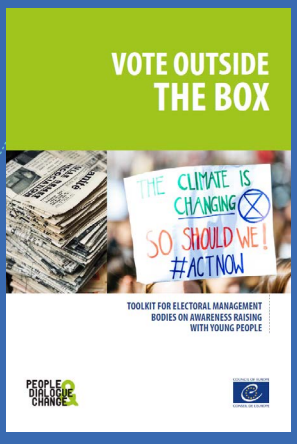
ElecLab, the Council of Europe Electoral Laboratory, concentrates on the Division's research and thematic work in order to innovate and produce useful and relevant guidelines in various areas of electoral matters ranging from first-time voters to better representation of women and modern strategic planning.

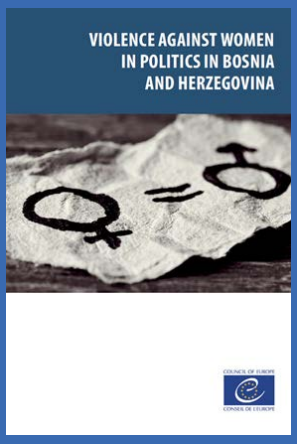
In this regard, several publications and toolkits have been elaborated to tackle various issues throughout the electoral process.





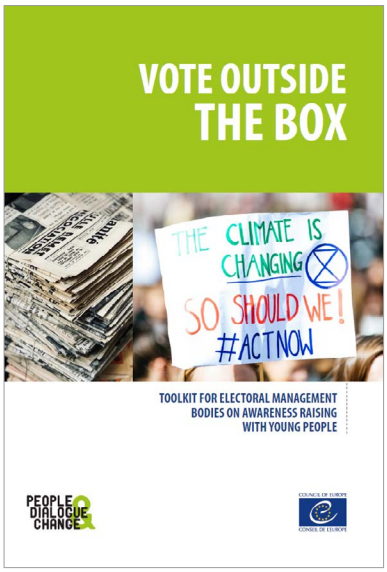







# 1.2.1. Toolkits and publications

## 1.2.1.1. "Vote outside the box"




In recent decades, within many democracies youth voter turnout has been at historic lows. This has caused some to argue that young people are disinterested in politics – however, recent research has shown this is not necessarily true. Instead, young people are very politically motivated, but have low levels of trust and belief in formal representative democracy organisations, often preferring to express their political convictions through alternative forms of participation such as volunteering and activism.

The toolkit "Vote outside the box" is designed to enable Electoral Management Bodies to develop strategic approaches to raising awareness of electoral processes and building electoral knowledge amongst young people as potential first-time voters. Also, this publication may be relevant to other bodies who are interested in this such as Ministries and Agencies responsible for youth policy and other state and non-state actors.

The toolkit was presented to the public during the online talk "Young Voters: Democracy Rebooted", organised by the Division on 28 September 2020. During the event, speakers and experts also discussed current challenges and possible solutions to engaging young people into electoral processes. The event was live streamed on Facebook and attracted some 5,8K views and participants.

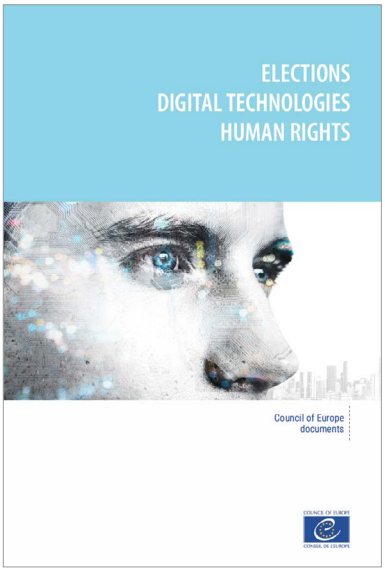
## 1.2.1.2. "Electoral dispute resolution"

One of the main postulates of a democratic society is the peaceful, periodic transition of office through free and fair elections, which are perceived as legitimate by the public. The credibility of elections and sustainability of the electoral environment hinge on the effectiveness of electoral dispute resolution throughout the electoral cycle. The system of electoral justice shall be designed in such a way as to ensure an effective exercise of individual rights to vote and to stand for elections.

The toolkit "Electoral dispute resolution" provides a set of legal standards and good practices for the judiciary, election authorities and other legal practitioners who work with electoral dispute resolution. It provides a comprehensive overview of the European Court of Human Rights case-law on electoral matters, and of the general principles regarding the effectiveness of a domestic system for electoral dispute resolution developed by the Strasbourg Court.

This document also presents national practices and experiences on electoral dispute resolution from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Ukraine. Since the international standards are of a rather general nature, examples of national good practices, and failures, may serve as valuable guidance in implementing and strengthening a system of effective electoral jurisprudence in other Council of Europe member states.

## 1.2.1.3. "Elections. Digital technologies. Human rights"

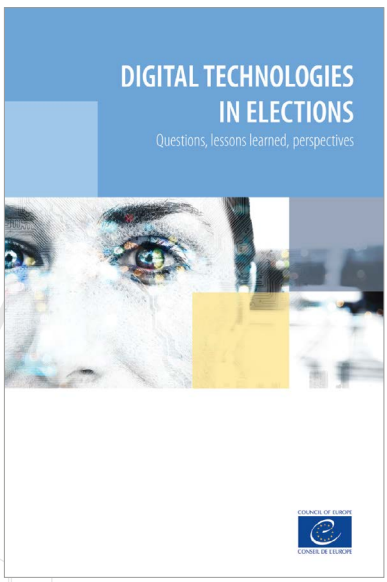



The use of digital technologies in elections has been in the focus of the Council of Europe and its member states for the past twenty years. Certain digital solutions used during the electoral cycle were first covered by the Recommendation Rec(2004)11 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2004 and then by the new Recommendation CM /Rec(2017)5 adopted in 2017.

Though the paper ballots have always been and remain the most trusted (and to a certain extent trustworthy) voting technology, different digital solutions may become very attractive given the COVID impact today. Whenever introduction of digital technologies into electoral process is discussed and pursued, respective legal and practical considerations should be carefully weighed up.

The Council of Europe compendium "Elections. Digital technologies. Human rights" collects respective standards, recommendations and guidelines how to ensure the right to free elections, enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, in the era of digital technologies and AI. The compendium will be updated on a regular basis with relevant Council of Europe documents and instruments, once they are developed and adopted. The publication is available in English and Ukrainian.

## 1.2.1.4. "Digital technologies in elections: questions, lessons learned, perspectives"

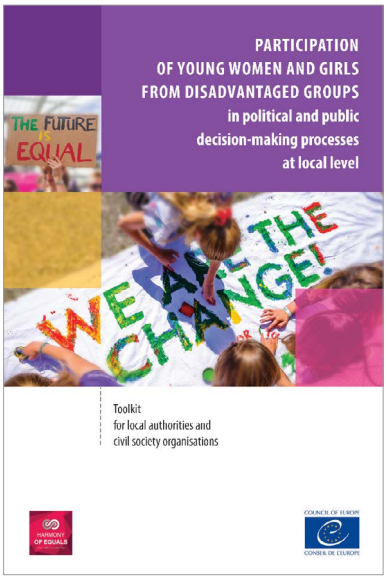



The Council of Europe publication "Digital technologies in elections: questions, lessons learned, perspectives" presents an overview of the relevant international legal instruments as well as issues and principles for regulatory framework which should be taken into account by legislators and election management bodies when introducing digital solutions in the electoral process.

The publication contains the abridged version of the study conducted and presented to the CDDG in January 2020, which presents the main digital technologies applied or envisaged for application during the electoral cycle. It also identifies a list of check-up questions on the compliance of such technologies with the principles of democratic elections. The publication contains findings and conclusions that can be applicable in any country where the use of digital solutions in the electoral process is considered.

The publication is available in English and Ukrainian.

## 1.2.1.5. "Participation of young women and girls from disadvantaged groups in political and public decision-making processes at local level"



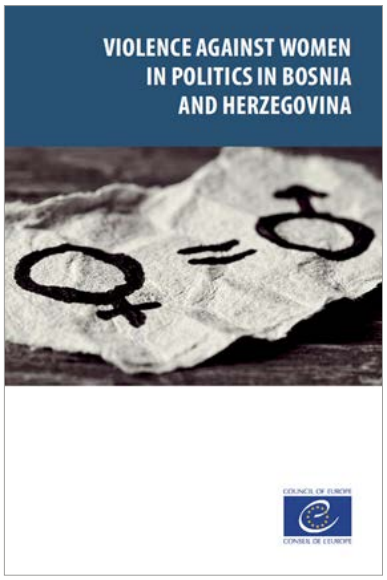

Ensuring a balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making processes is one of the necessary components of achieving gender equality.

This new Council of Europe toolkit is focused on young women and girls from disadvantaged groups as those whose public and political potential is not sufficiently represented within their communities.

The publication is developed for local authorities and civil society organisations who are concerned about the problems of young women and girls from disadvantaged groups. The toolkit offers a curriculum that can be used as a model but should be tailored to the needs of the selected target group.

It offers practical tools, exercises, training methods and good practices from Ukraine and other countries on greater engagement of women and girls in public and political processes at local level. The publication is available in English and Ukrainian.

## 1.2.1.6. "Violence against women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina"

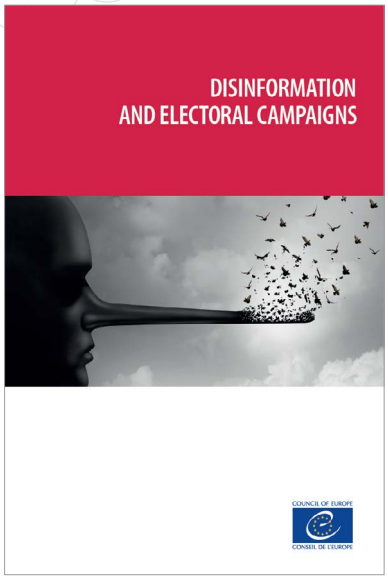



Following the Resolution 2274(2019) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on "Promoting Parliament free of sexism and sexual harassment", the Division of Elections and Civil Society has produced in co-operation with the NGO "Bonaventura Sarajevo" a study on "Violence against women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina" which contains some recommendations (promote women's participation within political parties, including in leadership roles, regularly gather and publish data on violence against women).

As women's political activity has grown, so has the frequency and degree of violent responses to their presence in politics. Around the world, politically active women voters, candidates, local councillors, members of parliament, community activists, bloggers and so on – regularly find themselves on the receiving end of acts or threats of violence. These growing acts of violence serve as a strong barrier to women accessing their right to participate fully and equally in politics and public life.

This publication analyses violence against women in politics in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina and sets out recommendations to address the problem.

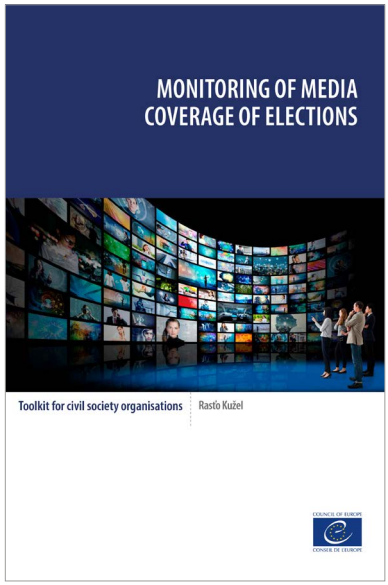
## 1.2.1.7. "Disinformation and electoral campaigns"




Since summer 2016, "fake news" (misinformation, disinformation and propaganda) has denoted the deliberate, viral spreading of false information on the internet and social media with the intention, for example, of discrediting a political party, tarnishing someone's reputation or casting doubt on scientific truth. This practice, which hinders citizens in making informed decisions, has become very widespread. This report attempts to provide responses to issues raised by this phenomenon, in particular during electoral campaigns, and offer proposals to shape a legal framework at the European level.

This publication is available in English, French, Macedonian and Ukrainian.

## 1.2.1.8. "Monitoring of media coverage of elections"




During elections, media monitoring by civil society organisations provides benchmarks for judging the fairness of the election process, and gives professional, comprehensive and objective assessment of political diversity and balance in the news and current affairs coverage.

The aim of the new Council of Europe toolkit is to provide civil society organisations with detailed methodology of how to implement a monitoring project of media coverage of elections, containing description of its stages and activities, as well as practical step-by-step guidelines and tips with regard to monitoring of different types of media (TV, printed and online media, social media).

The publication contains tools and methods that can be applicable in any country and adjusted according to the given context and research question to be answered, as well as presents media monitoring case studies from several countries.

This publication is available in English.

## 1.2.1.9. "Countering the misuse of administrative resources"

Competitive, fair and healthy electoral environment is crucial at every stage of the electoral cycle. Still, it gains an utmost importance for the electoral campaign as well as on the Election Day. The line between a state and a ruling party is very fragile and sometimes is blurred in young democracies that detracts from other improvements in electoral practices. The abuse of public administrative resources damages democratic development of states and leads to frustration of citizens towards elections and the results.

"The fair use of public administrative resources is vital in ensuring that full and fair democratic elections take place. Misuse by those who have power over such resources during an electoral process has the potential to seriously inhibit the full and fair participation of opponents thereby undermining the legitimacy of the results." (Abstract from the toolkit – Richard Barett)

The toolkit "Countering the misuse of the administrative resources during electoral processes" is developed as a methodological guideline for the Council of Europe member states to introduce effective mechanisms for preventing abuse of public administrative resources and responding to respective violations in a timely and efficient manner. The toolkit is designed in cooperation with the Venice Commission and is based on the Council of Europe *acquis* and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. The publication proposes an overview of international standards and good practices, case studies and practical examples, empowering electoral stakeholders with necessary instruments for countering the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes. The toolkit suggests interesting comparative analysis on examples of Latvia, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and other Council of Europe member states. Authors propose recommendations and practical solutions, complex of measures that are already in place and have changed electoral practices for the better. The methodological guideline also includes code of conduct, training materials and concepts of E-learning courses in the field aimed at raising awareness of electoral stakeholders towards necessity of ensuring fair and competitive electoral environment.

The toolkit will be mainly targeted at electoral officials and public servants, as well as other electoral stakeholders. The publication will be released by the end of the year 2020.

# 1.2.2. E-learning tools

## 1.2.2.1. CEC: Prosvita

On 21 September 2020, an interactive online training platform about elections "CEC:prosvita", being a joint educational project of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine and the Council of Europe, was launched. For over six months, more than 30 experts and specialists have been working on its development and production, particularly, a team of elections and democracy experts of the Council of Europe, creative teams from a laboratory "Platform" and studio for online education "EdEra", "UA: Ukrainian Radio", as well as a marketing agency "BigBangers".

The main idea of this project is to show that every vote counts and every choice is important, that everyone's vote determines the future of both a particular community and the country as a whole. The purpose of this project is to help Ukrainians make well-informed and conscious choices during elections.

The educational online platform "CEC:prosvita" was created for Ukrainian citizens – voters, including first-time voters, election commissioners, observers, candidates and parties, as well as other participants of the election process. This project is designed to:

- explain why elections at both local and national levels are important for the democratic development of the state
- show how elections are arranged and organised
- encourage citizens to participate in elections and make well-informed and conscious choices

**3,09 k**
**followers**

**11 m**
**views**

Ukrainians will be able to take both individual training courses, as well as become familiar with other informational and educational materials on electoral issues to be developed and placed on the educational platform "CEC:prosvita".

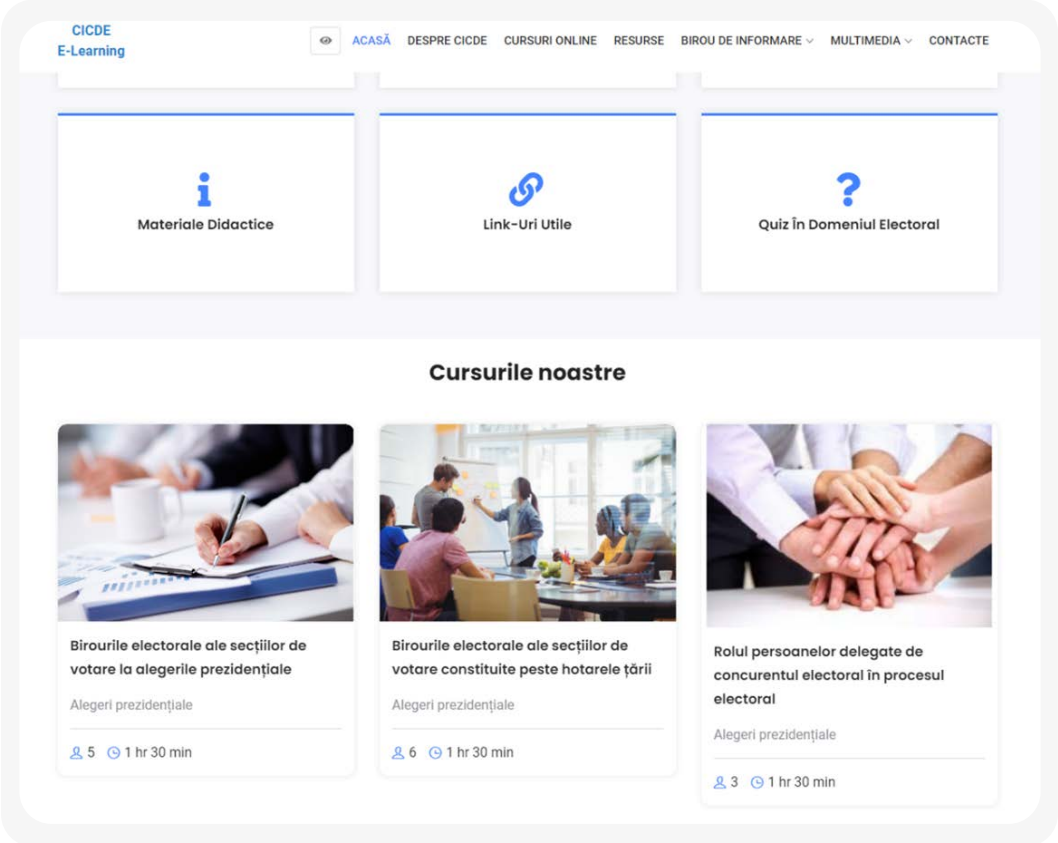
The platform can be used by the CEC as its main communication channel to disseminate educational and awareness raising materials which can be developed and produced by the CEC alone or in co-operation with its national and international partners.

In one month, 1973 participants registered on the platform. The platform has its own YouTube channel where all video materials from the "CEC:prosvita" are placed and publicly available. In roughly two months, 3,09 K followers subscribed to the channel and video materials got more than 11M views.

## 1.2.2.2. CCET Moldova: electoral education becomes user-friendlier and more accessible in the Republic of Moldova

On 13 October 2020, a new E-learning platform of the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training (CCET) by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Moldova was presented. This E-learning module is user-friendly and more reliable than the old one.

Due to this electronic tool, the electoral courses are becoming more accessible for all interested stakeholders, the representatives of the electoral management bodies, civil society, first-time voters, journalists, observers etc. Consequently, everyone will be able to enrol him or herself into different courses via E-learning platform within the Training Centre and due to interconnection with the electronic Register of trained and certified experts by the Training Centre get an official certificate, if they completed successfully the relevant electoral course.



## 1.2.2.3. Election campaign and administrative resources – preventing and responding to abuse of administrative resources during electoral processes in Georgia

The E-learning course on "Election campaign and administrative resources – preventing and responding to abuse of administrative resources during electoral processes" is developed in co-operation with the Central Election Commission of Georgia and the Centre for Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Training.

The E-learning course aims to raise awareness among civil servants towards preventing and countering the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes.

The E-learning course is primarily designed for civil servants at all levels of the Georgian executive: central and local governmental agencies, including the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, as well as legal entities of public law and entrepreneurial or non-entrepreneurial legal entities established by the State, by the Autonomous Republic, or a municipality.

In addition, the E-learning course is available for all electoral stakeholders and general public. For these purposes, the E-learning course is displayed on the CEC and the Training Centre official websites. The distant platform enables users to access the E-learning course without any time and space limitations. To stimulate interest, there are certain timeframes set for the fulfilment of test assignments and case studies, integrated into the program. Test assignments' block is an additional resource for verifying knowledge of the topics. After successful testing process, program users receive electronic certificates.

The software platform of the course has technical capacity for data processing (report) that enables to receive and process various data including by periods, about quantity and category of users (civil servant or a private person), as well as gender disaggregated data.

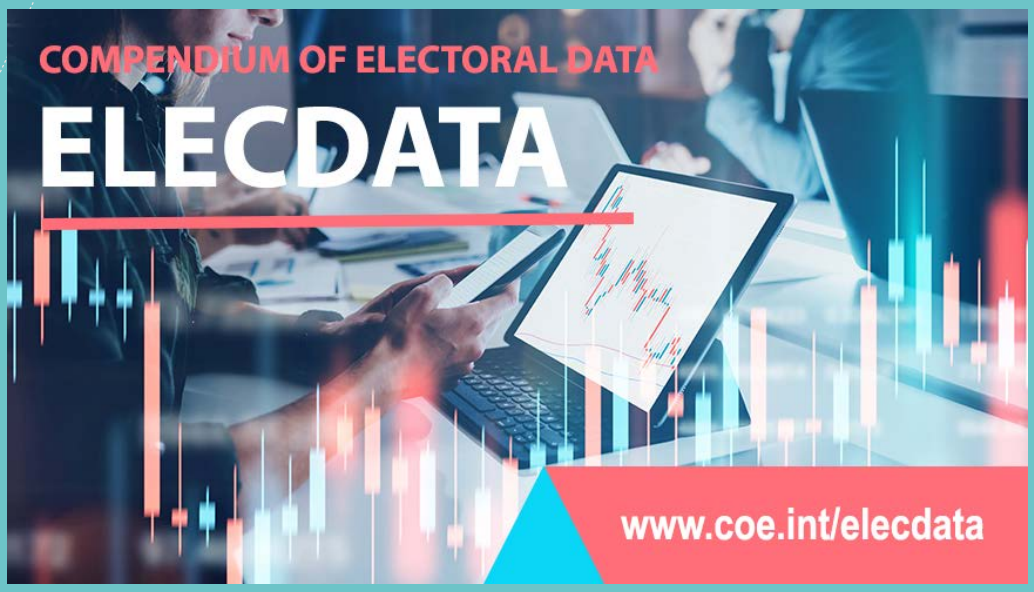
Upon successful completion of the E-learning course, awareness of civil servants on domestic and international standards and good practices related to use / misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes is increased; civil servants have obtained a deeper knowledge on legal framework prohibiting the misuse of administrative resources, as well as respective administrative sanctions responding to violations, court practice and decisions of the election administration, as well as other international instruments aimed at countering the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes.

The course is fully adapted for blind individuals and those with visual impairment.

Up to date, 16 981 civil servants have registered for the E-learning course and 14 912 civil servants have successfully completed the course.

## 1.3. ElecData

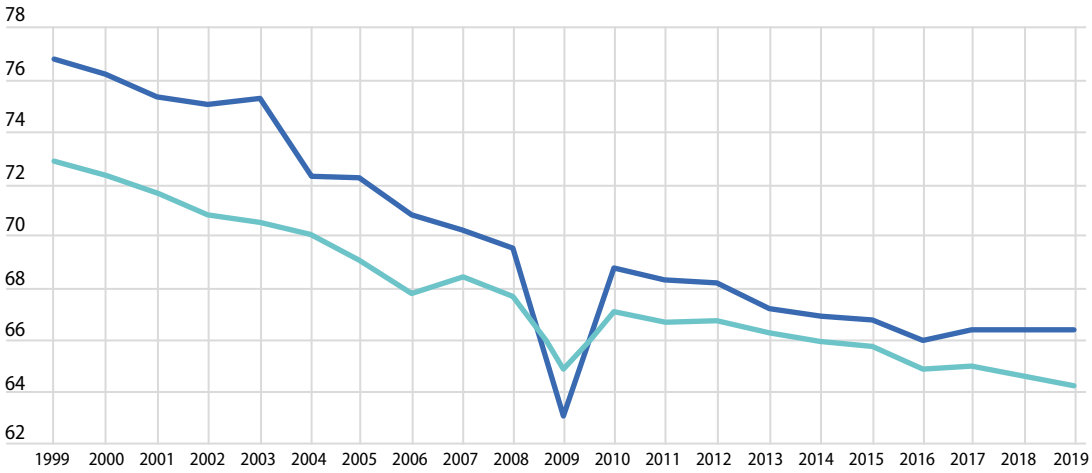
The Council of Europe Compendium of Electoral Data (ElecData) is a tool, which gathers the specificities of each electoral system of the Council of Europe. This collection makes it possible to easily consult the electoral data by means of interactive maps and graphics. Many items have been already elaborated so far (representation of women in parliaments, turnout, frequency of elections, etc.).




- Electoral information for each country in Europe
- Turnout for Parliamentary Elections
- Representation of women in national Parliaments
- Frequency of Parliamentary elections
- Election Observation Mission reports (PACE and Congress)

## Turnout for Parliamentary Election (1999-2019)

### Average within the member states




COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

As an example of the ElecData's work, the average turnout for Parliamentary Elections in the Council of Europe's member states has been illustrated by the above graphic. For decades, the representative democracy is questioned by the citizens. We can see clearly the disaffection of voters regarding elections. The average turnout in the Council of Europe's member states has constantly decreased over the past 20 years (see above the graphic by ElecData, the Compendium of Electoral Data of the Council of Europe). In 1999, the average turnout in Europe was **72,8 %** whereas in 2019 it was **64,2 %**. This effect can be seen in most parts of Europe, it can be considered as a general trend.

The Compendium of Electoral Data (ElecData) allows to measure the evolution of various aspects of the electoral process.

**1999** **72,8 %**

**2019** **64,2 %**

# 1.4. Country-specific initiatives, co-operation programmes and activities

## 1.4.1. Albania

The Division of Elections and Civil Society is constantly strengthening its support to the Central Election Commission of Albania. 15 senior officials of the Central Election Commission were trained and certified in the field of Strategic Planning under the BRIDGE international methodology. The ceremony organised at the CEC premises for this purpose marked the successful completion of the first training of this standard in Albania, which aims to advance and standardise the curriculum used for the CEC professional growth and electoral education, utilising the best methodologies and tools used in over 40 different countries.

The programme, supported by the Council of Europe and implemented by the Academy of Political Studies in Albania, under the expertise of the international organisation International IDEA, provided capacity building and technical assistance for the staff of the CEC in Albania with regard to strategic planning and management.

This certification precedes the electoral reform objectives and recommendations of the OSCE / ODIHR reports on the establishment of a training centre under the CEC which will conduct relevant trainings and certification of future electoral commissioners to be involved in the 2021 Parliamentary Elections.

# 1.4.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina

## Council of Europe project "Support to more integral and inclusive electoral processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina"

The project "Support to more integral and inclusive electoral processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina" started in 2020, in line with the long-standing electoral co-operation activities put in place by the Division of Elections and Civil Society, as a follow-up to the conclusions of the post-electoral conference " 2018 General Elections – challenges of the electoral process in Bosnia and Herzegovina".

This project aims to support the electoral commissions at all levels with capacity building activities and awareness-raising campaigns targeting voters and especially under-represented categories of citizens. To achieve this project, the Division is supporting the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Within this project, the Division of Elections and Civil Society published a pilot-study on "Violence against women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina", presented in the previous section; this study will be the basis for further actions to tackle this issue.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was also assisted through the specific grants to the Central Election Commission to strengthen the capacity of various electoral stakeholders prior to the 2020 Local elections, with the production of different publications for municipal/city election commissions and polling stations committees, especially regarding the specific context of COVID-19 outbreak. The Council of Europe support has also enhanced the awareness-raising campaigns towards "young voters" to mobilise them to exercise their right to vote, and a publication on the impact of social media on the electoral processes was prepared and distributed.

## 1.4.3. Georgia

### Council of Europe project "Supporting transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice and process in Georgia"

The Council of Europe has been supporting electoral reforms in Georgia almost a decade, in close co-operation with the Election Administration of Georgia, primarily, with the Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC) and the State Audit Office of Georgia (SAO) and its Political Finances Monitoring Department, as well as with the leading civil society organisations in the field.

Currently, the Council of Europe is implementing the project "Supporting transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice and process in Georgia".

Electoral assistance project has supported the Georgian counterparts in all endeavours aimed at improvement of electoral environment. International standards and good practices, with an emphasis on the Council of Europe *acquis* and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, were promoted and incorporated into domestic electoral practices.

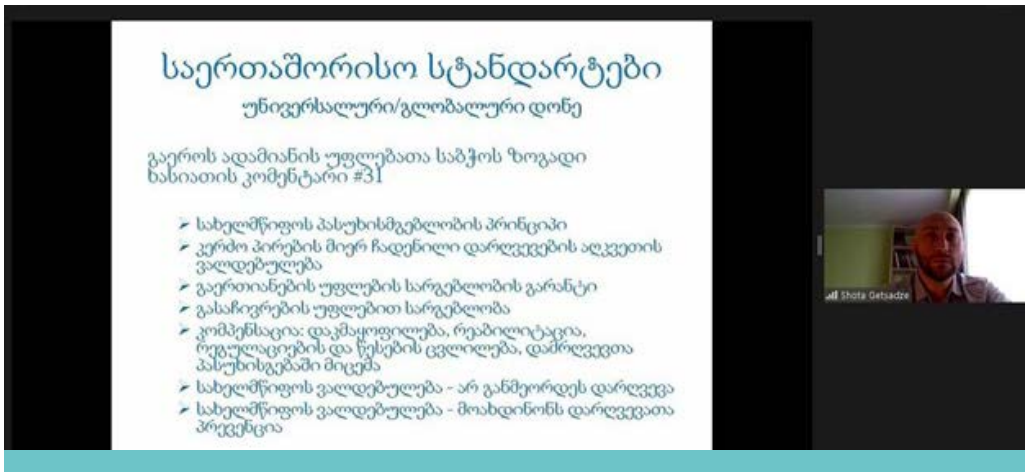
Transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral processes was increased through establishing and promoting dialogue platforms and thematic consultations among electoral stakeholders, sharing and promoting values of European electoral heritage, supporting working group formats aimed at further refinement of electoral legal framework to ensure better alignment with international standards.

Administrative, operational and management capacity of the Election Administration of Georgia was enhanced through capacity building of electoral officials, new online electronic registration systems for electoral stakeholders (party proxies, international and domestic observer organisations, media representatives) enabling better and transparent access to electoral processes through simplified procedures, efficient mechanisms to implement gender mainstreaming within election administration, as a follow-up of the conducted Participatory Gender Audit.

Effective measures were introduced aimed at preventing and countering misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes and, particularly, in light of upcoming 2020 Parliamentary Elections: E-learning course – "Election campaign and administrative resources – preventing and responding to abuse of administrative resources during electoral processes" was developed and implemented in co-operation with the Georgian CEC targeting civil servants at all levels of the Georgian executive. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed among Georgian governmental agencies – the CEC, the Inter-agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections, the Civil Service Bureau of Georgia and the Council of Europe – to ensure consistent implementation of the course.

A toolkit aimed at countering the misuse of administrative resources was developed, in co-operation with the Venice Commission, to share experience and good practices among the member states on effective instruments necessary to prevent the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes, ensure healthy and competitive campaign environment and to respond to respective violations in a timely and efficient manner.

Capacities of Georgian common court judges were enhanced to adjudicate electoral disputes. A permanent training course on "Electoral Law and Electoral Dispute Resolution" was introduced and included into the curriculum of the High School of Justice of Georgia, in co-operation with the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED, domestic CSO). Training module was developed, training of trainers and pilot trainings were conducted to ensure a consistent and systematic professional growth of Georgian judges adjudicating electoral complaints, as well as of judicial candidates. Up to 100 judges all over Georgia have successfully completed the course. It is worth mentioning that the High School of Justice continues to implement the course sustainably.




Capacity of the Election Administration of Georgia was enhanced to resolve electoral disputes and improve quality of their decisions. Trainers of the Centre for Elections Systems Development, Reform and Training (under the CEC) and the staff of the CEC Legal and Audit Departments have obtained a deep knowledge on international and domestic standards and practices of electoral dispute resolution, with a particular emphasis on the Council of Europe *acquis* and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. The ToT participants disseminated obtained knowledge further among up to 150 election commissioners of Georgian District Election Commissions countrywide. Election commissioners are better prepared to hear electoral complaints for the upcoming 2020 Parliamentary Elections.

Practices related to adjudication of electoral complaints have been improved: a toolkit, a methodological guideline for strengthening electoral jurisprudence was developed in co-operation with the Venice Commission and introduced to the Georgian counterparts – judges, election commissioners, legal professionals as well as to the Council of Europe member states to serve as a roadmap for further alignment with good international practices in electoral matters.

Administrative, operational and management capacity of Political Party Finance Monitoring Department of the SAO was enhanced through capacity building of the SAO staff through thematic workshops and trainings. New internal and external web-platforms were designed and launched improving operation of the agency and enabling better access for electoral stakeholders and general public to monitor legality and transparency of political finances (internal and external web-platforms). Participation of the youth and vulnerable groups' in the electoral processes were increased through a large-scale voter education campaigns within the framework of Electoral Development Schools project, in co-operation with the Georgian CEC, reaching up to **500 young people** all over Georgia, from **27 municipalities**. The CEC continues to organise Electoral Development Schools sustainably.

**500**
**young people**

Awareness of electoral stakeholders and general public in the Autonomous Republic of Ajara was raised with regard to active engagement in electoral processes: in co-operation with the Supreme Election Commission of Ajara joint activities have been implemented, among others a *periodic* electoral journal "Elections and Democracy" is issued and disseminated in the region, addressing most disputable topics related to electoral matters and providing a transparent information to general public, supporting an informed choice among Georgian citizens.

**27**
**municipalities**

# 1.4.4. Republic of Moldova

## Council of Europe project "Improving electoral practice in the Republic of Moldova"

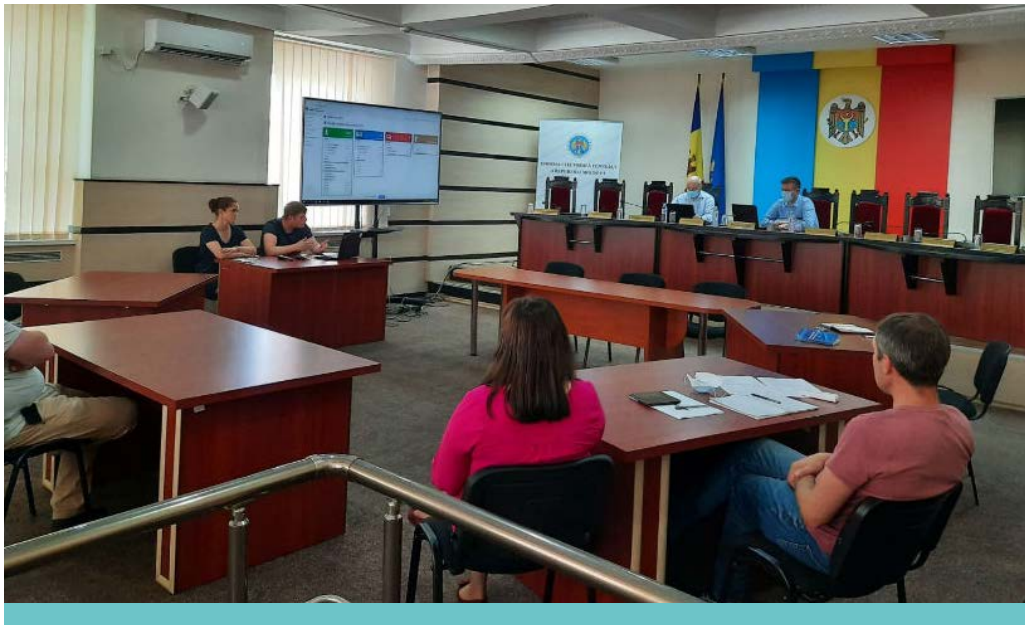
The Council of Europe is currently implementing the project "Improving electoral practice in the Republic of Moldova" to support more transparent, fair and inclusive elections in the Republic of Moldova. One of the project objectives is to support improving the electoral practices and to increase confidence in the electoral system. Also, the project aims to enhance the capacities of national electoral bodies at all levels, in order to ensure an electoral process in line with international standards. In 2020, the Council of Europe focused its support on capacity building of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Moldova (CEC), the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training by the Central Election Commission (CCET) and the Central Election Commission of ATU Gagauzia (CEC ATU Gagauzia). In this context, strategic and electoral advice was provided to the CEC, CCET and CEC ATU Gagauzia in improving their communication with electoral stakeholders, in developing innovative electronic tools for spreading electoral knowledge and enhancing skills and crafts through capacity-building trainings / webinars /study visits.

Study visit to the Council of Europe institutions, January 2020

Three strategic plans for the CEC, the CCET and CEC of ATU Gagauzia were developed and adopted using the innovative Council of Europe URSO tool for strategic planning and prioritisation of electoral co-operation. Also, the communication strategy for CEC was developed, based on the URSO methodology for electoral co-operation. This will serve as a basis for annual plans, as well as to promote the good image of the electoral system and electoral processes.

Another achievement during implementation of the project was strengthening electoral jurisprudence by organising trainings for over 50 judges and dedicated electoral staff on electoral dispute resolution, based on the Council of Europe "Electoral dispute resolution" toolkit and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Also, the Council of Europe supported the development of the new modules for the State Automation Informational System "Elections" (registration and accreditation processes for observers, representatives of electoral competitors, preliminary registration for voters residing abroad and documentation).



CCET's enhanced its capacity through the innovative electronic Register of trained and certified experts, which enables the CCET to collect and process information about specific needs of different categories of trainees, segregate gender and age data, availability of trainers with specific knowledge and crafts, count certificates for those who completed successfully the relevant on-line and off-line electoral courses.

The Council of Europe's support has increased transparency and integrity of the CEC work by updating video-audio recording and streaming equipment for meetings.

Another activity implemented was piloting the toolkit on awareness raising with young voters: organising webinars for students from universities and high schools, whose goal was to encourage them, including first-time voters, to participate more actively in the upcoming presidential elections. In addition to that, in these activities the National Youth Council from the Republic of Moldova was involved in promoting the "Vote outside the box" approach among young people, especially first-time voters.

The Council of Europe provided support for enhancing capacities of domestic election NGOs for monitoring the 2020 presidential elections in the polling stations created abroad.

The Council of Europe assisted the CEC of ATU Gagauzia in building its institutional and operational capacities to efficiently organise and conduct elections, by harmonising the electoral legislation that will consolidate the status and capacities of the CEC of ATU Gagauzia to operate in more transparent and professional manner. Also, the Council of Europe experts provided support for the automation of informational electoral processes in the ATU Gagauzia by conducting a feasibility study.

In accordance with the draft of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021 – 2024, further assistance in electoral field is foreseen in order to re-enforce the institutional and operational capacities, skills and knowledge of all participants in electoral cycles and processes in line with the Council of Europe standards and international good practices: electoral management bodies, training entities, media observers, voters, including first-time ones, judiciary, and media-watchdogs.

In addition, an assistance towards further automatization and digitalization will be provided to the CEC, CCET and CEC of ATU Gagauzia as concerns more accessible and user-friendlier approach in respect of electoral stakeholders' rights.

# 1.4.5. Ukraine

## Council of Europe project "Supporting the transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine"

For the past six years, the Council of Europe has provided its electoral assistance to the Ukrainian authorities and civil society to promote transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine and to improve it in alignment with the European electoral standards and good practice. Based on the 2018 Memorandum of Co-operation signed with the Central Election Commission of Ukraine, the Council of Europe project on "Supporting the transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine" is aimed at increasing public trust towards the Central Election Commission of Ukraine and the electoral process.

In 2020, the Council of Europe focused its support, amongst others, on strengthening the capacity of the Central Electoral Commission to communicate with voters in order to increase public awareness about elections, including 2020 local elections.

In this regard, a visual/brand identity, as well as communication strategy for the CEC outreach and public awareness-raising activities was developed as a part of the Council of Europe / CEC joint project – educational and awareness raising online platform about elections "CEC:prosvita" ("ЦВК:просвіта"). All awareness raising materials and visual tools further developed by and in co-operation with the CEC, including with other partners, have been produced in line with the developed guidelines.

Herewith, two online training courses for voters about elections were developed and placed on the online platform "CEC:prosvita". The particular innovative approach used in both training courses is *"learning via chatting"* with prominent historical figures, as well as some outstanding contemporaries, but also ordinary Ukrainian citizens and voters.

**28**
**Modules**

**28 Modules** of "Elections in simple terms" training course were designed to inform Ukrainian citizens about the history of elections, basic principles and electoral standards, different types of electoral systems and procedures applied in Ukraine and in other countries.

**12**
**Modules**

**12 Modules** of "Local Elections for Voters" training course were designed to inform Ukrainian voters about the key aspects of local elections rules and procedures, as well as clear guidance and explanations how Ukrainian voters can exercise their electoral rights at local elections. All videos developed within these online courses are also available on the "CEC:prosvita" YouTube channel.

The interactive and innovative approach used in these training courses will make it easier to incorporate the developed materials into educational programmes about the basics of law and elections delivered in the Ukrainian schools and universities. These online courses and materials might further be used by the CEC in its future activities targeted at young voters, particularly, first-time voters, and measures taken for the engagement of young people in country's public and political life, in particular, the electoral process. Based on the Council of Europe "Vote outside the box" toolkit and following the webinars on how to increase youth' political and electoral participation conducted in August 2020, the CEC has already got acquainted with different approaches to formal and non-formal education, communication strategies and marketing campaigns which may increase the effectiveness of such measures based on the profiling of young voters, understanding their attitudes, values and views.

**690 k**
**Facebook users**

**28 500**
**polling stations**

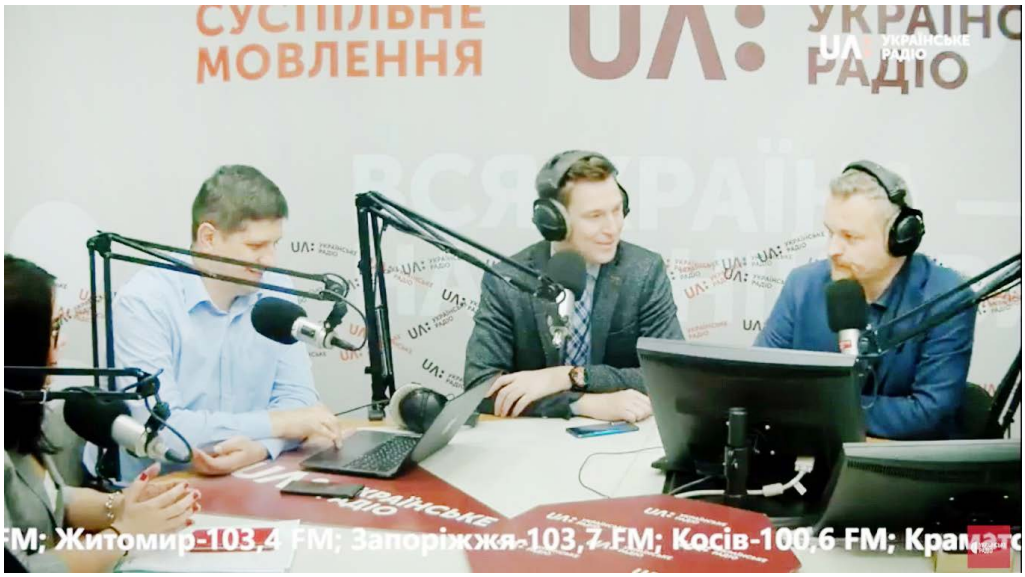
**35 k**
**daily audience**

**11,5 m**
**Ukrainians**

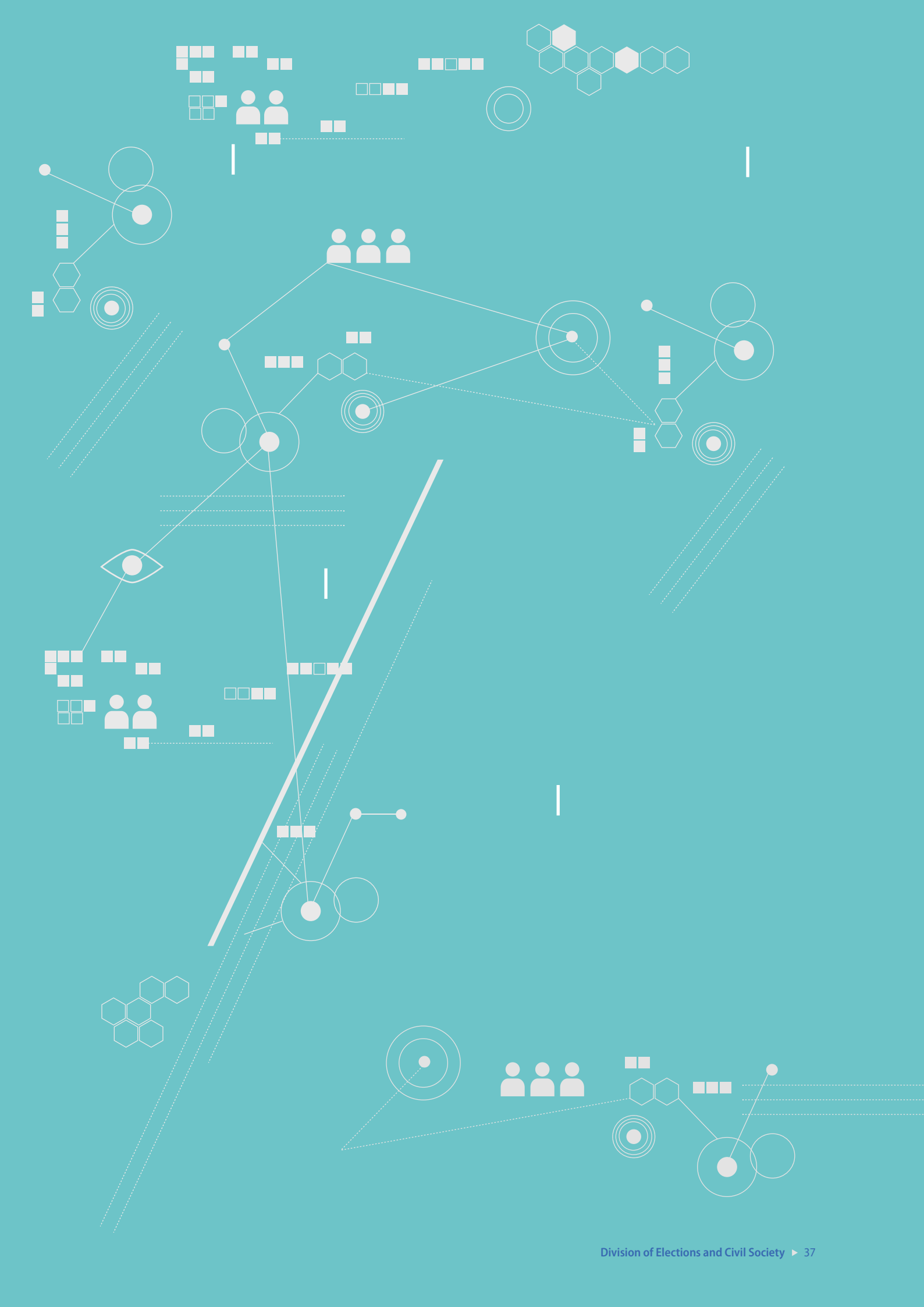
As a part of the joint Council of Europe / CEC project "CEC:prosvita", 129 infographic materials about 2020 local elections and newly adopted legal framework were developed and widely disseminated in online and social media (e.g. the infographics reached more than **690 K Facebook users** and the CEC Facebook page got more than **5 K new followers** in roughly one month). The materials explained various aspects of the electoral process, including general schedule of local elections with the key dates and deadlines, election commissions activities, electoral systems to be used during local elections, voting and counting procedures, as well as procedures for establishment of election results. Particularly, two posters on the voting procedures and accountability for electoral violations with two versions adjusted for people with visual impairments were developed and disseminated by the CEC at some **28 500 polling stations** before the E-day.

In addition to that, a series of 8 webinars "Local Elections 2020: Essentials Plain and Uncovered" was organized with an audience of more than **17 K persons reached** in online and social media and respective brochure published with the main facts from the webinars (available in Ukrainian and English). Also, 10 radio programmes about key aspects of the 2020 local elections broadcasted at "UA: Ukrainian Radio" (with more than **35 K daily audience**) were organised in close co-operation and with the participation of the CEC members and representatives, as well as other Council of Europe national electoral partners and stakeholders.

The Council of Europe support with respect to public awareness raising on local elections contributed to the media outreach with local elections awareness-raising materials of more than **11,5 M Ukrainians**.




The Council of Europe electoral assistance project has also strengthened the capacity of the Central Election Commission to organise and conduct the electoral processes in a more efficient manner, particularly by developing and providing the concept on the institutionalisation of the CEC training centre for electoral stakeholders, as well as preparing an analytical overview of the European practices of decentralized election management systems which might be further studied by the Ukrainian stakeholders, given the new legal framework in place. The Council of Europe will provide its further expert, methodological and technical support on these issues during the next year upon the CEC request.



# 2. CIVIL PARTICIPATION

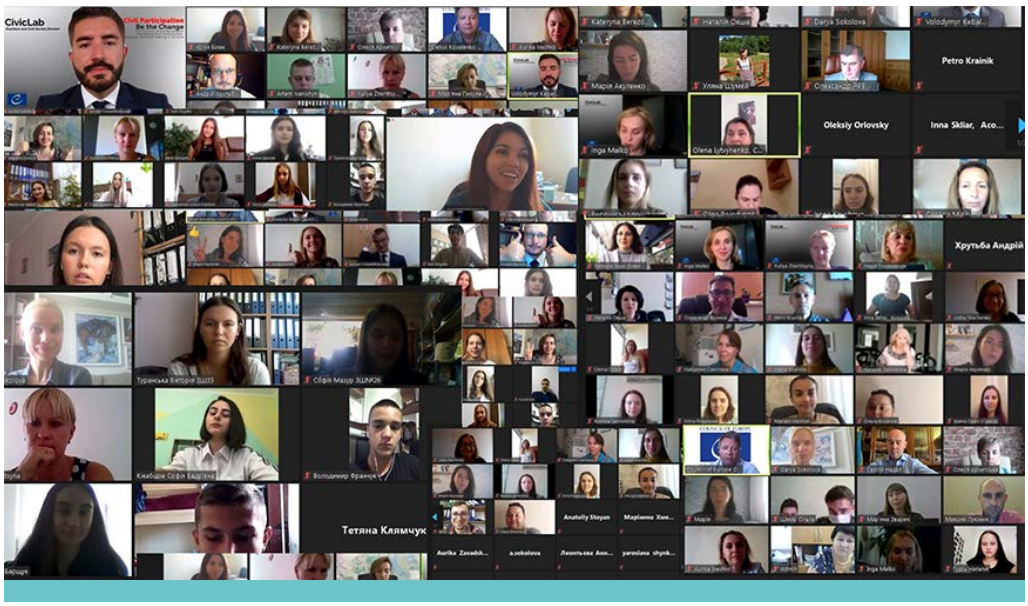
## 2.1. Role of the civil participation

The participation of citizens in the decision-making processes is the foundation of the functioning and development of a genuinely democratic society as it promotes social dialogue on the most important issues. Citizens accept decisions and trust their representatives when they are aware and take advantage of their opportunities to express themselves during political discussions on important issues and decisions.

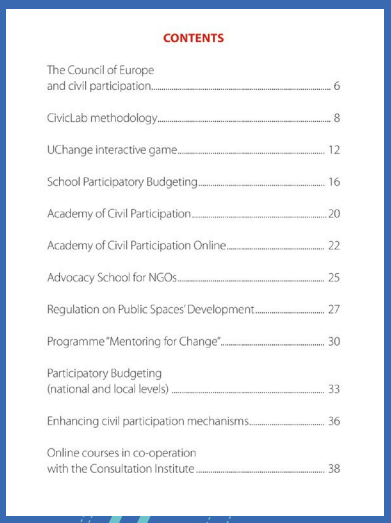
Among the most pressing challenges of concern for the European democracies are the issues of alienation of the people from political processes, lack of public confidence in democratic institutions and decorrelation between citizens' preferences and decisions made by public authorities. Such challenges should be urgently addressed as citizens who have no voice in political discussions and decision-making will more likely challenge them, and their trust in public authorities will be low. In such circumstances, neither citizens' voices are heard, nor their needs met, and governments act lacking appropriate information about the needs, problems and preferences of citizens, which, in turn, makes it complicated for the politicians to understand the implications of their decisions for the citizens' lives.

The practice of the representative system demonstrates that the change of political actors does not always improve the situation if the good functioning of the system itself is at stake. Therefore, the participation of citizens is of vital importance for the functioning of democracy as it increases public supervision of authorities and so ensures that the latter act in public interests. Citizens should have equal rights and opportunities to express their opinions in the course of local decision-making and implementation of important policies which have an impact on their lives, and everybody's voice must be taken into account.

Ensuring effective, accessible and equal opportunities for citizens to participate in political decision-making is one of the best ways of addressing most problems our democracies face. The best democratic governance usually takes place when citizens are more active, bridging thus the gap between civil society and authorities.



## 2.2. Toolbox: rebooting democracy through citizen participation



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Many countries in the world are nowadays in a critical need for the transformation of their political systems. The Division possesses the whole range of innovative instruments to this end. Such innovative mechanisms help countries to use the unbelievable potential of citizens, NGOs and civil society as a whole and ensure that such approaches are included in the functioning of political institutions, making civil participation the basis for the renewed democratic systems.

The Toolbox: rebooting democracy through citizen participation is a roadmap demonstrating what can be done to make democracy work again, along with the strengthening of election systems and investing in democratic education. The tools features in the toolbox have demonstrated their success in uniting public authorities and civil society in an open and fair political dialogue, which brought about sustainable reforms, strengthened public trust in democratic institutions, helped to identify and eliminate barriers and obstacles between stakeholders in the process of decision-making.

One of the key objectives of the Division of Elections and Civil Society is to promote the active role of civil society in political decision-making through creating a favourable environment, including improvement of legal and regulatory frameworks for NGOs; developing sustainable mechanisms and platforms for dialogue, consultation and co-operation between civil society and government in member states; creating innovative tools and methodologies to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making process and the civil participation in it.

## 2.3. CivicLab: Be the Change

A toolkit and methodology for participatory development, analysis and forecasting of decision options and the process of their implementation and monitoring at the local, regional, and national levels. The objective is to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the decision-making process and civil participation in it.

Citizens should have equal rights and opportunities to have their say in solving local affairs and implementing important decisions that affect their lives and communities transparently and openly, ensuring that voices of all are heard, including seldom-heard, young people, vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Involving target groups in the development of proposals and representative consideration of the views of all stakeholders – is an integral part of the democratic decision-making process and requires quality, innovative tools, mechanisms, and techniques: offline, online, remote, and digital.

The CivicLab methodology is designed to help public authorities and non-governmental organisations to make more effective civil participation and engagement in the decision-making process at central, regional, and local levels. Online or offline CivicLab workshops bring together all stakeholders around the joint development of policy proposals. The methodology features innovative approaches for assessing the needs and selecting participants for the participatory event "CivicLab", a digital component (including a set of matrices) of development, analysis and forecasting of solutions and monitoring decisions that can be used in both offline and online formats and adapted to the needs of specific audiences and CivicLab themes.

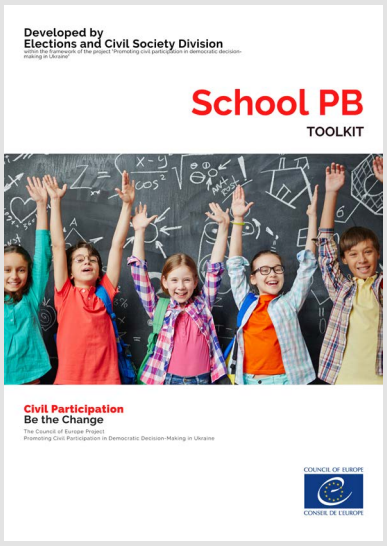
This tool can be used during consultations, public hearings, strategising, workshops, drafting of regulatory and policy documents of different levels and at other events, intended to produce ideas or proposals, develop options for solutions with their simultaneous feasibility assessment and provision of recommendations. The CivicLab tool will be useful for the civil society, including active citizens, non-governmental and international organisations, businesses, local self-government bodies, central and local executive and legislative bodies.

## 2.4. Creating favourable and effective legislative frameworks for civil participation

The key mission of the Division is to help public authorities to develop and implement effective legal frameworks for civil participation tools and mechanisms, especially, at the municipal level that is the closest to citizens, based on the Council of Europe standards and good practices:

- ensuring local government transparency;
- development of the modern legal framework for civil participation;
- adaptation of civil participation mechanisms to local conditions and context by providing and encouraging citizen participation;
- development and implementation of innovative civil participation mechanisms (see "School participatory budgeting" and "Public spaces and civic engagement");
- improvement of existing provisions related to civil participation tools.

### School Participatory Budgeting

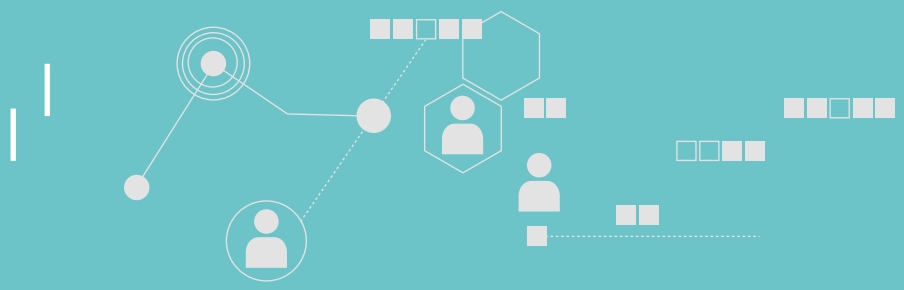



Innovative civil participation tools can boost active citizen engagement in the local decision-making process and in the long run eventually have a positive impact on voting turnout. School participatory budgeting is one of the most innovative civil participation tools, which is currently actively implemented around the world for youth participation in decision-making. Thanks to School PB, children improve their leadership qualities and schools gain practical experience of civil participation. Moreover, School PB helps develop a sense of participatory democracy and relationship with the community, bringing the voice of young people to policymakers. Drawing on the Council of Europe standards and good European practices, the Division of Elections and Civil Society designed a toolkit for the implementation of the School participatory budgeting (the pilot work has started in several municipalities in Ukraine) that can be adapted to the needs and peculiarities of any community. Developed through the innovative methodology "CivicLab", the toolkit offers step-by-step guidance and detailed methodological recommendations – communities are able to choose and create an optimal model of School PB and develop their regulations and implementation mechanism for the School PB, which will involve children in the process of the decision-making and ensure gender mainstreaming and inclusion. The Council of Europe highly professional experts and dedicated teams help implementing this tool in a number of Ukrainian municipalities.

## Citizens' Engagement in Public Spaces Design

Nothing for residents without residents. City public spaces (parks, streets, squares) in Kyiv, Drohobych, Ternopil (Ukraine) and Tbilisi (Georgia) will be designed based on citizens' preferences as a result of the Division's support in the implementation of the innovative tool – a mechanism for citizens' engagement in urban public spaces design. The key objective of the Division is to help create conditions (legislative and practical) and encourage civil participation at all stages of policy-making process and its implementation, create opportunities and entry points for citizens and NGOs in the process of development, creation or reconstruction of public spaces. The mechanism features an algorithm of actions required for a public authority to execute effective citizen engagement and consultation process with the aim to make a decision that will meet citizens preferences, interests and needs – pre-consultation process, stakeholder mapping, consultation plan (including "non-touch" consultation plans for the COVID-19 restrictions environment), dialogue and consultation methods, consultation report.

# 2.5. Country-specific initiatives, co-operation programmes and activities



## 2.5.1. Belarus

### Council of Europe project "Promoting civil participation in decision-making in Belarus"

Until 2018, the Division of Elections and Civil Society worked actively with authorities in Belarus to strengthen participation of civil society in decision-making processes.

In 2019 – 2020, the Division of Elections and Civil Society developed and discussed with the authorities in Belarus the start of the project "Promoting civil participation in decision-making in Belarus" (2020 – 2021). Its impact is to increase and use systematically civil participation tools by citizens and NGOs in order to improve decision-making and increase trust between citizens and public authorities. It is to start from the Minsk Oblast and to be implemented in co-operation with CSOs, targeting local authorities, NGOs, specific groups of population, in particular, women and youth.

The project builds on the experience, achievements and networks of several previous projects of the Good Governance Department, DG II – Democracy, in relation to Belarus: PGG Regional project "Civil participation in decision-making in the Eastern Partnership countries" (December 2015 – June 2017); and the project "Strengthening civil society and independent media in Belarus" (October 2017 – November 2018). The project benefits also from a similar and highly successful project pioneered in Ukraine to revise local regulatory frameworks for participation and created platforms for dialogue of administration with both NGOs and citizens.

The actual start of the activities of the project will depend on the political and epidemic situation in Belarus.

## 2.5.2. Georgia

### International conference on civil participation in decision-making (online, 6 – 7 May 2020)

The conference was organised by the City of Tbilisi and the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Democracy under the aegis of the Georgian presidency and a pilot project on co-operation and co-decision with civil society representatives on important urbanism measures implemented with the City of Tbilisi.

Georgia had selected civil participation in decision-making as one of the priorities of its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers (November 2019 – May 2020), given the importance and relevance of the topic.

The conference was aimed at identifying useful and innovative experiences of successful civil engagement at local, regional and national level and at highlighting and promoting the unique work of the Council of Europe in the area.

Also, with the aim of achieving meaningful results under this priority, the Georgian CM Presidency was actively engaged in co-operation with the Directorate General of Democracy (DG II) of the Council of Europe. This successful co-operation between the Department of Democracy and Governance of the Council of Europe and the City of Tbilisi in the field of civil participation led to the launch of a project aimed at helping the City of Tbilisi to create a standing platform of consultation, co-operation and co-decision with civil society representatives on important urbanism measures. It has already achieved significant results and the newly experienced platform represents an innovative, well-functioning mechanism contributing to the strengthening of civil participation in the decision-making process. According to the Georgian authorities, this mechanism will continue to play an important role in reinforcement of the participation of citizens in local public life and will grow ever stronger for years to come.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, our daily lives have been notably changed and, therefore, we had to explore new ways and innovative means to pursue our activities, so we turned to digital tools. The pilot paved the way to a more ambitious civil participation project that is currently under negotiations with the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

## Council of Europe project "Supporting participatory democracy in Tbilisi City Hall"

The Council of Europe's pilot project was launched in late 2019 and aimed at strengthening participatory democracy at the Tbilisi Municipality. It was continued and in 2020 the project "Supporting participatory democracy in Tbilisi City Hall" is being implemented in order to create workable institutional mechanisms to enhance sustainable citizen participation in the decision-making process of the Tbilisi Municipality.

The project is aimed at supporting the participatory decision-making in Tbilisi Municipality; creating the additional legal basis for facilitating and improving citizen participation through establishing appropriate mechanism – civil co-operation platform; and further developing the capacities and awareness of the civil servants of the Tbilisi Municipality to better understand and utilize the best practices of encouraging citizen participation in the policy-planning processes.

The project was formally launched on 22 September 2020 and will run through approximately March 2021. A number of high-level officials including the Deputy Mayor, the Members of the Parliament of Georgia, Deputy Ministers as well as the representatives of ministries and the civil society organisations and active citizens are involved in this project's implementation. The project puts special emphasis on the importance of the participatory democracy and is widely mediatised.

The project involves international and local experts to develop a concept and a regulatory framework for civil participation platform CivicLab (on the basis of the Council of Europe methodology) that is comprised of the citizens, civil society organisations, and the representatives of the Tbilisi Municipality, in order to facilitate and make sustainable CSOs and active citizen participation in decision-making process concerning building and renovating of green spaces in Tbilisi. Number of consultations and workshops have been held between international and local experts as well as among civil servants, local and international experts to assess the existing gaps, needs and requirements to develop appropriate concept and regulatory framework for civil participation in local decision-making.

## 2.5.3. Ukraine

### Council of Europe project "Promoting civil participation in democratic decision-making in Ukraine"

**22 %**
**Ukrainians**

Vibrant Ukrainian civil society has been the main driving force for the reform and democratic process in Ukraine. Nevertheless, a lack of inclusiveness and engagement threatened the reform process and democratic development. While at the national level the engagement is relatively high and the representation of NGOs is diverse, at the local level only 7 % of Ukrainians are regularly engaged in their local community life. The share of those who have experience with at least one type of civic engagement mechanism during the last 12 months constitutes 22 %. In Ukraine, as well as in other Council of Europe member states, among the most pressing challenges of concern for the democratic development are the issues of alienation of the people from political processes, lack of public confidence in democratic institutions and decorrelation between citizens' preferences and decisions made by public authorities.

To help urgently address such challenges, in 2019 – 2020, the Council of Europe continued and expanded its support and assistance in the area of strengthening civil participation in Ukraine through the implementation of the project "Promoting civil participation in democratic decision-making in Ukraine". This project created the conditions for effective civil participation in Ukraine and for enhancing citizen participation in decision-making process at the local, regional and national levels.

## Creating favourable and effective legislative frameworks for civil participation and civil society development at the national level

Monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy for Civil Society Development 2016 – 2020

Support of the development of the new Strategy for Civil Society Development 2021 – 2025

Expert support to the development of the draft laws concerning civil participation, in particular, the new draft law on local self-government (chapter concerning civil participation)

Expert support to the development of the draft law on public consultations

## Creating effective civil participation mechanisms at the local level

**4 337 121 citizens in 12 pilot municipalities** benefited from the Division support resulted in developing and implementing effective legal frameworks for civil participation tools and mechanisms:

**4 337 121**
**citizens**

**12**
**pilot municipalities**

KYIV
MEREFA
OBUKHIV
ZHYTOMYR
DUNAIVTSI
TERNOPIL
LVIV
DROHOBYCH
MUKACHEVO
KROLEVETS
KHMILNYK
NIKOPOL

Continuous and systemic support resulted in the adoption by the city councils of the **full package regulatory frameworks for civil participation** (statutes and "full package" of mechanisms: citizens meetings, public hearings, public consultations, e-petitions etc.): Zhytomyr, Drohobych, Obukhiv, Merefa, Dunaivtsi, Mukachevo.

**31 938**
**school children**

### CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT IN URBAN PUBLIC SPACE PLANNING:

Drohobych, Ternopil, Kyiv, Merefa, Mukachevo, Nikopol. City public spaces (parks, streets, squares) will be designed based on citizens' preferences as a result of the Division's support in the implementation of the innovative tool – a mechanism for citizens' engagement in urban public spaces design.

**95**
**projects**

### SCHOOL PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING MECHANISM:

31 938 school children in Ternopil, Krolevets, Krasnosilsk received access to a new civil participation mechanism through the piloting and implementation of the School PB Toolkit. 95 projects were developed and proposed for voting by school children from across 23 schools in Ternopil, and 5616 children from 20 schools cast their vote for the projects.

### E-PETITIONS MECHANISM:

Lviv and Kyiv. The e-petitions mechanism was enhanced in Lviv and recognised as the best practice. Kyiv authorities were supported in developing improvements for the mechanism.

### BODIES OF SELF-ORGANISATION OF CITIZENS:

Kyiv city. The expert recommendations and a series of expert discussions created a foundation for the improvement of the Kyiv city council regulation on the bodies of self-organisation of citizens.

## Strengthening the capacity of stakeholders in participatory decision-making: public officials, citizens and NGOs

**184**
**local officials**

**2 000**
**citizens and NGO representatives**

### ACADEMIES OF CIVIL PARTICIPATION (ONLINE AND OFFLINE):

Offline: 180 representatives of local authorities and NGOs were trained through offline Academies in Kyiv, Zhytomyr and Lviv. Online: **184 local officials of Drohobych City Council** were trained online in civil participation tools and implementation of the statute and regulations for civil participation, whereas more than **2 000 citizens and NGO representatives** have been enrolled in the course. In partnership with the National Agency of Civil Service of Ukraine, the project is currently developing a universal online course in civil participation for the benefit of all local officials and use of regional training centres in their training programmes. Previously, offline Academies were successfully implemented in Kyiv, Zhytomyr and Lviv. Local introduction of the Academy helps to eliminate barriers between stakeholders and safeguard inclusive and meaningful participation within which local politicians duly consider the standpoints of citizens and NGOs.

**23**
**persons**

**20**
**CivicLab events**

**1 143**
**participants**

**13**
**UChange games**

**473**
**participants**

**20**
**civic leaders**

### MENTORING FOR CHANGE PROGRAMME:

The project introduced 2 phases of mentoring programme that offered **23 persons** (public officials and civil society representatives) a tailored mentoring support providing important skills to implement a project or case study that brings benefit for the community.

### CIVICLAB WORKSHOPS:

Since November 2019, over **20 CivicLab events** based on methodology aimed at developing and analysing options for decisions and predicting their outcomes in the process of decision-making have been organized. These events were attended by **1 143 participants**, **783 of them – online**. With the help of CivicLab methodology 17 policies have been developed as well as **15 decisions were successfully implemented**.

### UCHANGE GAME-BASED TRAININGS:

The objective of the interactive practical game is to teach citizens how to interact with authorities through the effective application of civil participation instruments in order to address pressing challenges and implement ideas. Since January 2020, more than **13 UChange games** have been conducted, of which 10 – in online format due to Covid-19 quarantine restrictions. In total, **473 participants** attended the games, of which 448 citizens played online.

### ADVOCACY SCHOOLS FOR NGOs:

The objective is to assist civil society actors to be engaged in the complex policy-making environments to be able to participate more effectively in the processes of development, monitoring and review of public policy solutions at all levels. **20 civic leaders** from the communities of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, including Roma NGOs were equipped with skills and knowledge in effective advocacy, communication and project management, allowing them to successfully plan and implement civic initiatives in their communities.

**100**
**teachers**

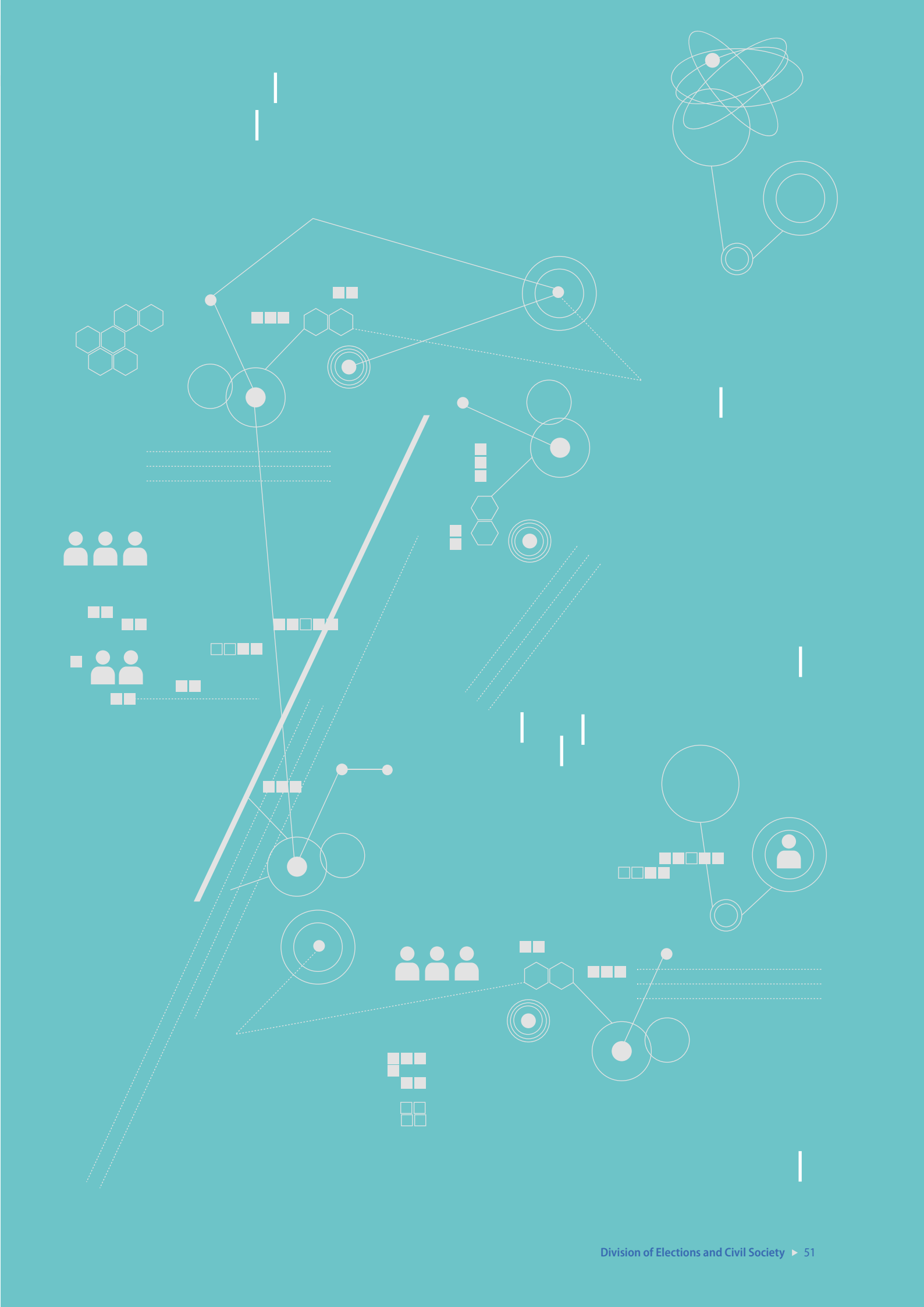
### ONLINE COURSE ON SCHOOL PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING:

Modules are being developed for the pilot municipalities to raise the awareness and boost the capacity of stakeholders in implementation of the mechanism for School PB. Modules are tailored to each municipality and target group: school students, teachers and local officials. Representatives of **4 Ukrainian municipalities** were already trained, including nearly **235 school students** and almost **100 teachers** and local public officials.

**518**
**citizens**

### COACHING ON PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT DURING COVID-19:

"Non-touch" consultation plans help local authorities to ensure effective citizens' engagement in the decision-making in the time of constraints. In Drohobych, the city council considered the input from **518 citizens**, or nearly **1%** of the city population representing various social and seldom-heard groups, received through the effective application of various online dialogue methods and consultation techniques, in the decision on the design of the reconstruction of the city centre street (the street reconstruction project has been successfully completed).



# 3. RESPONSE TO COVID-19

> **"Habits! … When what's needed is imagination."**
> **Albert Camus, The Plague**

The COVID-19 outbreak affected mostly all areas of public and private life all over the world. This outbreak has a significant impact on our democracies, including on elections and civil participation. State authorities either delay and re-schedule the initially planned elections or consider alternative voting processes and procedures to protect voters and election commissioners from spreading the virus at the polling stations (e.g. postal voting, remote voting etc.). In the same way, State authorities should find solutions to keep an active citizen participation.

On our respective special COVID-19 response pages (electoral co-operation and civil participation), we have condensed some tailored solutions and best practices in the field of electoral co-operation and civil participation.

Also, in addition to ElecData, the Council of Europe's operational and constantly updated compendium of electoral data, the current situation overview is reflected in the electoral calendar.

The Division published a toolkit on "Civil participation in the time of COVID-19", which gives useful keys to continue the democratic dialogue.

## Council of Europe's approach

Whether member states decide to hold or not to hold elections, specific arrangements will be required for administering such elections and for ensuring the basic tenants of a public debate allowing citizens to be properly informed and to debate the options on offer (read more).

## Focus on new technologies

The COVID-19 outbreak prompts us to rethink the way we administrate our democracies. New technologies are seen as an opportunity to continue democratic life remotely (read more).

## Best practices

During the COVID-19, the Council of Europe member states have been innovative to face this particular period. The innovation and new working methods have been observed by our Division to share some of the best practices (read more).

## Online and offline materials

The Council of Europe provides electoral stakeholders and citizens with training material on domestic election observation or on public consultations

access the material for electoral stakeholders

access the civil participation mechanisms

# Conclusions and prospects

Representative democracies have experienced an unprecedented backslide in the recent decades. The COVID-19 outbreak has amplified this trend making the citizens go less and less to the polling stations to cast their ballots. However, by all metrics, it seems that citizens are keen to take part more in the life of the polis and to make sure that their voice is better heard by their elected representatives.

Facing this democratic mistrust, the Division of Elections and Civil Society has set up, on the basis of the Council of Europe's *acquis* and the European Electoral Heritage, its own methodology which provides tips and advises to electoral stakeholders and authorities to integrate citizens in the decision-making process.

The Division of Elections and Civil Society of the Council of Europe in its activities and programs is pushing for more fair and inclusive societies in all its aspects (gender, age, etc.). Beyond elections, since 2020, the Division of Elections and Civil Society promotes all other forms of citizen participation, particularly that of the under-represented categories, like youth, minorities, etc.

The transition of the democratic torch is even more difficult as the new generations have different approaches in terms of information, expectations and forms of participation than the previous ones. In some respects, we could speak of an intergenerational quantum leap with strong incidence on how our democracies operate. The emergence of the internet and new technologies has deeply changed the understanding of democratic life. It poses new challenges for the Council of Europe, which is constantly adapting itself in order to stay as close as possible to existing realities.

With its electoral co-operation and civil participation activities, the Division of Elections and Civil Society intends to help to reboot democracy and to restore the trust of citizens.

The Division of Elections and Civil Society (Directorate General of Democracy) at the Council of Europe provides advice and technical assistance to the member states on various aspects of elections and civil participation, including capacity building of electoral stakeholders and voters' awareness raising, creating favourable and effective legislative and practical frameworks for civil participation and civil society development at the national and municipal levels, as well as developing innovative tools for citizens' active participation in electoral and public decision-making processes.

This publication represents the 2020 annual report of the Division about the results of its work, including activities implemented within some country specific programmes, as well as prospects for the future assistance and support as to ensuring that elections are held in line with the Council of Europe electoral *acquis* and European good practices, and that civil participation has a real impact on the decision-making processes in the Council of Europe member states.

URSO Useful Relevant Sustainable Owned
Council of Europe methodology for electoral cooperation

ELECLAB
Council of Europe Electoral Laboratory

CivicLab
Be the change

ENG

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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