REPORTING ON ELECTIONS

Council of Europe handbook
for civil society organisations

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Contents

Foreword

The right to free elections is guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights. Of all the democratic safeguards against the abuse of political power, it is one of the most fundamental. The ability of individuals to express their identities and choices peacefully, at the ballot box, is central to stability in any society, and so to Europe's democratic security too.

The tasks performed by election observers are therefore extremely important. Elections must be prepared with diligence and integrity, and observers must perform their duties in an unbiased and transparent manner. Their presence and professionalism helps ensure the confidence of voters, as well as of the international community. The Council of Europe and our partner organisations therefore strive to assist organisations conducting observations to do so to the highest standards.

This handbook draws on methods for electoral assistance developed by our Organisation over many years. It aims to help observers to become more efficient and to produce reports which are more effective. Our starting point is that, far from watching passively from the sidelines, observers play an active role in developing national electoral procedures through their advice and recommendations. It is therefore vital that mission reports and advice issued to national authorities are easily understood and can be translated into concrete action. There are also a number of important principles to which we believe observers should pay special attention during an election, including the participation of women, young people, national minorities and people with disabilities.

This new edition will, I believe, provide organisations engaged in these activities with a practical, useable guide, reflecting decades of relevant experience and supporting them in their invaluable work.

Thorbjørn Jagland

Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Acknowledgements

Introduction

COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND DOMESTIC ELECTION OBSERVATION

Elections are a pre-condition for democratic governance since it is through them that the citizens of a country choose freely, and on the basis of the law, the persons that can legitimately govern in their name and in their interest. The conduct of democratic elections that take into account fundamental human rights and freedoms and are based on the rule of law ultimately contributes to the setting up of procedures and institutions which form good governance. It is for these reasons that elections and electoral processes retain the attention of the Council of Europe and other international organisations, as well as of the civil society organisations in its member states.

While there is a distinction between international and domestic election observers, both should enjoy equal freedoms and rights and follow common principles. In the Council of Europe, it is the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities that conduct (often jointly with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) international observation of general and local elections respectively. When it comes to domestic election observation, this expression may include both party and non-partisan observers. This handbook, however, aims to help civil society organisations conduct professional observations of elections through the drafting of reports in respect of their findings.

Although the Council of Europe started to study the question of civil society organisations (CSOs) in 1986, when it adopted for the first time the European Convention on the Recognition of the Legal Personality of International Non-Governmental Organisations, its work with respect to the promotion of strong civil society organisations actually started with the accession of new members from South-East and Central and Eastern Europe. In parallel with the work on the legal status of CSOs, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission drafted Guidelines on an Internationally Recognised Status of Election Observers (adopted on 10 December 2009).[1]

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1. Available at www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)059-e.

The guidelines aim to promote an internationally recognised status of "election observer", including that of "domestic election observer". The document notes that both international and domestic observers should be granted the same freedoms; and should have common principles and rights, as well as duties. It points out that international election observation should have, *inter alia*, a duty to evaluate and report on whether national election observation organisations are able to conduct their activities without undue interference or restrictions, and recall international standards in case national organisations are limited or prevented from exercising their election observation. Additionally, the guidelines stress that assessment vis-à-vis domestic legislation, as well as international standards and good practice, should be core criteria in the assessment of the conduct of an electoral process. They insist on the fact that, since elections are a process and not a one-day event, the areas of assessment of electoral observation includes three phases: the pre-voting phase, the voting phase and the post-voting phase. The pre-voting observation starts with the assessment of the legislation and, where appropriate, of its revision process, and includes voters and party registration. The post-voting phase goes up to the settlement of complaints and appeals and the taking up of electoral officials. The guidelines complement the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation (adopted on 27 October 2005 by the United Nations) dedicated to international observers.

PROFESSIONALISATION OF DOMESTIC ELECTION OBSERVERS

With time, the role of domestic observer became increasingly important and was not only limited to the election day, but also took in the pre-voting phase and, in particular, the post-voting phase. Domestic election observation has thus become far more sophisticated and important for the legitimacy of the election process as it contributes directly to the promotion and protection of human rights.

The presence of observers at polling stations remains the centrepiece of the observation effort. At the same time, techniques for election observation have advanced, with significant changes in their deployment, data collection, reporting, etc. These changes reflect a greater appreciation of the importance of the political culture and a keener understanding of the need for more systematic evaluation of the quality of the electoral process. The continuing reflection and interpretation of international standards and good election practices have made it easier for observers to evaluate the election process as a whole and to understand its various parts.

As a result, domestic election observers now have at their disposal instruments that are more wide-ranging than ever before, which makes them more powerful. As election observation has become more systematic, observers have become increasingly adept at developing and deploying multiple strategies for detecting and deterring the subtler efforts of electoral manipulation and fraudulent conduct of various electoral stakeholders. Domestic observers have become inevitable guardians of the electoral process.

INCREASING ROLE OF DOMESTIC ELECTION OBSERVERS IN MAKING THE CHANGE

With domestic election observer groups becoming increasingly professional, the international community started to rely more and more on their expertise. In particular, domestic observers are more familiar with the situation on the ground; they assist international observers by providing information about the electoral process from the very beginning (even before the international observers are deployed) and in detail. Furthermore, domestic observers have the mandate not only to observe but also to actively participate in the electoral process: primarily, they follow up on election violations and shortcomings and assist in the implementation of steps adopted to improve the electoral process.

With the increased professionalisation of domestic election observers, citizens own more and more of the electoral process as they take part in elections, not only as voters and candidates but also as observers. In this way they contribute to the transparency and credibility of the electoral process, and as such promote public confidence in the integrity and honesty of the elections.

CHALLENGES OF DOMESTIC ELECTION OBSERVERS

Depending on the country, the rights of domestic observation were not always respected and their observation work often restricted. For example, in 2003, the OSCE/ODIHR, in its final report on the presidential election in Azerbaijan, noted that the law prohibited "domestic organizations that receive more than 30% of their budget from foreign State funding from observing elections. The effect of the legislation was to reduce the transparency of, and public participation and confidence in, the elections. It undercut NGOs' advocacy and lobbying abilities with relation to electoral matters".[2] Another example is the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2010, when the authorities prohibited non-partisan national observers. The legal situation in the country changed in 2014 and civil society organisations were able to perform observation work.

Nevertheless, in some countries national observers still face limitations preventing them from exercising comprehensive rights during the entire electoral process. Understanding that the process is often a long-term journey, this handbook aims to encourage all domestic observation groups to pursue their democratic objectives, so that the internationally recognised right to take part in the conduct of public affairs can be fully enjoyed for the benefit of each country, throughout the electoral cycle.

Naturally, while domestic observation in some countries seeks to enshrine basic rights in legislation, other more experienced and professional groups seek additional tools in order to increase the resonance of their observation efforts and findings. At the same time, it is also crucial that domestic observers have knowledge of international standards, relevant domestic legislation and responsibilities. It is also the role of the Council of Europe to help domestic observers to identify the most outstanding issues.

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2. OSCE/ODIHR, Final Report, Republic of Azerbaijan, 15 October 2003 Presidential Election, available at www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/13467?download=true.

Observation by the Council of Europe through pre-electoral assistance programmes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership has shown that the professionalism and independence of domestic observation groups could be further strengthened if they received additional support in:

▶ developing a more comprehensive and systematic approach to election observation that can be employed to provide more structured and message-oriented reporting, including recommendations and advised follow-up developments;

▶ integrating to a greater extent international election standards and good practice in their election observation methodology;

▶ committing to strict impartiality and non-interference of the observation, including reports based on facts and credible evidence and adherence to a code of conduct.

While spelling out the above-mentioned needs, the domestic observers in the Council of Europe assessment stated that their neutrality and objectivity is frequently being challenged – in particular during highly competitive and contested elections. Often domestic observers on the ground are intimidated, harassed and/or bribed, and some are even prosecuted. They are hindered in fulfilling their work as observers, excluded from polling stations, physically threatened, and/or their friends and family members are given severe warnings on future repercussions.

THE HANDBOOK

Issues faced by domestic observers are at the core of the Council of Europe's technical assistance in the electoral field. The present handbook is a response to the assessment made by the Council of Europe of the needs of domestic observers with particular focus on the right to write reports of the observation with recommendations. This will contribute to strengthening the capacities of the domestic observers and promoting their professionalism.

The handbook is written for domestic observers, specifically focusing on the reporting of Core Team members. At the same time, it also includes the reporting of long- and short-term observers. It covers mainly final election reports and reports/statements on preliminary findings, while also providing insights into interim reports; it gives ideas about ad hoc reports, press releases, as well as tips on how to follow up on recommendations.

The handbook gives an overview of the planning of observation activities from a reporting perspective: the scope of election observation, assessment of the organisations' reporting capacities, key observation principles and what the observation could focus on, how to assess one's own organisation's reporting capacities, key observation principles, and how to conduct training on reporting.

The handbook further proceeds with a chapter about internal reporting: the reporting plan, staff responsibilities with regard to reporting, their training and internal reporting forms.

Further on, the handbook covers external reporting, starting with an insight into training of Core Team members and reporting tips, and following with an overview of the structure and content of final reports.

An important part of the handbook is dedicated to reporting checklists for each of the reporting topics: political context, legal framework, election administration, voter lists and voter registration, registration of contestants, voter education, election campaign, media coverage of elections, election day, tabulation and publication of the results, complaints and appeals, post-election developments.

The handbook concludes with tips on the external communication of a report, and the advocacy of a report's recommendations.

With this handbook the Council of Europe hopes to contribute to further professionalising domestic election observation, which has a vital role in promoting and protecting the integrity of the electoral process in line with the principles of Europe's electoral heritage. As elections are not a one-day event, it is even more important that domestic observer groups stay firmly committed to observing pre- and post-electoral developments as inevitable parts of the electoral cycle. The Council of Europe will continue to further assist developments in this area.

Chapter 1

Electoral cycle and reporting

1.1. ELECTION OBSERVATION AS PART OF THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

Elections are embedded in a recurrent election cycle. The electoral cycle is generally regarded as running from the moment an election is held to the moment the next election is held. The underlying idea is that elections are not isolated events but processes that expand well before and well after election day. There is usually more than one election cycle at the same time. Parliamentary elections held at four-year intervals, for instance, have a different election cycle to presidential elections taking place every five years.

Other terms may be used which often have a narrower scope. "Electoral period" is one of them. It generally refers to the time period commencing on the day when the date of elections is officially announced and ending on the day when the final election results are confirmed by the authorised bodies. Observers should be sensitive to such varied terminology. More importantly, they should be clear about the events in the relevant electoral cycle that are relevant to the aspects of elections they plan to observe.

The way in which the election cycle is relevant for observers depends on the type of observation that is conducted. For example, observation of the preparation and conduct of voting itself may focus on election day, the period of voter registration, the period of establishment of electoral commissions, and even specific political changes such as boundary changes or electoral code revisions. In another example, campaign finance monitoring will need to pay special attention to the relationship between income and expenditure occuring within the official election campaign period and income and spending falling outside it.

The electoral cycle approach

The electoral cycle is a visual planning and training tool designed by International IDEA.[3] It illustrates the different phases during an election process and during the period between two elections. It covers the actions that should be taken by a wide array of people and organisations throughout these phases. The electoral cycle tool was developed to facilitate a shift from viewing elections as an event to viewing them as a complex set of processes. The electoral cycle is intended to be used as a guide rather than a strict model of the cyclical nature of elections. In reality, the electoral processes of each country will not fit accurately the electoral cycle model as many of these processes are much more complex than the model.

Figure 1: The electoral cycle
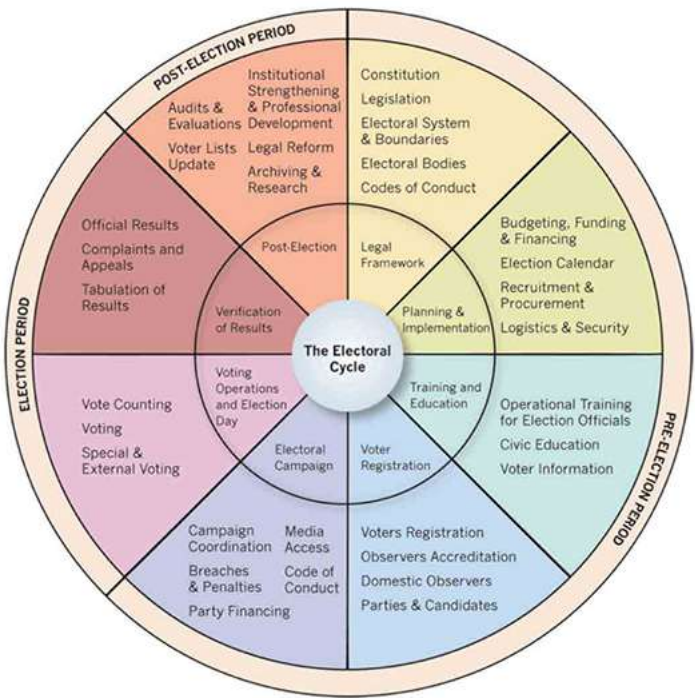
Source: www.idea.int/elections/eea

Observation: from election day to electoral cycle

The development of the electoral cycle tool to facilitate the focus on broader electoral processing has in some ways mirrored the development of election observation strategies. Many civic organisations initially focused on voting and counting processes, but have since broadened the scope of their observation to include assessment of legislation and other key electoral processes. In addition, a holistic approach to elections is also a prerequisite for effective advocacy of electoral reforms, which is a natural follow-up to election observation.

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3. Available at http://ecycle.idea.int/.

Building expertise

To approach elections with the electoral cycle model, organisations will have to build the necessary expertise which will enable them to review the more complex aspects of electoral processes. This entails building a team of experts each focusing on specific key processes. Developing such team expertise will contribute greatly to the quality of reports as it will provide in-depth findings, analysis and recommendations and will allow for sharing the reporting workload.

Observation methodology and reporting strategy

As will be presented in Chapter 3, the electoral cycle approach will have a significant impact on the reporting strategy and on the character of reports. While reporting on election day has a strong fact-reporting component, reporting on key processes has a strong analytical component. This means that, with increased focus on pre-voting observation, reporting will demand stronger analytical and writing skills. However, the reward of this approach will be evident especially in the post-election period when organisations advocate reforms. Strong analysis and a clear articulation of recommendations will provide a solid framework for the goals of electoral reforms.

To report on key electoral processes, organisations will have to develop a long-term observation methodology which will be supported by an appropriate number and structure of staff.

It is useful to develop your own model of the electoral cycle as an exercise when planning observation activities. Such a customised electoral cycle model will facilitate the development of a long-term observation methodology, including the size and structure of the observation team, as well as the reporting strategy. Depending on the objectives of the observation, the organisation should consider whether to produce a single report for the whole electoral cycle or to report prior to or after major milestones, such as the call for elections, the conclusion of boundary delimitation or of voter registration, finalised list of contestants, election campaign, the election day, publication of results or election-related appeals.

1.2. REPORTING PRINCIPLES

There is a long-standing informal consensus on the basic reporting principles which election observation organisations should follow. Reports must be accurate, objective and impartial without partisan bias. They also need to be timely, transparent and analytical. A number of factors presented in this handbook influence the quality of a report, such as the appropriate use of language, the organisation of information or the writing style. These factors will vary depending on the individual report writers. However, as emphasised in the Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations produced by the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM) the observers should always bear in mind that "non-partisan citizen election observers and monitors can be considered as specialized human rights defenders focused on civil and political rights, which are central to achieving genuine elections".

To standardise the key principles of reporting on elections, international governmental and non-governmental organisations included reporting as one of the key features of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers (hereinafter "the Declaration"). The Declaration was commemorated on 27 October 2005 at the United Nations and endorsed by numerous organisations, including the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and the Venice Commission. The international community of civic organisations, GNDEM, followed suit and developed their Declaration of Global Principles (referred to above), which also includes key principles on reporting. The latter declaration was commemorated on 3 April 2012 at the United Nations and it draws its principles directly from the universally accepted Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It was endorsed by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission (15-16 June 2012)[4] and also supported by the Parliamentary Assembly's Resolution 1987 (2012) on ensuring greater democracy in elections on 3 October 2012.[5] The reporting principles presented in this chapter are derived directly from the Declaration.

Reporting as a right

The right to report on electoral processes is considered an integral part of the right to participate in public affairs, as defined by the UDHR and ICCPR. According to the interpretation of this right in the Declaration, civil society organisations can legitimately demand access, evaluate and report on legal frameworks, institutions, processes and the political environment related to elections. It is also stated in the Declaration that citizen organisations may offer recommendations and advocate improvement in legal frameworks as well as the full implementation of the laws and removal of impediments to full citizen participation in elections.

Methodology

The observation methodology should be included in the report. It is considered good practice to observe and report on all phases of the electoral cycle, whenever possible. The Declaration provides an extensive list of elements of the electoral process that should be evaluated. However, it is admissible to limit the scope of observation to certains aspects of the electoral process, if there is a need to address a particular issue or area of concern. In such cases, the report should have a direct indication of that.

Schedule

The Declaration deals with two key issues concerning the reporting schedule. The first is that, by engaging in domestic observation, citizen organisations take on the responsibility for issuing reports, statements and releases on a regular basis. Withholding of election reports is discouraged.

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4. Available at www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD%282012%29018-e.
5. Available at www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19121&lang=en.

The second issue is the right to own information. The Declaration recognises that the information, analyses and conclusions developed by citizen organisations belong to them and that organisations are responsible for determining (also in light of legal requirements) the timing and manner for presenting their findings and recommendations.

Reporting election results

Projections of results made through parallel vote tabulation and other vote verification techniques and statistical analyses must carefully consider reporting timing. Special attention must be given to the credibility of internal reporting, the sufficiency of the information received and the accuracy of the statistical data. Reports based on statistics must include methodological information such as sampling and statistical calculations.

Co-operation with state institutions

Citizen organisations' modus operandi should always be based on good will co-operation with electoral authorities and other state institutions. Moreover, citizen organisations should seek such co-operation. They should strive to meet with the electoral authorities, request information or clarification on the application of legislation, practices, and, ultimately, share information gathered through observation with relevant state institutions.

Recommendations and advocacy

Election observation reports should not only include the presentation of facts and analyses. Organisations which endorse the Declaration in fact commit to offering recommendations for strengthening the electoral process and advocating improvements in legal frameworks, as well as efficient conduct of elections by the electoral administration.

Funding

Reporting on funding sources is an obligation of the election observation organisation. Citizen organisations involved in domestic election observation are also expected to disclose information on relationships and conditions which might create conflict of interest or that would interfere with the independence of the election observation.

Impartiality

Impartiality and non-partisanship are key features of any domestic election observation. Careful selection of language and well-articulated analysis is imperative for avoiding perceptions of bias. Reports should be of the highest ethical standards for impartiality and accuracy. The principle of unbiased reporting is not only relevant in the light of positions of particular political parties and the governing structures, but also applies to referendum choices.

Transparency

Election observation is a form of monitoring and is especially sensitive for a number of reasons. Citizen organisations that monitor elections place themselves in the midst of a process that determines the distribution of political power. Their findings – in particular, if they detect violations of law or other poor electoral conduct – can have an effect on outcomes of the elections. For this reason, the political forces that compete in elections may attempt to discredit observation findings. They may do this by attacking the monitoring methodology, the accuracy of the actual observation itself, or by attempting to discredit the organisation as such.

In order to minimise the risk of and vulnerability to such attacks, the organisation should be maximally transparent, particularly in the following respects.

- ▶ Disclosure of observation methodology: what is being observed, how it is being observed, including sources of information, sampling methods, etc., how findings are analysed and presented, the timetable for reporting findings.
- ▶ Distribution of the methodology to political parties (or other electoral competitors), as well as to the institution responsible for oversight in the area being monitored (for example, Electoral Commission, Anti-Corruption Agency, Supreme Audit Office), inviting comments and suggestions. If these entities mount objections to the methodology, the organisation implementing a domestic election observation should either publicly defend the methodology or make changes, if the objections are well-founded.
- ▶ Adoption of a policy of full disclosure on the operation of the organisation, including its form, purpose, governance and financing.

These rules for transparency should be followed along with other rules concerning the presentation of findings. The most important of these is to only make claims that are clearly supported by the findings, and to err on the side of caution when interpreting findings. An example of this is that where campaign spending is monitored using a range of estimates of market prices of campaign service, findings should be presented using the prices at the lower end of the range of estimates.

Legal framework

One key aspect of election observation and analysis is the national legal framework and the compliance of various stakeholders with the laws and regulations. In addition, organisations which endorse the Declaration, also commit to reviewing the electoral process in the light of a country's international obligations, commitments and evidence of good practice.

Training

Election monitoring organisations are under an obligation to ensure that all their staff and observers fully understand the standards for non-partisan election observation, to provide training on national and international frameworks for elections and to provide appropriate training in observation methodology and reporting.

1.3. TYPES OF REPORTING

This handbook refers to two types of reporting: internal and external. Despite having a common goal – presentation of election observation findings and recommendations to electoral stakeholders – these two types of report have distinctly different strategies, schedules, methodologies and audiences. It is thus important to make a distinction between them.

Internal reporting

Internal reports enable the transmission of information from the "ground" to the central structure of the civil society organisation, where such information is collected, further analysed and finally reflected in the external (public) report.

Organisations may follow different internal reporting strategies, but when considering reporting plans, they may consider the following types of internal report.

Baseline assessment reports

This type of report is produced at the beginning of the election observation. Its purpose is to capture the status of the electoral framework and environment and to analyse its significance for the future electoral process. A baseline report will include observation of the legal framework (including administrative regulations) and of the structure of the electoral authority. This internal report may be easily used in the final external report.

Internal analytical reports

If the organisational capacity allows it, team members who observe specific aspects of the electoral process may be required to submit reports which go beyond fact-reporting and which provide an analysis of the process. Similar to baseline assessment reports, these are useful contributions to the final external report. Examples of these are reports on:

► the development of the legal framework and administrative regulations;

► the process of adjudication of pre-election disputes, such as appeals of rejected candidates;

► the election operation – logistical preparations, production of ballots, procurement of election materials;

► the ability of women, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and disabled people to participate in all aspects of elections;

► the actions of other state actors, such as the military and security apparatus.

Periodical field (LTO) reports

These are regular – usually weekly – reports which document findings on the implementation of all aspects of the electoral process. They are submitted by long-term

observers (LTOs), following a template which is developed in accordance with the particularities of the electoral process. They are fact-based reports submitted for further analysis.

Incident reports

These are unscheduled, short and urgent reports produced by LTOs focusing on a specific event which threatens the electoral process. These events are usually major disruptions of the elections or violence.

Election day (STO) reports

Reports submitted by short-term observers during and at the end of the voting and counting process. These reports are usually based on templates, such as checklists and forms developed ahead of election day.

External reporting

External reporting is a key aspect of election observation. It provides a public record of what has been observed, analysed and recommended in a specific election and serves as a reference for future work. As a general principle, all external reports are public. However, an organisation may delay the publication of some external reports, in particular incident reports, which are initially communicated to the election authorities for the purpose of quickly solving or mitigating the identified problem. There exist different types of external reports which differ in their scope, analytical focus, level of detail of recommendations and channels of communication.

External incident reports

As with the internal incident reports, these reports serve to highlight urgent and prominent problematic events. If the situation permits, it may be advisable to first communicate them to election authorities, to give them an opportunity to rectify the problem. Otherwise, organisations might consider presenting these reports through various communication channels.

Interim reports

These are periodical reports which usually follow major milestones in the electoral process – such as the end of the voter-registration process, the conclusion of the candidacy procedures, the beginning/end of electoral campaign, etc. – or are issued in regular time sequence prior to election day. They are analytical and might include recommendations to the stakeholders for the upcoming phases in the electoral process.

Statements

These are brief, focused public announcements designed to raise as much public attention as possible to specific developments. They may warn the public of any critical event, call for specific action or present support for some action by the

electoral authorities or other stakeholders. Examples of such statements include calls for political parties to respect electoral silence, or calls for election authorities to publish details of polling station results.

Statements on preliminary findings and final reports

These are comprehensive reports issued immediately after election day or at the end of the whole electoral process. They include a description of the observation methodology, the main findings with an analysis and subsequent conclusions, as well as recommendations for improved future conduct of the electoral process.

Figure 2: Internal/external reporting table

Internal reporting	AUDIENCE staff
	TRANSPARENCY confidential
	METHODOLOGY fact-reporting
	SCHEDULE near-continuous
External reporting	AUDIENCE stakeholders
	TRANSPARENCY public
	METHODOLOGY analysis
	SCHEDULE periodical or single

Source: www.isfed.ge

Chapter 2

Planning the observation from a reporting perspective

E lection observation is one of the most powerful tools that can be used by civil society organisations to improve the quality of the electoral process. In recent years, domestic election observation by CSOs has increasingly become more professional. Often they are able to focus on the entire electoral cycle. Assuming that domestic election observation is based on a well-established methodology, conducted professionally and in good faith and with the dedication to public interest and implemented by an independent, unbiased organisation that takes full responsibility for its activity, observation can generate tangible benefits for the improvement of an electoral process and contribute to democratic development in general.

It is important for each CSO involved in domestic election observation to conduct a needs assessment long in advance of election day to determine the objectives, the scope and the timing of its observation activity. Other elements of preparation from the point of reporting should include assessment of the organisation's capacities, including human and financial resources, which should be reflected in a work plan. Such a plan is a logical and operational matrix of sequential activities that, if implemented within the identified scope and in view of objectives of domestic election observation, would allow smooth operation and production of timely external and internal reports. The work plan may include or be complemented by training and communication plans. Both are important for a successful preparation for domestic election observation.

2.1. SCOPE OF THE DOMESTIC ELECTION OBSERVATION

Each domestic election observation should have a clearly defined scope.

International election observation missions cover many issues using uniform methodology, from analysing legal frameworks, observing preparation of elections to the conduct of voting on election day and resolution of electoral disputes. However, as they employ a uniform methodology such international election observation missions may not always be best placed to address particular issues in a given country – they may not have enough time or expertise, or be under other limitations.

Domestic election observations have varying scope. Large and experienced CSOs, or coalitions of CSOs that can field enough observers, may opt for an all-country and all-electoral cycle observation. However, many CSOs are more likely to design projects that focus on specific aspects of elections. Therefore, they may restrict the scope of their observation activities and adopt specific methodologies to pursue their objectives. In order to focus the observation properly, the organisation may select an issue to be observed on the basis of a needs assessment, as in the following examples.

► If previous observation reports, media reports or expert opinions indicate that the voting process on election day is clean, but that the voter list is manipulated, it makes more sense to use limited resources for domestic election observation to scrutinise the processes of voter registration and compilation of the voter list.

► If previous experience, election practice (non-existence of postal, proxy or electronic voting) or specific type of elections (local, regional elections) reveal that the question of voters residing *de facto* abroad but entitled to vote is a matter of concern related to electoral fraud, such a situation could require more attention to observation of election day conduct, including observation of its particular procedures.

► If domestic election observation has the aim of determining whether parties are reporting election campaign expenditure correctly, the observers will need to monitor certain categories of spending. In order to select which categories, the organisation needs to determine the main forms of election campaigning in the country – something that may vary greatly between political systems.

► If there are major concerns over the misuse of public (administrative) resources by incumbent political forces for electoral purposes, it is important to select which types of public resources should be targeted for monitoring – for example, media resources, public employees, vehicles, office infrastructure, etc.

A needs assessment should be conducted by gathering information on the existing legal and institutional framework, official reports or documents on the area in question (for example, reports by a Central Election Commission), existing publications and studies on the area in question (for example academic papers, analyses by CSOs, previous observation missions), information published in the media, and targeted interviews with relevant stakeholders (such as election officials, politicians, academic experts, civil society activists, journalists, etc.).

When preparing a needs assessment a CSO should take into consideration the type of election, since this can have a critical impact on the election observation methodology. Different approaches may be required, depending on whether elections are presidential, parliamentary, local or a national referendum.

Once completed, a needs assessment should identify areas of concern that the domestic election observation will target. The assessment should also play an important part in shaping the specific objectives of the domestic election observation project.

2.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE DOMESTIC ELECTION OBSERVATION

First and foremost, an observation project should have clearly set objectives. This can positively influence implementation of all components of the project, including the

organisation of reporting, distribution of tasks, setting and meeting deadlines, etc. If such an internal strategic approach is taken to planning an observation project, it has a good chance of resulting in a professionally run operation.

There are several factors which influence the choice of objectives for an observation project. They pertain to internalities of the organisation as well as the external environment. Internally, organisations, when determining objectives, should see how they are linked and/or aligned with the strategic goal of the organisation. The choice of objectives will also depend on available human and financial resources. Prior expertise in election observation can also be an important consideration at this important stage of developing an observation project.

Externally, CSOs need to consider the overall political and/or legal environment. Often, such an assessment allows them to determine the most relevant and important objectives for a concrete observation project. In addition, opportunities for coalition-building with other organisations might be explored. However, an organisation embarking on such co-operation should be mindful that a joint project often leads to an expansion of the overall objectives of the domestic election observation.

Finally, the focus of the international election observation might influence the objectives of CSOs involved in domestic election observation activities.

Depending on these and other factors, CSOs may define objectives for their domestic election observation, ranging from ensuring the integrity of the election process to advancing electoral reform or a particular issue. They may focus on a wide range of objectives or limit their observation to just one or two. Possible objectives may include the following.

– *Provision of an informed, independent, unbiased opinion on the electoral process*
  A civil election observation organisation produces impartial, evidence-based public reports and statements that are widely distributed among key electoral stakeholders with the purpose of providing information about the positive findings and shortcomings of the electoral process.

– *Promotion of transparency in the electoral process and ensuring its integrity*
  The objective is to contribute to increased confidence in the electoral process, to enhanced accountability of elections as well as to the candidates' acceptance of the results. However, care should be taken when selecting this objective in some contexts, where basic conditions for genuine elections are not met. In any given situation, the mere presence of observers in the polling stations should not be seen as legitimising or adding credibility to an election process.

– *Discouragement of electoral fraud and reduction of the level of manipulation or election-related violence*
  The CSOs conducting domestic election observation, by their simple presence at the polling stations or in other election-related contexts, can discourage potential violators of the electoral law and procedures. From this perspective, such observation activities can be viewed as a pre-emptive measure to discourage possible election manipulation.

– *Analysis of the shortcomings of the electoral process and presentation of recommendations for reform*
Unbiased observation of the electoral process and production of concrete recommendations can lead to improvement of national election laws and electoral practice, as well as lay the ground for a more complex reform of the electoral system.

– *Promotion and protection of universal human rights, specifically civil and political rights*
Targeted election observation can prevent violations of human rights and recognised international obligations for elections (the right and opportunity to participate in public affairs, to vote, to be elected, freedom from discrimination and equality for all citizens, freedom of expression, assembly and association, right to an effective remedy, etc.).

– *Assessment of the compliance of elections with the national legislation and international standards*
As a rule, election observation organisations assess the elections against the national legislation and increasingly also against international standards to evaluate a level of democracy, respect for rule of law and fundamental freedoms and human rights.

2.3. REALISTIC AND COHERENT WORK PLAN BASED ON THE ORGANISATION'S CAPACITIES

Observation of elections is a complex undertaking, which demands dedication, professional knowledge and well-organised human and financial resources. This part provides a summary of the activities that should be considered when preparing to organise and execute domestic monitoring. Getting maximum use from often very limited organisational capacity is often crucial for the success of domestic election observation. A realistic work plan that matches the scope and objectives of domestic election monitoring, underpinned by carefully selected human resources and backed by sufficient and timely financial resources, allows for a smooth, co-ordinated and efficient implementation of a domestic election observation, including meeting the strict deadlines for internal and external reporting.

Work plan

As a first step, CSOs running a domestic election observation should prepare a work plan. The process of preparing such a plan should include developing a list of activities, an implementation time frame, and suggested measurable outcomes. It is useful to review the work plan against the objectives and the scope of the observation as it will help to exclude activities that are not directly related to achieving the objectives or those that are not within the scope of the observation. A good working plan shows that activities and ultimate outcomes strictly correspond with the objectives of the observation. In other words, the plan is in fact a strategy for achieving the objectives of the observation and describes the means by which they are met. The plan should be stable and yet still be flexible enough to be adjustable to any unexpected situations that might occur in the course of activities.

It is generally a good idea to put the major components of the plan into writing, so that everyone involved in the implementation of the observation knows the plan. Moreover, it is useful to make it public, as it serves the transparency principle. It is also good practice to make other documentation of the observation public, at least in summary form, including the objectives, scope, guiding principles (code of conduct) and other relevant information on the project.

Election monitoring requires precise planning and organisation so that numerous deadlines are met. As such, a detailed calendar that identifies dates and time periods in which most significant election-related events will take place is an advisable move. The calendar offers a visual aid, but mainly helps to determine what activities should take place, what kind of personnel and financial resources will be available and what logistical preparations are needed.

Human resources

It is advisable to develop a recruitment policy that addresses all issues and procedures related to human resources in detail. The policy should clearly foresee the staffing needs of the observation and include a table of all posts. Depending on the scope and objectives of domestic election observation the following positions and conditions may be required.

- ▶ Number and roles of Core Team (CT) members
- ▶ Number of long-term observers
- ▶ Number of short-term observers
- ▶ Number of assistants to CT, LTOs and STOs
- ▶ Other personnel (accountants, translators, IT and technical support, drivers, etc.)
- ▶ Remuneration conditions (range of salaries, including performance-based bonus).

The deadlines for hiring the staff should be set in a working plan and linked with the calendar. Designing such a plan in advance, with due attention to the scope and objective of a domestic election observation project, allows you to hire, retain and terminate contracts according to the observation's needs, resulting in better use of human resources.

When recruiting and working on domestic election observation it is important to ensure that no staff or volunteers engaged in observation have a conflict of interests (for instance, serving as a member of an election commission, holding an executive or leadership position in a political party, or registering as a candidate). When recruiting staff and observers, CSOs should try as far as possible to ensure a gender, age, ethnicity and linguistic balance. Hiring observers on a voluntary basis may significantly reduce staffing costs, but in this case training according to international standards should be emphasised. All staff must have a commitment to the promotion of human rights and an understanding of the needs of those who may suffer discrimination (for example, women, religious and ethnic minorities, disabled people).

Financial resources

An equally important aspect of the observation planning is the financial side of the operation. The budget should accurately reflect the scale of the observation and consider the following categories.

- ► Office rent and utilities
- ► Office equipment and its maintenance
- ► Office supplies
- ► Remuneration of observers (including taxes and allowances)
- ► Remuneration of Core Team (including taxes and allowances)
- ► Communication and postage
- ► Travel expenses (reimbursement of observation staff and volunteers)
- ► Contractual services (accountants, translators, trainers, other consultants)
- ► Other direct costs (printing/copying, events-related costs).

The budget should cover all requirements and have a sufficient amount reserved for contingencies. Donors expect the budget to be strictly justified by the proposal for observation. In addition, they usually require regular financial reports (on monthly/quarterly or other regular bases). Normally, there are various common sources of funding, available for domestic observation groups, such as the following.

- ► Contributions from wealthy individuals and businesses
- ► Donations of materials and services from businesses and individuals (in-kind contributions)
- ► Membership fees
- ► Revenue from sales of the organisation's own products, publications and visibility items (T-shirts, magnets, buttons, posters, etc.)
- ► Grants from international or domestic donors interested in supporting democratic processes.

Potential donors might include inter-governmental institutions such as the European Commission, foreign embassies in the country of the CSO, development and technical co-operation agencies, international CSOs and foundations, as well as relevant local partners or institutions (for example, the Central Election Commission). Soliciting funds for the observation is rather often conducted under time constraints, which might lead to several challenges, including situations where the actual observation budget may experience a shortfall in cash flow or underfunding.

The observation's credibility may be at risk if the funds are obtained from the government, political parties or other directly involved election stakeholders. For that reason, many CSOs avoid getting funding for their activities from such potential donors. In cases where such funding is received, it should be properly acknowledged to avoid accusations of partisanship or bias. A perception of partisanship is usually limited or overcome by proper implementation of the working plan based on impartiality, objectivity, professionalism and transparency.

2.4. TRAINING PLAN ON REPORTING

The handbook includes three sections on training issues all with the focus on the Core Team's training needs: the current one, which aims at providing a general overview, a section inside the internal reporting chapter (see Chapter 3.4) and another one for external reporting (see Chapter 4.1).

This first section presents some general features that CSOs should take into account to develop a good training programme. It addresses issues of designing a generic training plan on reporting using a strategic approach that aims at achieving mid- and long-term objectives. It also intends to act as a framework within which subsequent decisions on training from a short-term perspective have to be taken. For instance, selecting an appropriate method is essential for a successful outcome of a particular training activity, but such a decision has to be framed and justified within a broader strategy. The other two sections deal with specific training needs, approaches and methods.

Initial assessment

If a domestic election observation organisation has done election observation-related training in the past, this experience should be reassessed in the light of how it contributed to the success or failure of the previous domestic election observation. Such retrospective analysis should be as broad as possible. It should include different periods (for example, electoral and non-electoral stages) and be focused on detecting overall gained strengths or repeating shortcomings.

Despite the possible presence of new factors (for example, new objectives, scope or staff) that seem to require a new training arrangement, any domestic election observation should take into account what has been done in the past. Repeating mistakes is very common, but implementing lessons learned is also possible.

Road map for strategic vision

Based on the findings of such initial assessment, a clear road map is essential for new projects. Despite the differences that exist between countries, a common mistake consists in adopting decisions having only in mind immediate challenges. The election calendar may be extremely compelling for the CSOs and may require them to organise training sessions at short notice, but a strategic plan (a medium-term and/or long-term road map) is the only way to improve the overall training quality. Otherwise, training activities would never have a strategic direction: they would only be reactions or even improvisations to address short-term needs.

A road map should include different elements and, taking into account their importance, the following points highlight some of them.

Configuration of electoral stakeholders

Configuration of electoral stakeholders is always an essential component of any strategic planning. Election training involves a number of people that undertake different roles. While each one of them has his/her own sphere of responsibilities,

their tasks create interconnections that have to be properly assessed in order to lay out a training strategy plan. A mapping of actors will clarify who does what during the whole election cycle and, having in mind this picture, identify which training methodology is needed in each case and who has the best profile to conduct it. It is especially important that training of trainers (ToT) has to be properly designed and implemented because it represents a key method for guaranteeing quality of cascade training (usually done under time constraints and with the aim of reaching out to all domestic election observation staff and observers) and thus a harmonic training strategy for all those involved.

Indicators/quality and impact assessment/accountability

Training activities aim to transfer certain information or a set of skills to domestic election observation staff and observers, assuming that this in itself will generate a positive result. While such an approach could be justified in some critical situations, it should normally be avoided. Having in mind some weak elements of the organisation is a useful departure point for designing and carrying out training activities.

Good practice consists in setting objectives and permanent quality indicators as part of the strategic training plan for the organisation. If indicators are used, over time they can generate data that provides guidance on the actual efficiency of the training programmes and thus opportunities for improvement will be easily identified. Moreover, accountability is also directly linked to these indicators. Successful initiatives as well as negative experiences will be highlighted, making management decisions on performance of the staff more evidence-based.

Familiarisation with the organisational framework

A balanced and proactive institutional framework is also a pre-condition for a good training programme. There is no perfect model since each country and each civil society organisation has its own profile. In general terms, any organisational review that can be presented at the training activities can be a useful supplement to training in substantive issues. This component of the training can include discussion of: the legal status of CSOs, internal structure, the role of external donors, what may affect the independence of the organisation, (in)formal connections with other national and international CSOs, and so on.

How to implement: human and material resources/ICT means/training materials

Good intentions might be rooted in non-realistic assumptions and thus training activities will face difficult practical obstacles to proper implementation. Beyond normal financial constraints, human factors may be much more difficult to address. The composition of a core staff of a CSO may cause not enough qualified trainers or experienced staff to train newcomers and observers. It can also be busy with other operational tasks, which would limit their investment in preparation of training activities and their implementation. One option here is to outsource such activities

to other organisations or hire temporary staff to deliver such training. The option is to rely on ToT schemes that allow a quick cascade of training activities down the observation chain.

Training materials, both paper- and ICT-based, are essential tools for the successful outcome of the training and they cannot be produced on a short-term basis. A general strategy should identify which kinds of materials are needed and which means have to be used and at what stages. They should be produced in advance and adjusted depending on changing needs and demands.

Good practice/building networks

Even if there are different approaches to domestic observation, some common challenges, situations and methods can be used as a joint platform for training. The international electoral community is composed of a variety of actors that may be extremely useful for a CSO implementing a domestic election observation. Regular interaction with the international community would allow quick adoption of good practice, as well as joining forces through various networks of domestic election observation organisations by designing and following a general training strategy.

2.5. COMMUNICATION PLAN

As discussed above, domestic election observation needs to be guided by planning and setting clear objectives. All information distributed to external audiences should reflect the objectives of the domestic election observation.

Setting up clear objectives includes defining objectives for external communication, which in turn influences the manner in which an organisation communicates its reports. As part of the broader communications plan for the domestic election observation, CSOs need to decide how to distribute information through reports and how to use the content of these reports to ensure that findings and recommendations have an impact in the post-election period.

Communication objectives and targets

Each domestic election observation needs to have a designated person (a spokesperson) or a team in charge of communication, often called the press office. This designated person or team should be responsible for identifying communication needs and priorities and will design a strategy to address them.

The organisation might decide to focus only on distributing information or taking a more active role in shaping the debate on the electoral process, for example by encouraging more citizens to participate in the elections or to increase the level of public trust in the elections. Objectives that are more specific could be developed as steps to achieving broader objectives. They will have an impact on reporting activities and their schedule as reflected in the internal reporting plan.

Audiences usually targeted during a domestic election observation are: election contestants (political parties and candidates), election-administration bodies, other civil society

groups, local and international media, the diplomatic community and other international organisations involved in elections, voters and public officials.

Different types of messages will facilitate reporting on findings and will have a better impact if the message is tailored correctly to the needs of the special type of audience. The communication team needs to study in advance the priorities of each group in terms of election-related information, the time they are prepared to devote to discussing electoral matters and select the information that is most relevant for them.

The methods selected for communication vary according to the message to be delivered and the audience targeted. The organisation, depending on concrete situations, may need to decide whether to utilise printed, audiovisual or online channels of information, traditional or new media. These decisions will depend on a variety of factors related to timelines and existing budgetary resources, available personnel and expertise.

Types of audience

The communication approach might look different when discussing election observation findings and recommendations with election-administration bodies compared with a discussion on reforms within the civil society. An organisation needs to keep various audiences informed about the progress of the domestic election observation and be prepared to give regular briefings, distribute printed materials or post updates on social media.

The relationship with election-administration bodies is very important for all the stages and components of an election observation project. A permanent co-operative dialogue is needed for gathering information and can be important to foster the reform agenda in the future. Many successful organisations keep channels for constructive communication with election-administration bodies, providing updates on their activities or establishing collaboration mechanisms for voter-education projects, for example.

Political parties or their representatives in parliament are important sources of information for reporting. Effective communication with parliamentarians might also ensure future co-operation in the process of advancing reforms. It is useful to discuss issues of the electoral process with representatives of political parties, create presentation materials or events specifically for them during the observation period, ask for their input or even support on issues raised in reports, without losing focus on maintaining impartiality and the role as watchdog.

Representatives of the diplomatic community and international organisations are interested in domestic observers' reports and in regular exchanges on the overall election environment. Domestic observation organisations could use the opportunities presented by the events organised by international groups to promote their priorities for reforms and seek funding of their future projects. They can also organise their own presentations for the representatives of the diplomatic community and international organisations.

Communication with other civil society organisations could be a good channel to promote dialogue on the identified issues and forge coalitions for reforms.

Overall, voters, or more specifically some groups of voters, could become the target for communication. For example, selected information from reports could form the basis for encouraging discussions on social media and involving young voters, to promote issues that are important for them.

Press officer/spokesperson and the press office

For all election observation organisations it is recommended that a spokesperson is designated for the external communication. Large organisations have a communication team under the guidance of a press officer or spokesperson. The team establishes and maintains contacts with the media and other interested subjects, addresses inquiries and moderates the CSO's press events. In large countries, domestic election observation may require nominating spokespersons in the regions, which can ease and speed up contacts with the media on regional issues.

Organisations that operate nationwide with staff and volunteers could decide to open a press office or media centre in a central location of the capital. It could be used for press conferences, off-the-record conversations and interviews with journalists, training for observers, meeting with politicians and voters. As a new local institution the location should be announced via media, by flyers distributed or through social networks in all places where target audiences are found (alongside the organisation's website).

The communication team or spokesperson(s) have to pay special attention to the "hot period" around election day; that is, approximately one week before and one week after. At least during this time it is advisable to open a press room. According to financial and personal resources the organisation could rent one to two rooms in a central location to serve as a media centre. Free workspace for journalists, Wi-Fi access and other office services can allow better interaction between the staff of the domestic observation organisation and journalists at the most crucial moments. The staff and volunteers can help organise press events and support the production of external reports. Translation of the organisation's press conferences and reports into English is needed if the international media are to be reached. The translation of written reports in other languages can possibly be carried out by volunteers living abroad. The different services of the media centre and a time schedule for press events during the week should be announced to the public, for example by means of a flyer or through social networks (alongside the organisation's website).

At least one person in the office must be responsible for technical support. This designated staff member should manage the content of the CSO's website, feed the social media and construct and maintain the electronic distribution database for distribution of the reports.

It can be useful to provide a list with mobile numbers of regional spokespersons and to prepare a list of interesting polling stations the journalists may ask for.

Mapping the media landscape

The identification of the most commonly used media in the country is important for planning communication. In many member states of the Council of Europe, television plays a significantly more important role than newspapers, radio and the Internet. This

means that domestic observation organisations should find out the most frequented channels and programmes, but should not forget the rest – in particular the ever-growing importance of online space. Communication through the Internet, notably through social media, should not be underestimated.

Depending on the available resources and needs, CSOs might try to reach out to the international media. Therefore, the CSO should have a capacity to translate the most relevant reports into English. It is good practice to have reports proofread in English by native speakers. Good English shows professionalism by the CSO. A poor quality English version (or any other officially presented language version) might diminish the credibility and the appreciation of the CSO as a valuable source of election-related information.

A list of national and international media well known in the country or worldwide should be created. After completion of the list, it has to be regularly updated and there should be functionality built in to allow quick distribution of the report or statement. On election day in particular, easy access to and simple handling of this database is crucial for the successful distribution of the messages. The handling of the database should be tested by the press officer and other persons in the office.

Media without personal contacts are not beneficial. The persons responsible for the media should make an effort to find out and establish personal contacts. E-mails and short messages are valuable instruments only if the addressee is known, and vice versa.

Time schedule

Elections are long, dynamic processes influenced by many factors. For that reason it is impossible to plan each media interaction or press event. Nevertheless, the organisation should decide on some key reports during the different periods of the electoral cycle that should be presented to the media at a particular time. Consequently, preparation and publication of each report must be accompanied by a deadline. Often election observation reports and press conferences follow the following schedule.

Pre-election period

▶ Press release about starting the observation.

▶ Special reports on single aspects like campaigning, legislation and security. In particular, during the week before election day press conferences with latest findings will attract the media.

▶ Regular interim reports on the whole preparation of the election, not later than 7 to 10 days before election day.

Election day

▶ Press release about opening of the voting.

▶ Press releases about turnout and voting during the day (after 12 p.m.) and before closing.

▶ Press release in case of outstanding observations.

Post-election period

► Statement on preliminary findings and conclusions assessing the whole monitored period (immediately, one to two days after election day).

► Final report with comprehensive and detailed assessment, including recommendations on all monitored aspects of the electoral process (some two months after the election).

Chapter 3

Internal reporting

T his chapter covers key elements of internal reporting, including the following stages: drawing up internal reporting plans; dividing up tasks within the domestic election observation mission (DEOM); designing/adjusting internal reporting forms; training observers on collecting information on the ground; processing the observers' information by the Network Team; and analysing the information by the Core Team.

3.1. INTERNAL REPORTING PLAN

The need for an internal reporting plan

The internal reporting plan is a key part of the organisation's overall strategic work plan and has a crucial role for successful election monitoring. It consolidates all important elements into one system and fosters reliability, effectiveness and efficiency. The internal reporting plan is a "map" that serves as a guideline on internal reporting for the domestic election observation staff, including the Core Team members, LTOs and STOs.

The internal reporting plan:

- ▶ increases the probability of achieving organisational objectives and goals;
- ▶ promotes all elements of internal reporting to work effectively and in support of each other;
- ▶ creates a more productive and responsive internal network;
- ▶ provides Core Team members, LTOs, STOs with clear directions and detailed instructions for everyday activities;
- ▶ allows the flow and sharing of information between the members of the mission;
- ▶ improves understanding of individual tasks and responses to each other's needs;
- ▶ utilises the appropriate means of internal communication and reporting;
- ▶ measures the compliance of activities with the determined time frames and rules;
- ▶ reduces the capacity for conflict by decreasing the ambiguity of messages;
- ▶ enables the review of activity and provides the channels to measure future success;
- ▶ empowers better performance by linking individual and team efforts in one unified system.

Key elements of an internal reporting plan

An election observation mission should have a well-developed internal reporting structure, with clear delimitation of roles and responsibilities. Its efficiency can be increased by:

► proper and wise division of labour among the members of the mission;

► clear and detailed instructions of the tasks and responsibilities for each group/individual;

► productive and reliable channels of communication/reporting between the mission's members.

Internal reporting timelines

The following table presents an indicative timeline of important election milestones and observation activities. The schedule is based on a single-round election; if two rounds are being observed, adjustments should be included. Timelines could be shortened in case elections are called at short notice.

A.   Preparatory stage (two to three months prior to the election day)

► Selection of the experts (especially, when the domestic observation group plans to create a coalition with other partners)

► Recruitment of LTOs.

B.   Deployment and pre-election observation stage (six to eight weeks prior to election day)

► Public announcement of the start of the election observation

► Briefing for LTOs

► Deployment of LTOs (four to five weeks)

► Observation of all aspects of electoral process

► Release of interim report(s) on pre-election findings

► Recruitment of STOs

► Recruitment of data entry operators

► Briefing for STOs

► Accreditation of STOs

► Recruitment and training of data entry operators.

C.   Election day observation

► Collect the data from the observers according to the forms and determined times

► Statements/press releases/press conferences on the opening and setting up of polling stations, voting and vote-counting processes, voters' turnout and observed incidents

► Press conference on the final election results.

D.   Reporting and post-election observation (end of election day to three weeks after)

► Release of preliminary statement (day after election day)

- ► Debriefing of STOs
- ► Observation of post-election process (tabulation, announcements of results, appeals)
- ► Debriefing of LTOs
- ► Release of final report (two to three weeks after election day).

Good practice example: election day timelines

▬▬ The election observation organisation should develop the timelines of activities for all stages of elections, including: type of activity, date/deadline, venue and responsible persons. The election calendar of the Central Election Commission (CEC) can be used as a basis to create the timetable. The CEC calendar enables one to follow whether the activities are in compliance with the election-related events. Experience shows that some activities – such as training, PR communication, LTO reporting, election day reporting – can have separate and more detailed timelines. Below is an extract from an election day activity timeline.

▬▬ The timelines can be drafted in the following formats: Excel timesheets, Microsoft Word and other special programmes. Google's calendar is one of the most popular and convenient and is used by a lot of organisations to create time frames. The Google calendar is available for everybody free of charge and facilitates gathering all needed components in one space. The information can be sorted, updated, shared among the network and sent automatically as a reminder for each activity.

Table 1: ISFED Internal election day schedule for 2015 local elections

June 15 (E-day)		
Time	**Task**	**Person responsible**
06:30	Management Staff arrives to open data centre and computers set up	E-Day Coordinator, ICT Expert
06:30	Data Operators arrive, sign in, and breakfast (for all)	ICT Expert
06:45	Data Operators are briefed	ICT Expert
06:45	STO Observers arrive at PSs	E-Day Coordinator, LTOs
07:00	Polling stations are opened	CEC
07:15	**1st SMS – arrival text**	**STOs**
07:30-08:00	Chase the data – Export data, data operators call back to STOs	ICT Expert, Analyst Expert
08:00-08:30	Replace observers, if needed	E-Day Coordinator, ICT Expert, LTOs
08:00-10:00	Taking video of data centre	PR Assistant
08:30	**2nd SMS**	**STOs**

June 15 (E-day)		
08:30-09:00	Chase the data – Export data, data operators call back to STOs	Operators, E-Day Coordinator, ICT Expert
08:30-09:30	Analysis of incidents (send cumulative incidents by 09:30)	Lawyer
09:00	Executive Director arrives at data centre	Executive Director
09:00-09:30	Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) analysis	ICT Expert, Analyst Expert
09:00-12:00	Operators have a break	ICT Expert, ICT Expert Assistant
09:20-10:00	Statement	PR Manager, Executive Director
10:00-10:30	Translation of statement	Interpreter
10:00-10:30	Design/graphics	Designer, PR Manager
10:30-11:00	Send statement to be printed at Media Centre	PR Manager, PR Assistant
11:00	**Press conference on opening**	**Executive Director**
11:00-11:30	E-mailing statements (ENG and GEO)	PR Manager
11:30-12:00	Post infographics (Facebook, webpage)	IT Manager, PR Manager
12:10	**3rd SMS**	**STOs**
12:10-12:30	Chase the data – Export data, data operators call back to STOs	Operators, E-Day coordinator, ICT expert
12:00-13:30	Analysis of incidents (send cumulative incidents by 13:30)	Lawyer
13:30-14:00	Statement	Executive Director, PR Manager
13:00-17:00	Operators break in shifts	ICT Expert Assistant
14:00-14:30	Translation of statement	Interpreter
14:30-15:00	Design /graphics	Designer, PR Manager
14:30	Send statement to be printed at Media Centre	PR Manager
15:00	**Press conference on noon turnout**	**Executive Director**

Source: www.isfed.ge

Below you will find an example of a structural chart, outlining the communication structure of an election observation mission on election day. In general, the internal communication structure depends on the scope of observation, the monitoring methodology and the available human/financial resources.

▶ The goal and scope of the observation define the structure of the mission. Depending on whether the observation focuses on the overall election process or on distinct topics (monitoring of electoral disputes, monitoring of media behaviour, and so on), the structure of the mission and its communication structure varies.

▶ In addition, the internal communication structure differs at all stages of elections: in the pre-election period, on election day and in the post-election period.

Figure 3: Election day internal communication structure (Georgia)
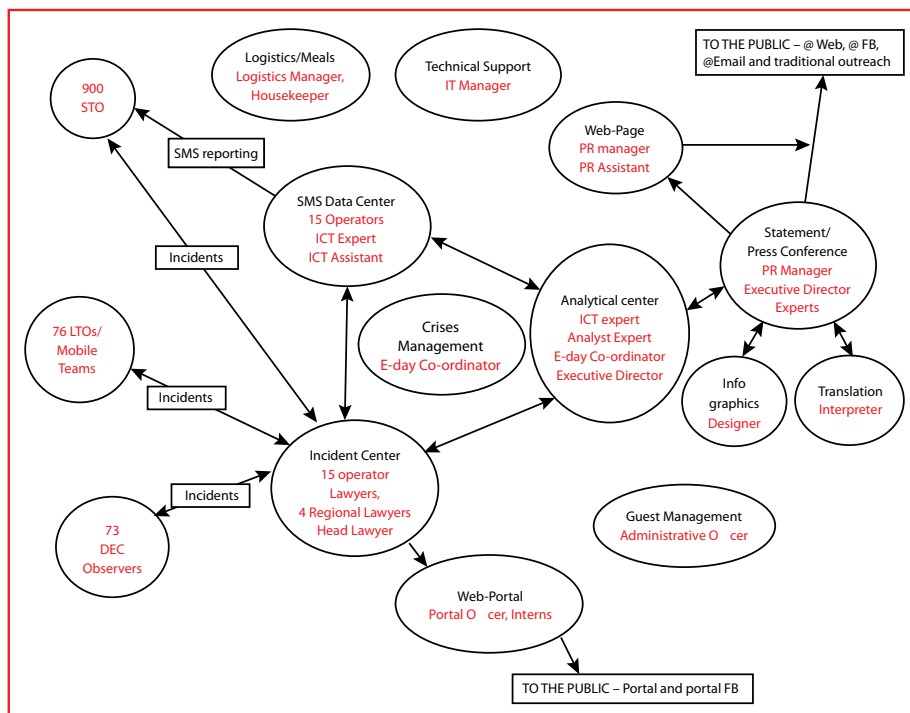
3.2. DEFINITION OF ROLES

Planning an election observation mission includes planning the structure of the election observation team. The structure and assignment of specific tasks, duties and responsibilities (usually defined by terms of reference tailored for each individual analyst/expert) depends on the scope and objectives of the observation, the available resources and previous observation experience. Regardless of the size of the team and the available resources, to produce good reports the following division of tasks is required.

▶ A Core Team with a Head of Mission and Deputy Head of Mission; analysts to draft the external reports; a Network Co-ordinator who receives and checks the internal reports.

▶ The observers who collect the information on the ground.

In order to produce reports, each of the two units needs to perform specific operations, and both units have to co-ordinate their activities. An example of an election observation structure can be found in the chart below.

Figure 4: Election observation structure (Moldova)

Source: https://promolex.md
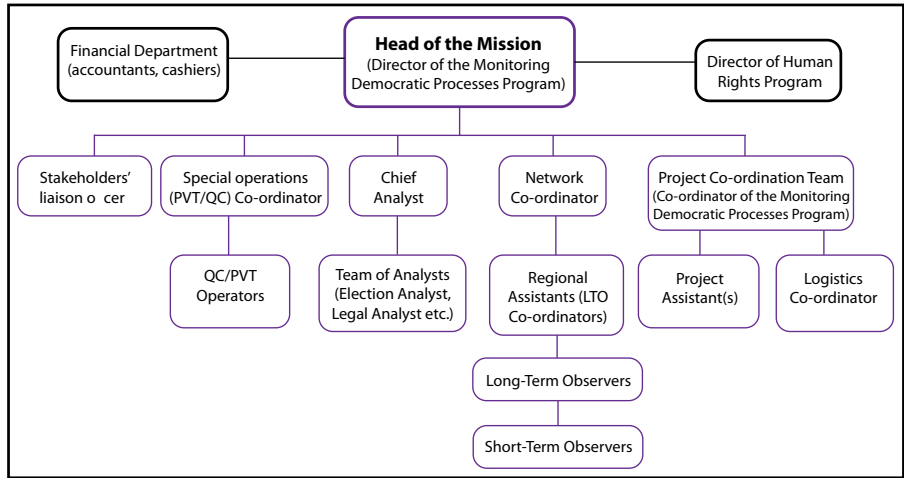
The Core Team

The Core Team co-ordinates the entire election observation mission; it decides on the overall methodology, secures an efficient co-ordination of the activities and communication, the content and timing of the interim reports, statements and the final report.

The structure of the Core Team varies from organisation to organisation. Normally, it includes Head of the Mission, Deputy Head of Mission and individual Analysts/ Experts (Election Analyst, Legal Analyst, Political Analyst, Media Analyst, Press Officer/ Spokesperson, Security Expert and the Network/LTO Co-ordinator, Statistical Expert). Besides these content-oriented members, there are also operational members of the Core Team (Finance Expert/Accountant, Operations/Logistics Expert and Procurement Expert).

The Core Team ensures regular communication among its members – usually via regular joint meetings (for example, daily morning meetings) that also serve for distribution of tasks. Individual Core Team members are responsible for ensuring vertical communication and transmission of tasks to the members of their working groups. Ideally, the Core Team includes co-ordinators/managers that ensure the information flow, so that the Core Team will stay continuously informed about their activities and needs. The key positions in the Core Team are the following.

The Head of Mission

► Co-ordinates the overall process of producing reports.
► Communicates with the Board to agree on the content of reports and statements.
► Engages in public relations activities to promote reports and statements.
► Approves the reports.

The Deputy Head of Mission

► Is the principal political and technical adviser to the Head of Mission.

► Ensures that reporting procedures are followed and that the reporting forms comply with the situation.

► Prepares interim reports, the preliminary statement and the final report.

► Co-ordinates the preparation of observer briefings, materials and forms.

► Conducts the operational planning for LTOs' deployment and election day coverage.

Mostly, the Deputy Head of Mission drafts the preliminary statement and other external reports, based on contributions from the Core Team members. Given the tight deadlines – the preliminary statement is usually presented the day after the elections – the preparation of these reports is a challenging task that requires a structured process of drafting, reviewing and finalising. Not to get into a rush, all these reports should be drafted long before their publication. The Head of Mission should be given enough time also to review the drafts. Thus, the deadlines have to be prepared accordingly.

Analysts

Analysts are responsible for assessment of their respective areas (legal, election, political, media, etc.), established on the basis of their own national-level analysis as well as information reported by the observers in the field. The internal reporting provided by long-term and short-term field observers should be a key element for the analysts when formulating the main findings, patterns, conclusions and recommendations of the external reports.

The Core Team principals (HoM, DHoM) are responsible for distributing and assigning any overlapping questions and issues which fall beyond the predefined terms of reference.

Network Co-ordinator

The Network Co-ordinator is responsible for keeping communication between the Core Team and other teams of the mission with the field observers (LTOs, Mobile STOs, STOs). The Co-ordinator may be assisted by several Regional Co-ordinators. The Network Co-ordinator, in conjuction with Regional Network Co-ordinators (if established), collects and verifies the observation reports from the LTOs, STOs or other field observers. The information is further channelled to the Core Team. A Network Co-ordinator:

► develops a system to store and process LTOs' periodic reports and incident reports;

► contributes to developing training methods and materials for LTO reporting;

► co-ordinates with LTOs to collect and process information from STOs;

► contributes to drafting sections of reports based on the information from LTOs' reports.

Statistical Expert

The Statistical Expert, in conjuction with data entry operators, collects information from the STOs on election day: developments, as well as data from the protocols. All information is introduced into special software for further processing. If errors occur, the operator calls back STOs to verify and correct the information. The software program facilitates the receipt of sufficient information by the Core Team on the quick count of the votes or parallel vote tabulation.

Incident Centre Lawyers

Incident Centre Lawyers may serve as an optional unit within the domestic observation mission, established especially for election day to receive the information on the observed violations/irregularities from LTOs, STOs, district election commission (DEC) observers, enter the data into the database and provide consultations on how to react.

Observers

Long-term observers

LTOs represent the eyes and ears of an election observation mission in the regions. Their main task is to collect different data about the electoral processes and election campaign in their area of responsibility. LTOs collect the data on the pre-election and post-election findings based on a specific observation methodology and use different observation forms (standard LTO form, incident reporting form, thematic forms, etc.). LTOs should be aware of the importance of the information they collect, pay close attention to details and collect evidence of the facts indicated in the reports.

Short-term observers

STOs collect qualitative and quantitative data on election day processes in the polling stations. Depending on the observation methodology, STOs may be deployed to cover all polling stations or a randomly selected sample of polling stations. The STOs stay in the polling station during the entire election day, covering the opening of the polling station, voting procedure, vote-counting and tabulation. Their information is transmitted in the following ways.

- ▶ Stationary teams (quick count/PVT, SMS reporting, reporting by phone) report directly to the centre either by calling in or sending text messages, or by filling out incident applications.
- ▶ Mobile teams report to their respective LTOs, who verify, correct, consolidate the information and send to the centre (to the Core Team).
- ▶ Observers at the upper level of election commissions (DECs) deliver the information to LTOs and the incident centre about findings and violations observed at DECs on election day.

More and more organisations use modern technology and send the information directly into a database, where more sophisticated analysis is undertaken. A small data analysis team (normally two or three people overseen by the Statistical Expert) then undertakes a first analysis of the information and forwards its analysis to the Core Team (Deputy Head of Mission, Election Analyst) for drafting the election day section of the reports.

3.3. REPORTING FORMS

There are two types of internal reporting forms: long-term observation forms and short-term observation forms (see Annex 3). Both sets of forms are specifically tailored for the country's specifics. They are one of the key information sources for the Core Team, besides information gathered by the analysts at the centre. When compiling or revising the forms, the following good practices are advisable.

Early drafting of forms

Many domestic observers have already developed internal reporting forms that serve their particular observation goal. When elections are approaching, they should be seriously engaged in revising their existing forms, building upon past experience and lessons learned; they should take into consideration what they want to focus on in their reporting. They also should have a clear idea how to ensure that the data is properly and most effectively processed for the public reports of the domestic observation organisation.

At the beginning, the Core Team should consider a range of possible issues and challenges in regard to reporting. During a brainstorming session the Core Team should determine what situations might occur during the observation and how these situations could be reported. Scenarios should be identified, along with the probability of their occurrence. Subsequently, the Core Team should develop new or revise existing reporting forms, thereby not excluding the possibility of their adjustments at a later stage. Regular review sessions should be planned in order to allow amendments to the reporting forms. That way, the domestic observation organisation is prepared to effectively collect information.

Key elements of each report

The quality of the public reports or statement fully depends on the quality of the questions an election observation mission puts into its internal reports. Consideration should be given to methods formulating the questions and collecting, checking and analysing the answers.

The Core Team should invest a significant amount of time in drawing up the reporting forms and the questions that LTOs and STOs should ask different stakeholders. While drafting the forms, the Core Team should make sure that the following five key questions are always being asked.

► Who makes it happen?
► What is happening?

- ► When does it happen?
- ► Where is it happening?
- ► Why is it happening?

Figure 5: Quality of information

Source: https://promolex.md

Including these questions in the internal reporting forms ensures that observers cover most key aspects of the events.

Long-term observation forms

Depending on the country specifics, the scope, the structure, the human and financial resources of the election observation mission, the long-term election observation may be based on two data collection methods that complement each other: long-term election observation forms (LTO forms) and data gathering at the centre by Core Team members.

LTO forms are the main source of information about the conduct of the electoral process in the regions. Domestic observers develop the following LTO forms.

- ► *LTO standard reporting form*s gather quantitative and qualitative information on all aspects of the election campaign conduct. LTO forms could also more specifically focus on different topics (campaign financing, media monitoring, etc.), thus ensuring a strong focus on the respective issue and qualitative gathering of information. Often these reporting forms copy the structure of the pre-election interim reports as well as post-election statement and/or the final reports.
- ► *LTO incident forms* provide immediate and detailed information of incidents in the LTO area of observation. These forms may be complemented by *LTO rally report forms* that could be used in the case of particularly important events (an observed rally, for example).

The content of the LTO forms depends on the country's specifics, the structure of the domestic organisation and the monitoring methodology. Nevertheless, the following aspects should be taken into consideration while compiling LTO forms.

Scope of the election observation mission

LTO reporting forms must be designed in accordance with the overall goal and scope of the election observation mission: the structure of the external reports basically copies the structure of LTO forms. Even if the observation organisation faces human and financial constraints, a minimum of characteristics of the electoral processes have to be included in the form in order to ensure a qualitative and coherent long-term input to the Core Team. Generally, LTO regular reporting forms cover the following aspects of the election campaign:

- ► role of the central and local public administration;
- ► activity of the election administration;
- ► compilation of voter lists (application of the electronic voter lists), registration of voters;
- ► campaign conduct, including activities of electoral contestants;
- ► campaign financing;
- ► media coverage of the election campaign (in particular in regional media);
- ► appeals and complaints.

Revision and update of forms

Before starting the election observation, the Core Team should consider adjusting their observation methodology. Most organisations monitor elections by following the main events of the campaign, the electoral calendar set by the electoral authorities and the electoral candidates and other relevant stakeholders. Some more experienced organisations take a more complex approach by deploying their LTOs to visit each locality in their area of observation, thus ensuring the coverage of all election stakeholders and nationwide representative findings.

Good practice examples: advanced processing of reporting forms

▬▬ New reporting tools could also be applied. In 2014, Promo-LEX (Moldova) digitised its LTO reporting forms, created software for the collection of the data from the LTOs and equipped each LTO with a PC tablet, 3G Internet and an e-mail account. LTOs have been trained additionally on how to use the reporting software and PC tablets.

▬▬ In 2012, ISFED (Georgia) developed the special software to collect data from the LTOs. The program enabled LTOs to add the information directly into the database, which can be viewed by regional and central office staff members. The program also allows its users to automatically identify errors and mismatches, and to analyse quantitative information.

Detailed information

In order to obtain complete, accurate and objective information, LTO forms could be designed in two different ways.

1. Questions are formulated in a very general way so that LTOs are flexible in their answers. In this case, LTOs should be well trained in the 5W technique for reporting (answering the five questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why?).

2. Detailed reporting forms are developed. This way, the Core Team ensures that LTOs provide quantitative and qualitative answers to the 5W questions.

The more detailed the LTO forms are (given that forms are properly adjusted to the particular election context), the more in-depth information about the irregularities and/or violations and their importance for the overall electoral process the Core Team receives. That way the LTOs provide qualitative information; they can gather much easier additional information as they know what to ask for; and the Core Team can easily check whether all necessary information was collected by the LTOs.

The regular reporting forms and incident/spot-reporting forms should also give the LTOs the opportunity to come up with short analysis that goes beyond the listing of facts and figures. Open questions could allow them to put their observations into context, give some background information and come up with their own conclusions. Open questions also allow observers to report events that had not been envisaged in the forms. In such cases reports/forms could include reminders that all contextual information or conclusions drawn by the observer should be clearly indicated as such, so that they are not deemed observed facts.

Reference to the CEC and the mission's calendar

The election administration usually adopts an electoral calendar at the beginning of the entire election process. The domestic election observers should also adopt a similar calendar in order to track key moments and stages of the process and to plan the conduct of its observation mission accordingly, especially in regard to internal and external reporting. The LTO reporting deadlines should have a clear connection with the deadlines set in the election calendar and with the mission's external reporting calendar.

The deadlines set in the electoral calendar should be included in the LTO form. This will help LTOs to remember the most important events of the campaign and report on them by the deadline.

Short and simple forms

In order to streamline LTO reporting, forms should be kept as simple as possible. Closed questions allow the Core Team to receive more accurate data that they could also use for statistical purposes. First, LTOs could be asked to answer questions with "Yes" or "No" (for example, whether a specific legal provision was enforced); then, additional details could be required depending on the affirmative or negative answers given earlier (see examples of such questions in the table below). This allows the analysts to receive precise answers.

Table 2: Extract from LTO reporting form (Georgia)

	A. Activity of the election administration							
1	How many sessions have been conducted in the District Election Commission during the reporting period?	*Specify the number:*						
2	Were all the interested persons allowed to attend the session?	Yes	No (Fill in details in block B)					
3	Which political parties did not name candidates for the District Election Commission according to the law?							
	UNM	Christian Democrats	Public Party	Conservative Party	Labor Party	Industry will save Georgia	European Democrats	Other
4	Did the CEC publish the detailed list of PECs at a determined time prescribed by law?							
	☐ TV	☐ Press	☐ Radio	☐ Web site	☐ Public stand	☐ Did not publish		

Reference to legal acts

The questions included in the LTOs' forms should contain (wherever appropriate) references to exact articles from the electoral law that regulates a specific situation. Additionally, the LTO forms should be written in a legal language, thus encouraging LTOs to study the legal terms and respectively to use this legal language in their reporting.

Guidance for observers

On the first page of the LTO form there should be an instruction/guideline reminding LTOs about the code of conduct for observers, the deadlines for reporting and explaining how to fill in the form. Separate instructions on how to answer the questions could also be included. Practice-oriented training sessions should be conducted for the LTOs; special emphasis should be given on ways, methods and techniques for collecting evidence and proof to support their reporting (for example, copies of documents, photos, video, samples of campaigning materials, testimonies of witnesses). If during the observation period problems occur in filling out the forms, the Network/LTO Co-ordinator could be tasked with providing support via e-mail and phone or by visiting the LTOs in the field.

Short-term observation forms

Differing from the international observation missions, domestic short-term observers are mostly deployed at one polling station from its opening and until the tabulation of results (thus forming a stationary team or observers); however, there may also be mobile teams/observers that visit more polling stations during election day. Each stationary short-term team/observer fills out the forms per each polling station (precinct election commission) visited. The short-term observer's package mostly consists of:

► an *STO standard form* that collects the qualitative and quantitative data at the polling station (see Annex 3);

► an *incident form* that provides immediate and detailed information about every incident at the polling station (see Annex 3);

► a *Statement complaint form* that requests a reaction on observed violation (see Annex 3).

In addition, an *STO activity timeline* helps the observer to follow all procedures, collect proper information, reflect findings in the relevant forms and report at determined times.

During the drafting of STO forms attention should be paid to the following aspects.

Adjustment of forms

A short-term observer's forms should be designed and structured according to the observation methodology and the reporting goal. If a parallel vote tabulation (PVT) is being conducted using a phone call or SMS reporting system, then the STO standard form should be brief and simple, as the monitoring is focused on collecting specific data at precisely determined times. For stationary or mobile teams/observers the forms can be longer with more questions. The STO standard form could be complemented by incident forms that provide information about irregularities/violations at the polling stations.

Testing of forms

The checklist of election day procedures serves as a guideline for the questions on the forms. In addition, the following questions should be considered when designing the STO forms.

► What could be the potential tendencies/violations?

► What could be the main issues which can affect the results?

► How could the information be prioritised?

► What would be the answer for each question?

► How will the collected data be analysed?

► What were the findings in previous elections?

► What was the answer for each question?

► Is there any question that needs to be modified or replaced as it didn't provide a sufficient answer?

Good practice example: test of STO forms

▬▬ If for the past several elections the analysis showed a very low number/percentage of violations during the opening procedure and potentially you don't expect them to happen for upcoming elections, the number of questions could be reduced or generalised: *Was the process of opening and setting up the polling stations conducted in accordance with the law?* That way, the short-term observer will still be able to follow the detailed checklist of election day procedures. If the observer recognises a violation during the opening of a polling station, the observer can fill in a spot (incident) form.

Consistency of forms

In the forms all stages of the whole election day process should be included: opening, voting, counting and tabulation. The questions should be put in line with the procedures of each stage.

> **Good practice example: questions for the voting process**
>
> ▬ Did voters show their ID cards?
>
> ▬ Was the ink checked?
>
> ▬ Were voters who had already been inked given the right to vote?
>
> ▬ Were the registrars confirming ballots with signature and stamp?
>
> ▬ Was the ink applied to all voters?

Easy-to-read forms

The questions should be very clear and unambiguous to avoid different interpretations. Wrong answers could affect the accuracy of the findings. The number of open questions should be limited; overwhelmingly closed questions should be used and alternative answers should be specified to decrease mistakes. Open questions should be used only in case there is no other way to collect information.

> **Good practice example: open and closed questions**
>
> ▬ Q.X – *Was the polling station opened on time?*
>
> ▬ This question can be interpreted in two different ways: (1) the polling station was opened by the commission members before the voting started; or (2) the polling station was set up and ready to receive voters.
>
> ▬ The above-mentioned question could be formulated in a more specific way:
>
> ▬ Q.X – *At what time was the polling station opened for setting up by the Precinct Election Commission (PEC) members?*
>
> ▬ Q.Y – *At what time was the polling station ready to receive the first voter?*
>
> ▬ The latter set of questions provides the Core Team with more concrete answers.

Logical checks of the forms

Logical checks enable the Core Team to verify whether the balances in election result protocol are correct. The Statistical Expert could come up with a list of important logical checks that should be integrated into the observation mission's software. This list of logical checks could also be used for the STO training. This way the STOs learn to check the correctness of their answers and are able to report more accurate data. Further on, the logical checks could be used for the evaluation of the tabulation

process. For this purpose, the best way is to prepare possible scenarios in which the process can be evaluated as "good" or "bad".

**Good practice example: logical checks
for verifying the correctness of evaluation process**

▬ *Question A:* Was the marking checked?

▬ Potential alternative answers for QA – 1) Always checked. 2) Not checked in one to five cases. 3) Not checked in more than five cases.

▬ *Question B:* Was the secrecy of the ballot safeguarded?

▬ Potential alternative answers for QB – 1) Always. 2) Not safeguarded in one to five cases. 3) Not safeguarded in more than five cases.

▬ *Question C:* Was there any pressuring of voters?

▬ Potential alternative answers for QC – 1) Yes. 2) No.

▬ *Question D:* Was the process of voting conducted according to the procedures prescribed by the law?

▬ Potential alternative answers for Question D – 1) Yes, process went well. 2) Yes, process went well, but with minor shortcomings. 3) No, process was conducted with many violations. 4) No, process was marred by significant violations.

▬ *Logical checks:* If for Question A the potential alternative answer is number 2 (QA=2), for Question B number 1 (QB=1) and for Question C number 1 (QC=1), in the evaluation Question D the observer should select an alternative answer, number 3, indicating that the process was conducted with violations (QD=3).

Linking STO standard and incident forms

Experience shows that the linkage of the STO standard and incident forms on the one hand enables adjustment to the specific types of methodologies/reporting without losing important information, and on the other hand increases the reliability and accuracy of the collected data. The integration of the forms in one software program helps to reveal the differences and errors, which can be verified and corrected.

Good practice example: correlation between different types of forms

▬ In 2014 ISFED conducted the monitoring of the Georgian local self-government elections using the PVT methodology via SMS reporting. The STO standard and spot forms were integrated in one software program. The information from the standard forms was reported to the SMS centre and violations presented in spot forms to the incident centre. The system enabled ISFED to identify over 150 differences between these two forms: violations were marked in the standard form and reported to the SMS centre; however, no incident forms were filled out and reported to the incident centre. The system enabled ISFED to clean the data and to achieve higher accuracy in their reporting.

3.4. TRAINING TIPS

Now that a general road map for training strategy has been established (see Chapter 2.4), this section will provide a list of concrete tips that could be useful for a correct preparation of training activities. One will find a number of methods that may ease knowledge transference as well as better and quicker skills assimilation. Trainers should assess which methods actually fit the needs of the sessions to be conducted. Depending on the target group (for example, LTOs, STOs, co-ordinators, report writers) or other factors (for example, time frame, material resources, trainer's own skills, trainees' profiles), appropriate training methods could be found among the list.

Most of the following methods could not only be used for training on internal reporting, but also applied to training focused on external reporting (see Chapter 4.1). Below you will find a comprehensive list of methods; trainers should shape each technique to the relevant intended purpose.

When conducting training sessions on internal reporting, the election observation organisation should try to pay attention to the different types of internal reporting (for example, STO to LTO, LTO to Core Team (CT), CT to CT, CT to STO (briefings/ debriefings)). The role of each position depends on the type of internal reporting that is being addressed; and the methods to be applied will have to match the needs of each situation. For example, training on STO to LTO reporting might be focused on accurate data retrieving from the field; the following methods would be particularly appropriate – mock elections, case studies or writing exercises. Alternatively, training on LTO to CT reporting would likely need an overview of the political, media and legal context. Thus, the appropriate training methods will not be the same. They will rather be contextualisation exercises (for example, reading past reports on the same case) or balancing and synthesis training sessions.

Different training methods

To get the message across, trainers could use a number of methods that could be structured in four different approaches.

1. *ICT means* are a useful tool provided the election observation organisation did a sound assessment that came to the conclusion that it is what the relevant training session really needs. PowerPoint presentations as well as video clips should strengthen the main purpose of the session: for example, on improving the reporting skills of the trainees. However, they are never a tool in itself. The following ICT means could be used during the training sessions:

   ► presenting information by **PowerPoint** (for example, key international standards, structure of an election report);

   ► showing **video** clips (for example, about the observers talking to the press);

   ► conducting **recorded interviews** (for example, asking about observers' personal opinion, asking about the funding of the organisation, about the age of the observer and his/her qualifications as observer).

2. *Readings*. An election observation mission might decide to use written documents in its training sessions. They play an important role during training as a way to consolidate provided information. Reports, handbooks and other similar materials provide systematic and structured data to the trainees, but their use should also be correctly balanced. Too much reading may lead to passive and non-interactive sessions. The following approaches could be implemented during the training sessions.

   ► **Report reading sessions** (for example, reading the executive summary of the latest election report and the assessments of the international observers about past elections).

   ► Working with **public handbooks/documents** (for example, reading out loud passages about international standards and plain language; referring to the Council of Europe's Code of Good Practice or OSCE's Copenhagen Document).

3. *Simulations and case studies*. Election observer organisations are recommended to undertake simulations. They are extremely effective at least for some target groups (for example, STOs). Role plays enable trainees to visualise reporting situations in a way that report readings or ICT cannot provide. Election observers also might come up with case studies. They are very useful, especially when they are chosen from real-life reporting situations. The following approaches could be applied during the training.

   ► Holding **mock elections** involving most of the participants (with an aim afterwards to jointly assess the conduct of observers and to analyse and document the violations).

   ► **Writing** exercises: transferring the knowledge by compiling information about a case, writing a complaint to the polling station officials and providing short information about the organisation and their observation methodology; also writing press releases (for example, how to react to allegations against the organisation).

   ► Conducting **quick interviews** to learn by heart phrases that the trainees could use in everyday observation situations (for example: What is your organisation all about? What is your election observation methodology?).

   ► Discussing **case studies** taken from previous election reports with an aim of improving the reporting (for example, the code of conduct, documenting rumours, choosing appropriate wording).

4. *Team cohesion and sustainability*. The election observation mission should try to strengthen their team spirit! If they provide a full picture to all election observers, then they avoid individual approaches that in the end may become irrelevant for the whole mission. The election observation mission should consider providing training on an ongoing basis; that way they could guarantee the continuity of face-to-face efforts. Such systematised, integrated and blended learning could include the following tools.

   ► Promoting **interdisciplinary** skills by training thematic electoral experts (for example, on campaign finances) to adapt their reporting style (that is, wording, structure, depth) to the overall organisation's reporting needs.

- ► Providing individual **feedback** on topics (from the Core Team to STOs/LTOs).
- ► Creating **online forums**/an app on key reporting guidelines.
- ► Encouraging the use of **existing manuals** and Council of Europe **handbooks**.
- ► Encouraging trainees (STOs, LTOs, Core Team members) to take part in the **Council of Europe e-learning course** on report writing.

3.5. POSSIBLE CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

Internal reporting can face several challenges and constraints that could have a serious impact on the quality of information provided and processed from the observers on the ground to the Core Team (analysts). These challenges and constraints could be multifold: the election observation mission might find it hard to recruit and register experienced observers; observers might not be able or willing to provide information as requested; observers might face conflicts of interest; observers might have difficulties reporting on facts and figures in an environment that is filled with rumour and gossip; observers might have limited access to information; and they might be faced with handling sensitive information. This chapter provides an overview of possible avenues to overcome the listed challenges and constraints.

Recruitment of experienced observers

Recruitment through the network

Recruiting observers can be a challenging process, considering the difficulty of finding so many professional and impartial people throughout the country. The LTOs and STOs can be selected using the following sources.

- ► Databases of already experienced observers.
- ► Permanent regional and district networks for the selection of LTOs and STOs.
- ► Your website can be used to gather applications. Keep in mind that this means of recruitment can contain more risks than the others.

Training and evaluation of observers

Based on the experience of domestic CSOs various approaches – including sample-based representative observation, practice-based training sessions and multi-stage evaluation systems – can increase the possibility of having more professional observers in the field.

- ► **A sample-based representative observation** allows you to select about 20% of all polling stations with still representative results throughout the whole country – this way you can reduce the number of STOs and increase the likelihood of finding professional candidates.
- ► **Practice-based training** helps to increase the quality of participants' knowledge and measure their ability to observe; you could include in your training sessions

pre-tests, post-tests and evaluation from trainers. Remember that it is important to train more observers than you actually need; it is always desirable to have a knowledgeable reserve.

▶ **A multi-stage recruitment system** provides you with the possibility to evaluate your observers at different stages. The recruitment process could be the following: you first examine the resumé/CV of candidates, then you check the references from reliable organisations or persons, and later on you conduct face-to-face interviews and write tests for verifying candidates' reporting skills.

Good practice example: multi-stage recruitment procedure

▬▬ In the 2014 local elections in Georgia ISFED developed a unified multi-stage evaluation database consisting of individual criteria for each stage.

▬▬ The steps of the evaluation process were as follows.

▶ STO candidates filled out pre-tests before the training; their basic knowledge was checked.

▶ STOs filled out post-tests after the training where their knowledge gained from the training and ability to observe was checked.

▶ STOs had election day simulations 10 days prior to election day; ISFED checked the quality of their reports and their ability to observe in practice.

▶ Verbal tests were conducted one week prior to the election day and verified whether the STOs were aware of the most important election observation issues; in case of wrong answers they were reminded of the correct answers again.

▶ ISFED conducted election day audits after elections checking the compliance of forms with the information reflected in its database.

▬▬ During this process ISFED was able to replace or reinstruct STOs. Out of more than 1 000 STOs 23 of them were replaced and 18 reinstructed. After this comprehensive training and evaluation process, ISFED had a database about the key qualifications of the STOs that allowed for their targeted deployment.

Refusal to be registered as independent observers

In some countries NGOs do not have a right to enter polling stations on election day, and to observe the work of commissions of any level (PEC, DEC and higher-level electoral commissions). In this case, the election observation mission may think about the following options.

▶ Registering your observers as journalists.

▶ Letting your observers register as proxies (observers of candidates).

▶ If the option is provided, observing live streaming from each polling station.

Observers should play by the rules and report on incidents, problems and violations that they are able to observe. As such, the above-mentioned options are not to be recommended but are rather optional in very exceptional cases.

Observer conflict of interest

Observers who have a conflict of interest can affect the reliability of and trust towards the findings of an organisation, especially in small regions and villages where the members of commissions, political party representatives and electoral subjects are relatives and/or friends of the observers.

The election observation organisation should have clear criteria for identifying impartiality of observers, their background and relationship with the representatives of political, governmental and public sectors. Conflicts of interest in some cases are unavoidable. Possible ways to solve them are:

- ▶ if there are enough resources, deploy observers from other regions or cities;
- ▶ if there are not enough resources, deploy observers to the same villages and cities, but to polling stations furthest from where they come from and where they do not have relatives and/or friends as members of commissions or election contestants.

Rumour and gossip

Careful handling of allegations and rumours

While observing the mission members will be receiving a lot of information about election incidents; some information will be credible, some less so or not at all. The observers should make clear in the report whether the information provided was personally observed, based on other credible facts or based on allegations.

Good practice example: reporting allegations

▬▬ Observers received credible allegations that voters, party supporters, and public employees were pressured to support pro-government candidates. In seven districts, observers were able to verify the allegations as credible or verified by multiple sources.

Or

▬▬ The observers received numerous troubling allegations from all over the country of pressure on or intimidation of citizens in connection with the elections. The Core Team followed up on these reports and found many to be credible. Even when the allegations could not be substantiated, it was often clear that people believed them, undermining "their right to cast their votes free of fear of retribution". This problem seriously undercut the quality of the election process.

Rumours are unverified information circulating from person to person; they often lack evidence. Election observers try to report about events that they themselves observed and documented or about which they have received credible information.

Stating the facts

Phrases such as "certain cases" or "various inquiries" should be avoided. The two words "certain" and "various" leave the impression with the reader that, for example, the election observation mission does not know the exact number of cases they observed or were reported to them.

Good practice example: reporting facts

▬ **Articles 43 and 45 of the Election Code** allow political officials to take part in the election campaign while in office.

▬ The observers examined if there were illegal contributions in four cases in favour of the governing party.

▬ In three cases local government officials conducted inquiries.

Make it clear whether you are reporting an observation first hand …

Good practice example: reporting observation

▬ LTOs reported a number of instances when public administration employees and teachers were encouraged to attend party rallies.

… or information that was reported to you. Always mention the source.

Good practice example: reporting sources

▬ The CEC subsequently reported that 2.83% of all ballots cast countrywide were deemed invalid.

When dealing with rumours, information can be checked by:
► searching for witnesses;
► checking the consistency of statements;
► seeking out supporting documents;
► comparing with similar cases;
► checking the backgrounds of the people involved;
► considering the motivation of the people spreading the rumours.

Handling of sensitive information

Proper storage of sensitive information

Election observer organisations should take precautions to prevent any unauthorised access to personal data. Any information relating to named individuals should be handled and stored safely.

- ► Desks or filing cabinets should be locked.
- ► Computers should be password-protected.
- ► Passwords should be kept secret and secure – changing them regularly.
- ► Data storage devices containing personal information should be kept safe.
- ► Papers should not be left out on desks or tables.
- ► Information on computer screens should not be accessible/visible to anyone other than authorised users.
- ► "Sensitive" data should be subject to very limited access.

Careful handling of information disclosure

The election observer organisation should not give any information to any third party without permission of the Core Team. This includes parents or other relations, partners, friends and colleagues.

The police may have certain powers under the law to access personal information which the organisation holds. This is not an automatic right, however, and must be in relation to investigation/detection of a crime and/or apprehension of an offender. Extreme care must be taken to establish the identity of the complainant and no information should be disclosed without an official written communication showing the name, rank and badge number of the investigating officer. In case of uncertainty, the observer should refer the matter to the Legal Adviser.

Precautions for disposal

The election observer organisation should dispose of records securely through shredding or incineration to ensure no accidental disclosure to any third parties. Particular care and caution should be exercised in the reuse and disposal of computers.

Limited access to information

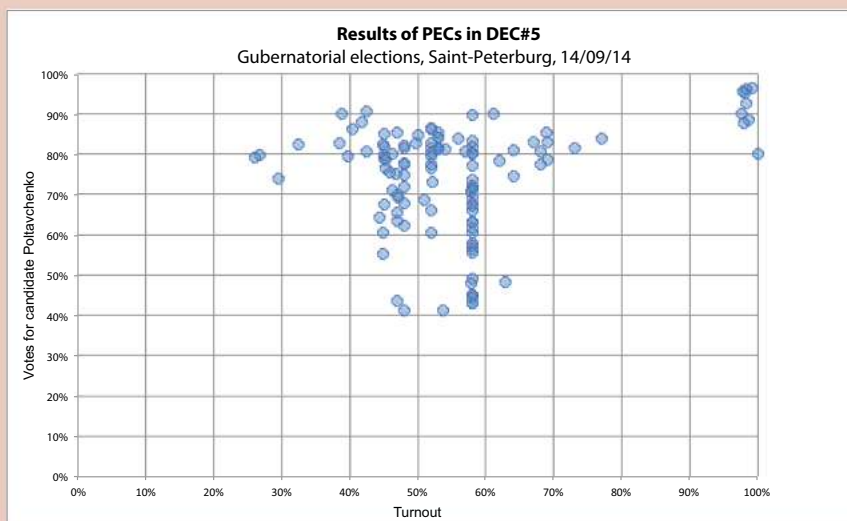In some instances, government institutions may be reluctant to provide requested information; this may be because of legal prohibitions, of internal regulations or of improper interpretation of the existing legislation. In such cases, the following approaches could be applied.

- ► Rely on the available published information (legislation, information on web pages, blogs, social media, in newspapers).

▶ Analyse the election results (if a breakdown to PEC level is provided).

▶ Try to receive more information by referring to relevant legislation on access to information.

▶ Between elections train officials of respective institutions on access of information issues.

▶ Lobby international organisations and the diplomatic community to raise the issue of access to information with key government stakeholders.

Data can be collected from ordinary citizens; the observer organisation could issue a call for providing information to a crowd-sourcing platform. This way, citizens assist the LTOs and the Core Team in data collection. Citizens can be encouraged to send incident reports to public incident databases (maps of violations), to upload photos and scans of campaign materials to special public photo galleries.

Best practice example: statistical analysis of election results

Results of PECs in DEC#5
Gubernatorial elections, Saint-Peterburg, 14/09/14

Votes for candidate Poltavchenko (y-axis), _Turnout_ (x-axis)

▬▬▬ The analysis of PEC statistical data can provide reliable indicators of fraud and falsification. The following methods could be applied.

▶ First sight, simple analysis: for example, identical numbers of invalid ballots/valid ballots/turnout.

▶ Linear comparison of data: for example, comparison of one parameter (such as the number of votes for one party) among precincts in a given district.

▶ Two-dimensional comparison: comparing the turnout in PECs with the votes for a specific candidate in the same PECs (see below).

In the chart, two parameters are compared:

► votes for a candidate;

► turnout.

The chart shows that in 30 PECs the turnout is identical to an accuracy of +/− 1 votes; apparently to reach the 58% turnout. This example was taken from the Russian gubernatorial elections of 2014 (Saint Petersburg, DEC#5).

Chapter 4
External reporting

This chapter covers the final phase of the election observation mission that results in the publicly available records of the mission's activity. As a practice, several types of public documents are prepared by the mission to present findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the observed electoral process; namely, interim reports, preliminary statements and final reports. In this chapter the handbook elaborates on all aspects necessary leading to the final version of any external reporting – preparation of the Core Team, structure of the reports, reporting styles, reporting topics including a set of recommended areas and questions to be covered, public presentation of the reports, possible constraints and challenges as well as follow-up and advocacy stages.

4.1. TRAINING OF THE CORE TEAM

Every election observation mission is unique, depending on its scope, its structure and available human/financial resources, as well as the sociopolitical context in which it operates. Election observation organisations become increasingly professional and the Core Teams are usually composed of experts with extensive knowledge in their areas of activity contributing altogether to the successful implementation of the mission.

Core Team members are responsible for consolidating information received from the LTOs and STOs from the field and developing the interim and final reports. Each member contributes to the report writing according to the task and scope of his/her work. Nevertheless, in some cases, Core Team members might need additional training and/or capacity-building activities to enhance their knowledge and skills or to ensure a common approach towards the creation and presentation of public reports.

In general terms, training activities for external reporters pursue two main objectives: to improve skills for conducting a comprehensive assessment of various areas of electoral process and to improve skills for communicating such findings in a meaningful and generally understandable manner to the public, including in tailored formats for different audiences.

First, a comprehensive overview is a key skill for any analyst. Normally a handful of people (Deputy Head of Mission, Press Officer) are at the very final stage of the reporting procedure. They, in particular the DHoM, receive individual internal input (contributions on respective areas from the relevant Core Team analysts) with an aim and need to harmonise them into a clear, concise and coherent external report (interim report, preliminary statement or final report). At the same time, the Press Officer should be able to draft press releases designed to capture in a short, media-friendly way main messages and conclusions of the observation.

Combining experiences from different fields (for example, law, politics or statistics), balancing details and general approaches and finally harmonising the content of the report to the short-, mid- and long-term goals are, among others, significant skills that training activities should be able to strengthen. Moreover, other Core Team members, responsible for given areas, should also be able to develop their own field having in mind the full picture, and that is a training objective that has to be highlighted through appropriate training sessions.

Second, external reporting may adopt different formats and the people responsible should be formed accordingly. Writing a press release needs skills that differ from the drafting of the general report. Therefore, training activities should take into account the different players in charge of external reporting and foresee sessions adapted to their specific needs. Written reports are the main component of the overall external reporting strategy, but other formats also exist and observers should be aware of them.

Having in mind such a frame, here are examples of several training methods aimed to improve quality of external reporting. Some modules should be common for every Core Team member and others should be adapted to specific needs.

Simulations

Reproducing real situations is extremely useful. Role playing, for instance, changes one's position and enables each individual to understand others' challenges. If press officers assume the role of journalists, they will improve their tasks. If leading drafters assume the role of election administration (EA), they will adapt the wording in order to achieve a better impact.

Transdisciplinarity

Training could include specific sessions intended to share one's knowledge. Lawyers for example could share their knowledge with election experts, spokespersons with analysts. This could be done by role play and other training strategies too, such as bilateral meetings between field observers and Core Team experts, as well as by brainstorming on general challenges and constraints.

Oral and written exercises

These are key components of the overall training strategy. Good external reporting entails specific skills on how to communicate the findings. Once certain general rules (like wording, synthesis, referencing) are established, the training could consist of individual exercises (for example, analysis of information, development of conclusions and recommendations, analysis of information, writing the press release) and subsequent group assessments.

Case studies

Comparative perspectives could help address most common problems (for example, language, means of verification, visualisation). Moreover, during the training previous reports on the same case could be selected in order to draw upon lessons learned

and to come up with a proper follow-up method (What was good/bad? What could be improved? What are the international standards and how can they be integrated into the reports?).

Visibility strategy

Training sessions could also be used to discuss how to achieve optimum coverage of the external reports in public (the means and tools of communication). This is about training content, the possibility of moving it elsewhere or dropping it from this list of techniques/approaches.

Network building and experience sharing

Observers' networks could provide feedback related to how to overcome similar obstacles that they have faced or face regularly in their work. Involvement of national and international organisations specialised in election observation might also be encouraged. In fact, experience sharing and network building improve what is passively analysed by case studies.

4.2. STRUCTURE OF EXTERNAL REPORTS

The long-term election observation mission conducted by a domestic election organisation usually offers to the public information deriving from its observation, reflecting various stages of the electoral process. There are two basic reporting methods.

1. Structured reports covering all areas of the observation (interim reports, preliminary statement and final report) and issued regularly during and after the campaign.

2. The press releases aimed at reflecting some particular moments of the observation process (opening of the observation, election violence, voting process on election day, main message of the preliminary findings and conclusions).

The first interim report of the full-scale mission contains an initial basic description of all essential aspects of the electoral process (election system, legal framework, election administration, voter lists, voter registration, candidate registration, election campaign, campaign finance, media, complaints and appeals). Usually, depending on the duration of the observation mission, there are several interim reports that are issued regularly (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.).

After election day (but variably, it might be issued also at the very end of the official campaign), the election observation mission should issue its report containing preliminary findings and conclusions with the aim of presenting key assessments of the whole electoral process. The report (statement) reflects the same structure as interim reports (with a special section devoted to the election day); nevertheless, its summary and content should provide analysis of the observed process and collected facts.

The final report is usually issued once the whole electoral process is completed (including post-election developments, complaints and appeals, as well as announcements of the final results) – about three to six weeks after election day. The report is the most comprehensive external document of the election observation mission;

it provides more detailed analysis and a set of specific recommendations offered to authorities with the aim of improving those aspects of the electoral process that the DEOM concluded as problematic.

## Reports should be clear and simple and structured in the following way

1. Cover page

As mentioned in the figure below, the cover page of an election report should contain all necessary information at a first glance. More precisely it should present the following information.

On the front page, but also in the report, the period covered should be stated. Generally, interim reports cover a period from one to three weeks. However, if there is a long-lasting election observation mission, the period covered may be longer; while final election reports cover the whole observation period.

► The name of your organisation and your logo
► Place and date of the issued report
► Type of report you are publishing (interim, ad hoc, preliminary statement, final report)

Figure 6: Monitoring of 2014 local self-government elections
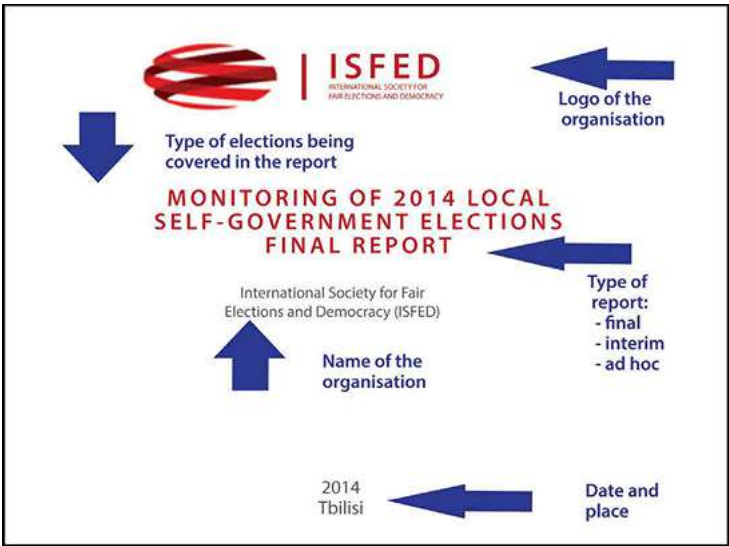
Source: www.isfed.ge

2. Table of contents

The table of contents allows the reader to easily get an overview of the subjects your report is covering; some readers might be interested only in the executive summary, some only in the findings/conclusions and others only in the recommendations.

All reports should be formally structured into sections. These sections are reflected in the table of contents that gives an overview of the sections, so readers can easily identify the parts of the reports that are interesting to them.

The table of contents should contain at minimum the following sections.

► Introduction
► Methodology
► Findings (interim report)/Conclusions (statement, final report)
► Recommendations (final report)
► Information about the organisation

The table of contents can be designed in different ways. Below there are two different options:

Figure 7: Examples of tables of contents

CONTENTS

Contents

Source: www.isfed.ge

3. Methodology

The beginning of the report should briefly describe what was observed and how. In the methodology section the following issues should be covered.

▶ *Outline which elections you are observing* – Indicate the period observed (only election day or pre-election and/or post-election period).

▶ *Describe the scope of your observation* – All election-related issues or an aspect of the elections (for example, media coverage of the elections, use of administrative resources, filing and handling of complaints).

▶ *Elaborate on your election observation methodology* – The approach to planning, training, deployment and implementation of your election observation activities.

▶ *Indicate which kinds of observer (LTOs/STOs; stationary/mobile observers) you deployed to which areas* – The deployment criteria should be described (for example, all polling stations, randomly selected polling stations or polling stations in some specific areas, such as minority-populated areas).

▶ *Make clear your criteria for the assessment of the elections* (for example, universal legal instruments – ICCPR, regional legal instruments – ECHR, political commitments

– Copenhagen Document), soft law (Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, decisions of the European Court of Human Rights).

Good practice: outline of observation methodology

▆▆ This is a report of the monitoring of the 27 October 2013 presidential elections by the International Society of Fair Elections and Democracy. ISFED, as an organisation with one of the broadest networks, monitored the pre-election period as well as election day and the post-election period. The process of monitoring entailed three key stages.

► *Pre-election monitoring*. During a four-month period leading up to the presidential elections, 73 long-term observers conducted pre-election monitoring throughout all election districts of Georgia. The pre-election monitoring focused on the use of state resources, activities of election administrations and political parties, formation of voter lists, pressure on political grounds, threats and vote-buying.

► *The election day monitoring* was carried out at 910 election precincts throughout Georgia, including 800 randomly selected election precincts with the use of the PVT methodology. In addition, ISFED had stationary short-term observers at an additional 110 election precincts. Together with short-term observers, the election day monitoring mission consisted of 78 mobile groups, 73 district observers, 20 lawyers and 20 cameramen. The election day observation combined three key components – opening and setting up election precincts, the polling process, vote-counting and tabulation.

► For the *post-election monitoring* ISFED had 73 district observers and lawyers deployed. They monitored the work of the election administration, the application process at district election commissions (DECs) and the process of the vote tabulation. ISFED filed dozens of complaints with the election administration over alleged violations observed during the process.

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4. Executive summary

This is presented at the beginning of the report; it is principally based on the findings and conclusions that you present in the following parts of your report. The executive summary should enable the reader to become rapidly acquainted with your main conclusions without having to read the whole report.

Key message

The main message should reflect the extent to which the electoral process was carried out in a manner that enjoyed the confidence of the candidates and the electorate, as well as the degree of political will demonstrated by the authorities to conduct a genuine democratic election process. Overall, it should reflect respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, compliance with procedures and rules stipulated in the domestic legislation as well as with principles and standards defined by international treaties and political commitments against which the elections were assessed. However, it should not aim to evaluate whether the elections were "valid" or not.

Good practice: key messages of the executive summary

▬▬▬ In the elections, "many OSCE commitments including citizens' rights to associate, to stand as candidates, and to express themselves freely were not respected, despite some improvements to the electoral law. While there was an increase in the number of candidates put forward by parties, prominent political figures who might have played a role in this contest remained imprisoned or were not eligible to register due to their criminal record. The field of contestants was also constricted by arbitrary administrative actions, leading to a limitation of choice for voters. The elections were not administered in an impartial manner and the complaints and appeals process did not guarantee effective remedy".

(OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM), Final report – Belarus, Parliamentary elections, 23 September 2012)

▬▬▬ The election "was generally well-administered and was characterized by a respect for fundamental freedoms. Contestants were able to campaign freely. Media fulfilled their legal obligation to provide balanced coverage, and all contestants made use of their free airtime. At the same time, a lack of impartiality of the public administration, misuse of administrative resources, and cases of pressure on voters were of concern. While election day was calm and orderly, it was marked by undue interference in the process, mainly by proxies representing the incumbent, and some serious violations were observed".

(OSCE/ODIHR EOM, Final report – Armenia, Presidential election, 18 February 2013)

▬▬▬ The election "was undermined by limitations on the freedoms of expression, assembly and association that did not guarantee a level playing field for candidates. Continued allegations of candidate and voter intimidation and a restrictive media environment marred the campaign. Significant problems were observed throughout all stages of election day processes and underscored the serious nature of the shortcomings that need to be addressed in order for Azerbaijan to fully meet its OSCE commitments for genuine and democratic elections".

(OSCE/ODIHR EOM, Final report – Azerbaijan, Presidential election, 9 October 2013)

▬▬▬ The presidential election "was efficiently administered and transparent, and took place in an amicable and constructive environment. During the election campaign, fundamental freedoms of expression, movement, and assembly were respected and candidates were able to campaign without restriction. The media was less polarized than during the 2012 elections and presented a broad range of viewpoints. On election day, voters were able to express their choice freely".

(OSCE/ODIHR EOM, Final report – Georgia, Presidential election, 27 October 2013)

▬▬ The elections "marked an important step in Ukraine's aspirations to consolidate democratic elections in line with its international commitments. There were many positive points to the process, such as an impartial and efficient Central Election Commission, an amply contested election that offered voters real choice, and a general respect for fundamental freedoms. The newly elected parliament should take the political responsibility to ensure that key reforms are passed to prevent certain bad practices noted in this statement from becoming entrenched. As well, grievances should be resolved with respect for the rule of law and through democratic institutions".

(OSCE/ODIHR EOM, Final report – Ukraine, Early parliamentary elections, 26 October 2014)

▬▬ The elections "offered voters a wide choice of political alternatives. The campaign was influenced by the country's geopolitical aspirations and the late deregistration of one electoral contestant raised questions about timing and circumstances. Contestants enjoyed unimpeded access to the media; however, most outlets, with notable exceptions including the public broadcaster, were subject to political interference.

The election administration enjoyed the confidence of most stakeholders and the process was generally well-administered, with the exception of the functioning of the new electronic system for the processing of voters on election day".

(OSCE/ODIHR EOM, Final report – Moldova, Parliamentary elections, 30 November 2014)

Summary of key findings

At the beginning, after the key message, there should be a summary of the most important findings of the electoral process – usually reflecting all the main topics/areas observed by the domestic observers. This is what most of the audience will read. Below is an overview of key phrases used in the summary.

Good practice: key findings

▬▬ Overall, the technical preparations for the election were efficiently administered by the Central Election Commission.

▬▬ The election administration, headed by the Central Election Commission, administered the election in an overall professional manner and within legal deadlines.

▬▬ Political forces were unequally represented in the election commission which gave pro-government forces a *de facto* decision-making majority. This situation lead to opposition representatives complaining about the impartiality of the election administration.

━━ Candidate registration was overall inclusive and transparent.

━━ The election campaign was conducted in a highly polarised political environment.

━━ The distinction between state and ruling party was frequently blurred.

━━ Generally, the media provided voters with a diverse range of political views, allowing them to make a more informed choice.

━━ The complaints and appeals procedures were recently simplified and clarified to some extent.

━━ Election day was generally calm.

━━ The tabulation process at DECs was assessed positively by the observers.

━━ Approximately 800 election-day-related complaints and appeals were filed, alleging a range of irregularities in voting, counting and tabulation of results.

Reference to international standards

In the executive summary the main trends and tendencies of the election process should be identified, and ultimately be assessed as to what extent the election process was conducted in accordance with international standards, political commitments and principles for democratic elections and the extent to which it complied with domestic law. This can be done the following way.

Good practice: reference to international standards

━━ Important previous recommendations by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe`s Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) were implemented, including granting the right to vote to some categories of prisoners, permitting independent candidacy and reducing residency requirements.

━━ The continued lack of properly delineated counting procedures meant that an honest count, as required by paragraph 7.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, could not be guaranteed.

━━ Credible reports of candidate and voter intimidation arose throughout the campaign, raising concerns about candidates' ability to campaign in a fair atmosphere, as well as voters' ability to cast their vote "free of fear of retribution", as required by paragraph 7.7 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

5. Findings (interim reports)

Findings are the summary of your facts that members of the mission (including the Core Team, LTOs and STOs) observe. As you will not be able to present all facts one by one – due to time constraints and space limitations – you will have to sum them up in your findings. This summary of your observations – that is, your findings – serves as a basis for the conclusions and recommendations that you present.

You might also wish to illustrate your cases. This could be done the following way.

Figure 8: Statistics on violations for which ISFED files complaints with PECs

Source: www.isfed.ge

Contextualisation of cases – No enumeration

Individual cases should not just be presented and violations enumerated, but put into context. It should be made clear whether any reported irregularities or violations of law are isolated incidents or whether they form a systematic pattern that could pose a threat to the integrity of the election process.

Analysis of the cases

While international observation missions reserve their assessments for the reports issued after election day (preliminary statement, Final Report), domestic organisations may sometimes use their different position and present their analysis already in reports prior to or during election day.

Reference to international standards

International standards could be referred to when reporting on cases: first stating the facts, then indicating the violation of the respective international standard.

Good practice: reference to international standards

▰▰▰ An activist of the opposition party was detained in the capital on 22 August. The police did not give information on the reason for his detention and the charges.

▰▰▰ Numerous instances of detention and arrest of supporters of the opposition political parties and their relatives were reported during the pre-election period.

▰▰▰ Anyone arrested for a misdemeanour offence is entitled to due process, and their basic rights in detention must be respected. However, in the above-mentioned cases none of those deprived of liberty enjoyed their full due process rights and received a fair trial regardless of whether the charges against them are administrative or criminal.

▰▰▰ The CEC failed to take any decisions on establishing the DEC no. 3 in Bender and no. 37 on the territorial administrative unit on the left bank, and did not avail of its right to open special PSs in those regions, in the timeline set for the creation of DECs. At the same time, with a significant delay from the provisions of the electoral calendar (10 days), that is only on 4 November 2014, the CEC decided that Transnistrian voters could realise their right to vote on supplementary voter lists in 26 PSs already created in electoral districts Cahul (1), Chisinau (5), Anenii Noi (3), Dubasari (9), Causeni (3), Criuleni (1), Stefan Voda (1), Rezina (1), Balti (1) and Floreşti (1).

▰▰▰ *Following the reinstatement of the 2004 constitutional amendments, MPs will lose their mandate if they fail to join or if they leave the parliamentary faction of the political party for which they were elected. This is at odds with Paragraph 7.9 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document and has been repeatedly criticised by the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) in the context of the 2004 Constitution of Ukraine.*

(OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, Final report – Early parliamentary elections, 26 October 2014)

Balance between text, charts and pictures

The most important information should be put in writing. Too many visual aids and infographics, including charts, should not be used. While a pie or bar chart could visualise raw data, it should never go without explanatory notes that tell the reader why that data matters: showing the number and the period of time when incidents occurred, demonstrating the media coverage political contestants got during prime time and comparing PVT data with the official election result.

Pictures should not be overused. The report should state the facts mainly in writing. If pictures are included, consider carefully which pictures should be inserted into the report. Data protection/privacy rights of other people should be protected. (See Council of Europe (1980): Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data.) The figure below could be considered as a good example of the balanced use of text, charts and pictures.

Figure 9: The polling process

ISFED's monitoring has found that polling process was peaceful and no major irregularities took place. At some

Opening procedures

The polling station was ready for the first voter by 8:00 am

Tbilisi - 99.4%
Mtskheta - 83.3%
Khoni - 98.3%
Tkibuli - 97.3%

Gori	Terjola
Akhmeta	Ozurgeti
Khulo	Baghdati
Lanchkhuti	Rustavi

100%

Polling Station

WWW.ISFED.GE

election precincts violations of inking and vote secrecy procedures were detected; however, these irregularities were often mediated by means of verbal reproof.

Source: www.isfed.ge

6. Conclusions (statements on preliminary findings and conclusions, final reports)

Conclusions are not findings, they are based on findings

Conclusions are usually presented in the main parts of reports that are issued after election day (preliminary statement, Final Report). Conclusions are not just a simple repetition of your findings that you present in your interim reports. They are a synthesis of your findings, in a broader context, pointing to further implications your findings might have. The conclusions are not a compilation of findings; they should logically derive from the observed findings and they should identify tendencies or patterns between collected findings.

Below you will find several examples of how to turn findings into conclusions.

Good practice I: conclusions based on analysis of the findings

Findings

▬ The observers attended all sessions of the CEC which conducted its sessions in a professional manner, with session minutes published on its website within 48 hours, as required by law. However, the CEC sessions, when deciding on requests from party X and party Y, were tense and the CEC members almost always voted along party lines.

Conclusion

▬ The Central Election Commission held regular sessions, but continued to be divided along party lines on all politically contentious issues.

Good practice II: conclusions based on analysis of the findings

Findings

▬ The presidential election campaign officially began on 24 March. Three candidates started meeting with citizens during their regular visits across the country before this date. By mid-March, the President had visited 70 towns and villages. On 23 March, he presented his election programme. Moreover, the President has publicly promoted reports on his party's records in office. On 16 March, presidential candidate X held a 50-person gathering in the capital. On 21 March, party Y held a rally with 350 people in the nearby city to promote its achievements since the previous elections and to call on ethnic minorities to vote for presidential candidate Z. All four presidential candidates and their affiliated political parties held rallies on 24 March to officially open the campaign.

Conclusion

The campaign was active with a large number of rallies and meetings with voters. However, apart from candidate B, the remaining three candidates started their activities before the legally permitted official beginning of the campaign.

Good practice III: conclusion based on the analysis of findings

Findings

▆▆▆ During the reporting period, according to official information, CEC received 78 examples of contestation, 10 of which were filed on election day. The CEC adopted 38 decisions on those claims of contestation (six were admitted, seven were partially accepted, 24 were rejected as unfounded or submitted late, and in one case it was established that the object of the contestation was exhausted), 12 complaints were returned because the alleged facts could not be subject to contestations, 21 complaints were submitted for consideration by competence in order to establish the constituent elements of an offence, six complaints were withdrawn by the authors, one complaint was not examined because it was filed jointly with an action in court.

Conclusion

▆▆▆ CEC examines claims of contestation in compliance with the adversarial principle. So both the party that filed the contestation and the party concerned submit references and evidence against complaints. Promo-LEX noted that the voting representatives of electoral contestants are mostly lawyers with experience, which helps to increase the quality of debates. On the other hand, the limited time of submission and review of these claims of contestation established by law did not allow the CEC members to examine and document some cases accordingly.

Good practice IV: conclusion based on analysis of the findings

Findings

▆▆▆ ISFED observers reported three cases of unauthorised persons present at the polling stations, as well as minor technical flaws. Noteworthy was a trend of 140 voters at 73 polling stations of 19 districts going to their respective polling stations only to find that they had not been registered in voter lists. Out of these 140 voters, 53 stated that they had cast their vote in the first round of elections on June 15, 2014. Notably, compared to the first round of the elections, gaps in summary protocols significantly decreased during the second round of the elections.

Conclusion

▆▆▆ Based on the analysis of the information received through PVT methodology, ISFED concludes that the voting and vote-counting processes were conducted in a calm environment. Most of violations reported by ISFED observers were minor and of a procedural nature and could not have affected the final outcome of elections.

Avoid single cases

Only in exceptional circumstances should the report refer to single cases.

> **Good practice: single exceptional case**
>
> ▬ Following election day, Mr X disputed the preliminary election results, organised protest rallies in the capital and visited several cities outside the capital. He demanded that all election-related violations be prosecuted and that a second round of the presidential election be held, or, alternatively, the resignation of the government and holding of early parliamentary elections. The main broadcast media, including public TV, showed a selective approach in their coverage of post-election events, with a noticeable tendency to limit views critical of the conduct of the election. They often presented only general, and at times marginal, coverage of the protests.

Reference to international standards

When a specific aspect of elections is observed which runs contrary to international standards or good practice, it should always be specifically described.

> **Good practice: reference to international standards**
>
> **The campaign environment**
>
> ▬ Instances of continued blurring between state institutions and party interests challenged paragraph 5.4 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document and paragraph I.2.3 of the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters. Allegations of vote-buying and pressure on public-sector employees, including instances of forced rally attendance and dismissal from employment, assessed as credible, negatively impacted the pre-election environment.

7. Recommendations (final report)

Most commonly, final reports – not so much interim reports – contain a recommendation section. This section is the last section of your final report. It comes after the main part and before the annexes, which might include election results or media monitoring charts. Through recommendations, observers can make their views known and suggest a line of action. Recommendations provide suggestions on how the overall process or elements of the process might be improved. They are proposals; they do not impose any legal obligation on those to whom they are addressed. If they are not implemented, there are no legal consequences.

Recommendations are offered with a view to enhancing the conduct of elections in the country and bringing them fully in line with the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice, OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections.

Nature of recommendations

The recommendations are based on the national legal framework and applicable international and regional obligations, principles, commitments and good practices. They are formulated with a view to advocating change and improvements to electoral

legislation and particular aspects of the process. As such, they should be formulated precisely, clearly and unambiguously.

Numbering of recommendations

If there is more than one recommendation, it is advisable to number the recommendations so that it is easy for readers to refer to them.

Good practice: sequence of recommendations

▬▬ 1.   The authorities could consider conducting an audit of the voter registers, including a detailed comparison of entries in the voter registers and the source information held in the Ministry of Interior registers.

▬▬ 2.   Electoral legislation should be amended to include specific provisions that clearly address the role of the media during a presidential campaign.

▬▬ 3.   …

Sub-headings

Recommendations should have sub-headings that refer to specific parts of the electoral process (naturally, respective Core Team analysts draft recommendations belonging to their portfolio) so that it is easy for readers to get an overview of what the recommendations are about. In addition, a category of top priority recommendations could also be created and presented at the beginning, with specific recommendations on respective areas following. This can be done in the following way.

Good practice: sub-headings

Priority recommendations

▬▬ 1. As a permanent body responsible for the overall conduct of elections, the CEC could anticipate and address more effectively the ambiguities or gaps in the law, as early as possible in the electoral process.

Legal framework

▬▬ 2. Consideration should be given to eliminating ambiguities in the Election Law.

Election administration

▬▬ 3. In order to further increase the transparency and accountability of the election administration, the CEC could consider …

Voter registration

▬▬ 4. To provide a genuine opportunity for seeking legal redress and to ensure consistent application, the Law on the Voter Register should be amended.

Campaign finance

▬▬ 5. In order to improve the transparency and accuracy of reporting on campaign financing, the law could be amended to introduce meaningful control and oversight mechanisms, as well as effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions for potential infringements.

Use of subjunctive

As recommendations provide suggestions and proposals, they should be formulated in the subjunctive. Similarly, the language should try to prefer the more advisable nature of "could" rather than the imperative wording of "should". This could be done the following way:

Good practice: subjunctive

▬ It is recommended that …

▬ Consideration could be given to …

▬ The authorities could consider …

▬ The transparency of the Constitutional Court would be enhanced …

▬ Provisions of the Election Law on vote-buying could be reviewed/amended …

Findings and conclusions as a basis for the recommendations

Recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions that you came up with in the main part of your final report. For example, if you concluded that "the applicable legal framework for party and campaign financing contained gaps, ambiguities and disproportional sanctions" and you enumerated these deficiencies in the main part of your final report, then you could formulate the recommendation that "the law could be amended to provide an exhaustive list of irregularities and applicable sanctions that are proportional, effective and dissuasive". To clearly demonstrate the link between the problem and recommendations, a concrete recommendation could also be put after the very text of the report where the problem is referred to (beside the separate section at the end of the report).

Recommendations as concrete advice for the improvement of the election process

The recommendations could be formulated in a very general way; however, it is advisable that they contain very concrete and precise proposals for further improvement of the electoral process. Recommendations might include suggestions for changes in the election legislation, for improvement of election administration practices or of other stakeholders' performance. They even might recommend concrete election assistance projects.

The following sentence does not serve this purpose.

▬ PEC members should stop their hostile attitude towards election observers in the process of complaints review.

Alternatively, the recommendation could be formulated the following way.

> ■■■ There is a need for further training of PEC members, emphasising code of conduct regulations.

Recipients of the recommendation

Recommendations should be formulated for election authorities, political parties, civil society and the international community.

> ■■■ 1. **Local civil society organisations** could carry out wide-scale voter-education programmes for ethnic minority groups.
>
> ■■■ 2. **Educational establishments** could include elements of voters' education in the curricula of secondary schools.
>
> ■■■ 3. **The Election administration** should continue training PEC members with ethnic minority backgrounds.
>
> ■■■ 4. **Political parties** could seek political dialogue with minority representatives at the local level.

Visualisation of recommendations

Recommendations could be supported by infographics as they may serve as eye-catchers and make it easier to understand for the reader.

Figure 10: OSCE/ODIHR priority recommendations

5-year residency requirement

1. Harmonize legislation and remove candidacy restrictions

Candidacy to run in elections is restricted due to an excessive five-year residency requirement, as well as restrictions on the freedom of mandate. Restrictions on electoral blocs should be lifted.

3,771 complaints and incidents

2. Investigate cases of violence

The Ministry of Internal Affairs recorded 3,711 cases of elections-related complaints and incidents between 25 August and 25 October. ODIHR observed 83 rallies where, in some instances, candidates were barred from campaigning freely.

2/3 members of DECs

3. Guarantee independence from political interference

Two thirds of the District Election Commissions (DECs) members were replaced, mainly by the nominating parties. This high turnover is believed to have partly been the result of wide-scale corruption among electoral subjects in order to control election commissions.

Source: www.isfed.ge

Information about your organisation

At the end of each report a brief overview of the organisation should be presented. This should include the following information.

- ► Full name of your organisation
- ► Your vision/mission statement
- ► Foundation/development of the organisation since its foundation
- ► History of your election observation activities (including main scope)
- ► Your most important election assistance projects
- ► Focus areas of its observation activities
- ► Your sources of funding
- ► A link to your website
- ► Contact details and contact persons

Below is an example of an information section about an election observation organisation.

Figure 11: Example of information on election observation

ABOUT THE OSCE/ODIHR   **Full name of the organisation**

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) is the OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (…) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.   **Mission statement**

History of the organisation

The OSCE/ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 130 staff.

Involvement in elections

The OSCE/ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, the OSCE/ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

Other areas of activity

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. The OSCE/ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programmes annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website (www.osce.org/odihr).   **Reference to the organisation's website**

4.3. REPORTING TIPS

The language used in election-related documents, such as observation reports, matters a great deal. The Core Team should carefully weigh each word. Once the reports are public, they cannot be withdrawn. The section below provides tips on how to write reports in an easy-to-understand, easy-to-read manner. It gives hints about what constitutes clear, straightforward, plain language, how to avoid subjective statements and to present facts and figures.

Plain language

Ensure that the report is clearly written and can be understood by people who are not election experts. The readers should be able to easily understand the report the first time they read it. Use plain language in your election reports.

Plain language is clear, straightforward expression, using only as many words as are necessary. It is free from jargon and rarely used words and terms; it uses the appropriate terminology in a way that is easy to grasp. Plain language concentrates on bringing the message across instead of distracting the reader with complicated language. It leaves unnecessary phrases and cumbersome sentence constructions aside; it avoids inflated vocabulary, is factual, concise and issue-oriented.

Short sentences and short paragraphs

Reports will be clearer if your sentences, paragraphs and sections are kept short. Ideally, analysts should aim for an average sentence length of 12 words, with no one sentence running over 25 words. Only one subject should be covered in each paragraph, and paragraphs should be kept to less than 10 or 12 lines. Sections should not be overstretched; two to three pages (for the final report) in each section should be enough. This way the reader can easily understand the message you want to get across.

Try to avoid sentence constructions such as the following.

▬ The purpose of the limitation imposed by this provision is to prohibit the placement of propaganda materials on institutions and buildings, which are obliged by law to adhere to the principle of political impartiality and which must be perceived as politically neutral by the public. (45 words)

This way the message comes across better.

▬ Article 9 of the Election Law prohibits placing election posters at government buildings. (12 words)

▬ Government institutions are "obliged to adhere to the principle of political impartiality". (12 words)

▬ In this way the public could perceive them as politically neutral. (10 words)

Main message

Analysts should omit or minimise phrases that do not add any additional meaning to the sentence. Try to avoid phrases such as "It should be noted that …"/"It is noteworthy that …"/ "It shall be emphasised that …" All of these phrases distract the reader from the main message.

Avoid the following structure.

> ▬▬ **It is noteworthy that** a day before the incident in village Tkhilistskaro, "Georgian Dream" had a public meeting in Telavi.

The sentence has more weight if formulated the following way.

> ▬▬ A day before the incident in village Tkhilistskaro "Georgian Dream" had a public meeting in Telavi.

No passive sentences

When using the passive voice, no clear indication is given of who is the author/source, thus several important facts are left unaddressed for the reader.

Avoid the following type of wording.

> ▬▬ Important legislative changes aimed at promoting media pluralism were introduced that were positively evaluated.

Sentences as stated above leave the reader with many questions – Who introduced the legislative changes? Who evaluated them positively? Are we talking about the same person/entity?

This construction makes the sentence clearer.

> ▬▬ The parliament adopted legislative changes aimed at promoting media pluralism, which the election observers evaluated positively.

Subject, verb and object close together

Analysts should structure their sentences so that they are logical, coherent and easy to understand. They should get to the point and not hide the message behind complicated syntax or convoluted constructions.

Avoid the following construction.

> ▬▬ The Election Law envisages the opportunity **of** pre-term termination **of** the authority for members **of** election commissions, yet only in cases directly stipulated by law.

This construction makes the sentence clearer.

> ▬▬ The Election Law allows the authority of election commission members to be terminated ahead of schedule.

Parallel phrasing

When referring to the same case, analysts are advised to use a similar grammatical form. Using parallel language brings thoughts together and makes it easier for the reader to understand the document.

> ▬▬▬ The Central Election Commission operated professionally and despite limited resources met legal deadlines.
>
> ▬▬▬ Authorities made significant efforts to implement necessary changes to the voter registers.
>
> ▬▬▬ Two candidates, the incumbent president and the opposition leader, contested this election.

Facts and figures

As a politically neutral observer, the analyst should refrain from expressing any preference for or against any candidate, political party, group, movement or other association seeking public office. Analysts should simply state the facts – in a neutral, clear and concise way.

Unnecessary qualifiers

Excessive or elaborate words (for example, totally, completely) usually make the text weaker. If they are used, they leave the impression that the writer is biased in their judgment.

Avoid the following sentence construction.

> ▬▬▬ Their claim was **totally** unrealistic. It was **completely** meaningless.

The sentence is better formulated this way.

> ▬▬▬ Their claim was not substantiated. It lacked basic facts.

Depersonalisation of the report

When reporting observations, analysts should avoid references to themselves; it is advisable to refer to the organisation in the third person. "The election observation organisation considers/regards/believes …", instead of "I/we consider/regard/believe …"

No emotional expressions

Analysts should refrain from using words that could give the impression that they are biased in favour of one organisation, institution, political party or candidate.

Words such as "unfortunately" should be omitted. However, to make clear that there was a problem, a value judgment is not to be excluded.

Avoid sentences like the following.

> ▬▬ **Unfortunately**, district election commissions and CEC members frequently demonstrated a hostile attitude towards representatives of monitoring organisations in the process of complaints review.

No subjective statements

Analysts should not state their personal feelings, opinions or thoughts about the electoral process. They are recommended to solely present the facts and assess them against national legal norms and international standards.

Avoid the following sentence construction.

> ▬▬ The State Audit Office (SAO) was **notorious** for its **unfair** decisions during the immediate pre-election period.

This is the correct way to assess the work of the State Audit Office.

> ▬▬ A new regulatory body, the State Audit Office (SAO), was tasked to implement the law related to party and campaign finance. The SAO enjoyed wide discretionary powers, but failed overall to apply the law in a transparent, independent, impartial and consistent manner, targeting mainly the opposition.

Appropriate terminology

The impartiality of analysts can be ideally demonstrated by using internationally recognised election terminology (see also Annex 2 – Definitions), while at the same time writing in a clear, concise and easy-to-understand manner.

Avoid the following type of formulation.

> ▬▬ The executive authorities had a hand in the majority of the cases of **biased** and **improper** use of legal resources. The State Audit Office was once again **notorious** in this respect. In certain cases the Inter-Agency Taskforce, functioning with the National Security Council, also was **far from acting impartially**.

Formulate the text in the following way.

> ▬▬ The SAO enjoyed wide discretionary powers, but failed overall to apply the law in a transparent, independent, impartial and consistent manner, targeting mainly the opposition. The Inter-Agency Taskforce at times exceeded its mandate and challenged the principle of separation of powers.

Neutral headlines

In the election reporting analysts should not exhibit any bias or preference in relation to authorities, parties, candidates or any other election contestant.

Analysts should avoid emotional connotations in the headlines, as presented below.

> ▬ 1. **Improper** decisions and actions of the executive authorities
>
> ▬ 2. **Inconsistent** approach of the State Audit Office
>
> ▬ 3. **Groundless** imposition of fines
>
> ▬ 4. **Selective** reactions to offences
>
> ▬ 5. **Ignoring** cases of illegal donation

This following way is correct because it demonstrates your objectivity.

> ▬ 1. The verification of registration documents was carried out by Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) in closed sessions. The rules of signature verification are unclear and at odds with international good practice and allow for arbitrary decisions by TECs, which cannot be appealed.
>
> ▬ …

Before the publication of the reports

Reading the text aloud

People tend to skip words when they read silently, and even more so when it is their own work and they think they know what they have written. Reading aloud forces the reader to pay attention to each word. This will help the reader to identify if the text is user-friendly and easy to comprehend.

Analysts should try to pay attention to punctuation. They should note if their sentences need breaking up or if, in some parts, the sentences need additional revision.

Spelling and grammar checkers

Analysts should review each proposed change individually before making changes.

Editing and proofreading

Various people might have contributed to the report – all with very specific writing styles. Analysts, but in most cases the Deputy Head of Mission, should aim to harmonise individual texts. In such cases, the following questions should usually be addressed: Have all contributors structured their parts of the text in a similar way? Have they presented all cases in the same way, outlining the most important

facts, referring to violated legal norms and mentioning sources of information (for example, it was observed by the mission itself)?

Visual aids

Photos, charts, diagrams, infographics and extracts from the incident maps could be used to visualise the election reports. Visual aids maintain the interest and improve readers' understanding. During selection and incorporation of visuals into the reports, analysts should take into consideration several important aspects, such as the target audience, the length of the report, the language to be used, the vocabulary, etc.

► Do not overload the reports with too many photos, charts, infographics.
► Avoid the incorporation of similar photos – of the same activities, persons, groups.
► In case of a large portfolio of photos, just select the most interesting and important ones. Charts/infographics should be always accompanied by explanatory texts.

Figure 12: Good practice chart
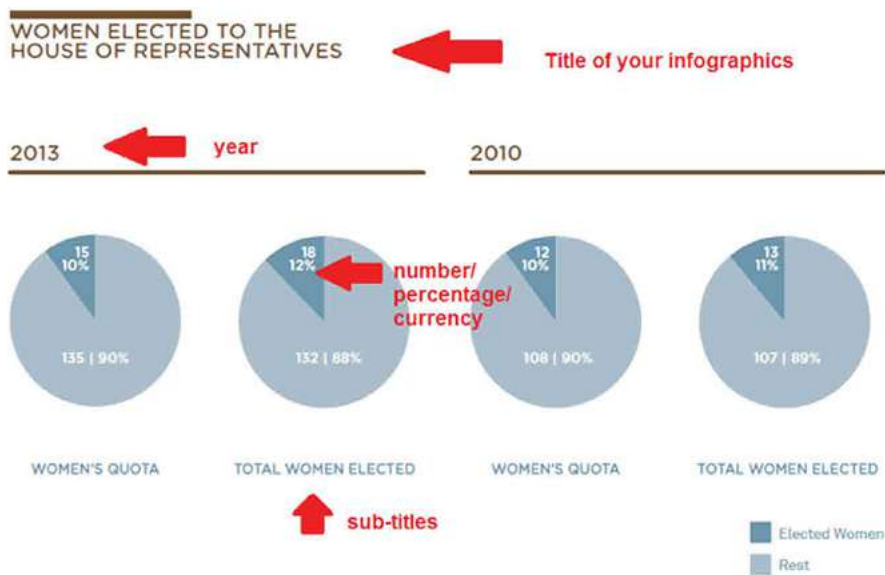
Source: www.isfed.ge

Selection of relevant photos and graphics

► Add photos reflecting your training activities, observers monitoring in the field, operators collecting the data, press conferences and meetings with stakeholders.
► Find the right place to put the visual aids within the texts.
► Include some photos above the chapters.

4.4. REPORTING TOPICS AND CHECKLISTS

This section aims to cover in a comprehensive manner the areas of assessment of an electoral process that are usually observed and reported on by a domestic election observation mission. These areas include, in particular, the political context, the legal framework (including the electoral system), the election administration, voter information, voter lists, the registration of voters, the registration of contestants (parties and/or candidates), the election campaign, media coverage, election day (voting and counting), the tabulation and publication of results, complaints and appeals, and post-election developments.

Additionally, the handbook offers a reporting checklist for each area of assessment, trying to provide a practical and user-friendly tool for quality-based reporting of domestic observation missions.

A. Political context

When initiating domestic election observation, civil society organisations need to take into account the broader context in which elections will take place. Aspects that do not have an apparent, direct connection with the elections, such as the democratisation process in the country or current geopolitical implications, might be analysed and included in reports. In addition, the existing political set-up of the country and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – including the rights of women, the situation of national and religious minorities and persons with disabilities, or of other particularly vulnerable or disadvantaged groups – should be studied.

In addition, broader electoral cycle issues could be reflected and considered, including the implementation of previous recommendations, electoral reform, the functioning of democratic institutions at both central and local levels (from transparency and accountability perspectives), the opportunities offered by existing legislation and by the authorities towards dialogue and inclusiveness of civil society in public life, and the impact of the existing atmosphere in which the elections will be held.

For reporting on the political context, the following questions could be taken into account.

Political process

▶ What are the main issues being raised in the public domain most frequently?

▶ What is the position of the main stakeholders concerning the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms?

▶ Does the political system allow for public participation in the democratic processes, including in the elections? If not, what are the possible causes: lack of trust in the process/democratic institutions, lack of trust in political parties?

▶ How is legislation passed and how inclusive are preparations of new legislation?

Political factors relevant for elections

▶ Are there political and democratic factors which would not normally be involved in elections and which are relevant to the conduct of the electoral process (for example, the army)?

▶ Are there any conditions created by the broader environment that make it difficult for candidates/political parties to operate?

▶ Is a broad range of opinions represented by existing candidates/political parties to ensure the voters have a genuine choice?

▶ How do legal requirements like prohibition of foreign funding or the need to include election observation in statutes, as a prerequisite to accreditation, affect the observation operations?

▶ How permissible are procedures for applying for and receiving accreditation as observers?

▶ What is the position of various stakeholders on issues raised in past election observation reports by both international and domestic organisations and have the responsible authorities taken steps to address them?

Women's position in society

▶ To what extent is the state fulfilling its international commitments to human rights and gender equality?

▶ Do women have equal access to education and employment?

▶ Are women from particular groups (minority populations, IDPs, living in rural areas, victims of violence and/or trafficking) particularly disadvantaged?

Women in politics

▶ What is the percentage of women in the outgoing and previous parliaments or local and regional assemblies?

▶ What percentage of women are ministers in government, or mayors or presidents of local and regional assemblies.

▶ What is the number and ratio of women in the election-administration bodies at various levels?

**Participation of national minorities
and groups with specific needs**

▶ What is the percentage of self-declared national minority representatives serving as cabinet ministers or in other senior government positions or in the legislature?

▶ What is the percentage of national minority representatives in local councils?

▶ What is the percentage of self-declared national minority candidates on political party lists?

▶ What is the representation of IDPs, refugees or nomadic communities on political party lists (do these groups create their own political party or are they elected on other political parties lists)?

▶ What is the number and ratio of national minority representatives in the election-administration bodies at various levels?

B. Legal framework

Domestic election observation by civil society organisations can contribute to improving legal frameworks for elections. CSOs should have a responsibility, where practicable, to advocate peaceful electoral and political processes such as improvements in legal frameworks for elections and electoral administration. Observation of content and implementation of the legal framework is a cornerstone of election observation, in particular for CSOs that have a practice of long-term observation and analysis covering the whole electoral cycle.

CSOs should start by identifying all instruments that make up the national legal framework for elections. Usually this includes the constitution (namely the provisions dealing with free elections), legislative acts adopted by the parliament (for example, the Election Code or Law), as well as normative acts introduced by the government or the election-administration body (for example, regulations and decisions).

In addition to provisions strictly related to electoral issues, norms on human rights and fundamental freedoms (such as freedom of assembly, expression, etc.) and on other relevant areas (such as citizenship, media, etc.) also constitute part of the legal framework for elections. International treaties ratified by the respective country, which regulate the right to free elections and related rights (for example, the ICCPR and the ECHR) or other human rights treaties that include provisions on the electoral rights of specific groups (the CEDAW and CPRW for women; the ICERD and FCNM for minorities; the CRPD for people with disabilities) are part of the relevant national legal framework. Additionally, final judicial decisions on electoral issues introduced by national courts as well as country-related decisions of the European Court of Human Rights should also be considered.

Alongside this, it is also important to identify pending issues to improve the legal framework, which are based on political commitments taken by the country. International bodies within their monitoring activities usually identify these issues, in particular the ICCPR/HRC in its concluding observations, the OSCE/ODIHR in its election observation reports, the Venice Commission in its studies and opinions on electoral legislation issues of the respective country. CSOs are advised to consider whether there are effective opportunities created for citizens to exercise their electoral rights. Suggestions for a good structure are set out below.

The following questions may be considered when observing and reporting on the legal framework.

Election legal framework

▶ What instruments and provisions make up the national legal framework for elections (including judicial decisions)? How is the electoral legislation structured?

▶ Does the electoral legislation clearly define the hierarchy of legal norms governing elections (stating that constitutional and legislative provisions take precedence over any instructions)?

- ▶ What are the necessary improvements to the legal framework that have already been identified (see, for example, the recommendations included in the Venice Commission, the OSCE/ODIHR opinions and in previous OSCE/ODIHR observation reports)? Have they already been introduced? What effect does the implementation have on the process? What progress has been made since then?
- ▶ Is the electoral legal framework stable with a view to providing certainty (predictability) among electoral stakeholders regarding the electoral process? Are the changes introduced based on inclusive and consultative processes? Are modifications introduced by the executive (government) in compliance with the actual competences of the executive body in this area? Are modifications introduced in accordance with legal provisions that regulate the promulgation of laws?
- ▶ How is the electoral legal framework respected in the context of the present election?
- ▶ Do the electoral rules have at least the rank of a statute adopted by parliament (in particular, explicit procedures for democratic elections and an overall electoral system should have the rank of statute; the rules on technical matters and detail may be included in regulations of the executive)?
- ▶ Is the legal framework for elections clearly written, consistent and accessible (published and readily available to citizens; without inconsistencies and gaps; no overly complex legal framework)?
- ▶ Was the electoral legislation enacted in accordance with the applicable legal provisions governing the promulgation of laws (as amendments introduced contrary to such provisions risk annulment by the courts)?

The competence of the election administration (EA) to regulate certain urgent matters by its own normative acts should, however, respect the principle of legislative (parliamentary) control over the electoral legislation. Thus, the following questions could be considered.

Role of election administration

- ▶ Are the powers of the administration – at all levels – established by law, including obligations to administer an election process fairly, impartially and in accordance with the law?
- ▶ Does the electoral legislation clearly state and define the scope and extent of the election administration's authority to issue instructions?
- ▶ Are relationships between national and local authorities, as well as between election-administration bodies and other governmental bodies clearly stated and defined (to prevent conflicts or overlap with the powers of other government bodies)?
- ▶ Does the law clearly state that instructions may not be contrary to or inconsistent with the electoral legislation?

▶ Does the electoral legislation provide for a process in which electoral contestants and voters can lodge complaints and appeals concerning the adoption and implementation of such EA instructions? Does it also allow for complaints and appeals concerning the violation of electoral legislation by the election-administration body?

▶ Does the electoral legislation provide clearly defined rules for authority of the EA to issue instructions in emergency situations or on election day, as well as the process involved?

▶ Were substantive fundamental rights, such as the secrecy of the vote, abrogated or diminished by an instruction/regulation of the EA?

Legal framework for elections (women's participation)

▶ Does the constitution guarantee equal rights for women?

▶ Does it contain specific rights for women to run for and hold public office?

▶ Are there any provisions in the constitution which disadvantage women?

Electoral system (women's participation)

▶ Does the electoral system affect the participation of women as candidates?

▶ Does the law allow for any affirmative action to increase the number of women who are elected? What are they (for example, reserved seats for women, women in winnable places on a list of candidates – top 10 places)? How are lists which do not comply with affirmative actions (the quota) treated by election officials?

▶ If there are any affirmative action measures in place how successful have they been in increasing the number of women candidates and women elected?

▶ Is there an open or closed list system? If open, has this led to more or fewer women candidates? How are vacancies filled if a woman withdraws?

▶ Do the results show if the electoral system is benefiting or disadvantaging women?

Participation of national minorities and groups with specific needs

▶ Does the constitution guarantee universal suffrage without unreasonable restrictions?

▶ What are the implications of the electoral system for the representation of national minorities?

▶ Are there specific provisions in the election legislation for national minority participation as candidates and voters?

▶ Are there any restrictions on the establishment of political parties based on communal identity? Can any administrative restrictions that restrict the effective participation of national minority candidates or parties be identified?

▶ Does the electoral law foresee any special measures for the representation of national minorities, IDPs, refugees or nomadic communities?

C. Election administration

The work of the EA is vital for a democratic electoral process. The way in which it operates creates conditions for voters and contestants to fully exercise their fundamental freedoms and political rights. The administration should work professionally, efficiently and transparently, as much as possible under public scrutiny, and at the same time it should be able to undertake its work without political interference or intimidation. Its role is to ensure that all required steps in the course of the electoral process are rigorously, adequately and impartially followed and implemented in a timely manner so that all electoral stakeholders, primarily the voters, have confidence in the integrity of the process.

A CEC, responsible for decision making and oversight of the entire process, usually heads an election administration and this is usually a permanent body. Almost invariably, the EA structure is composed of various levels of lower election commissions, reflecting different levels of local government (for example, region/territory, district and municipality). All the levels may operate on a permanent basis or be of a temporary nature established for the electoral period only. Naturally, there is a need for clear distinction of roles among the different branches and levels of the EA. The composition, replacement procedures and functions of each layer of the election administration should be clearly laid out in law as it affects their independence and the quality of work.

As for the membership, the election administration may be composed of different kinds of members and may be appointed by different methods. A non-partisan independent commission consists of persons who are appointed on the basis of their professional experience or drawn from respected, neutral and experienced individuals, including members of the judiciary. A partisan independent commission consists of persons nominated by political parties or candidates. The role of partisan election administration is greatly enhanced where its membership reflects the political spectrum, especially participants in the election, and when those members act in a collegial, consensual and constructive manner rather than by taking decisions along party lines.

The following questions could be taken into account.

Election-administration activities

▶ Is there public confidence in the work of the election administration?

▶ What are the issues most frequently raised by the public in relation with the EA?

▶ Does the EA act independently and in a fair and impartial manner?

▶ Does it provide a representative balance of the political spectrum (or of participants in the election)?

▶ Is the process to select members of the EA taking place regularly? Are the rules for this process generally agreed upon?

▶ Is the EA able to work freely, without interference or intimidation?

▶ Does the EA have adequate financial and other resources?

▶ Does the EA function in accordance with the law and with rules of procedure?

- ▶ Does the EA comply with legal deadlines? Does the Central Election Commission plan effectively for all foreseeable needs within an adequate time frame?
- ▶ Does the EA work in a collegial, consensual and constructive manner? Are all members able to assume their position on the election administration? Do all members have equal access to information?
- ▶ Does the EA act in a transparent manner? Is it providing access for its work to be scrutinised by accredited representatives, observers and media?
- ▶ Does the EA communicate appropriately their activity to election stakeholders and the wider public?
- ▶ Is there a clear distinction of roles among the different levels of the EA?
- ▶ Are appropriate decisions/instructions being taken and communicated appropriately and in a timely manner to lower levels?
- ▶ Does the CEC provide adequate and timely training for all levels of the EA?
- ▶ Are sensitive electoral materials produced in a manner that guarantees their integrity?

Participation of women, national minorities and groups with specific needs

- ▶ Are there any women in leadership positions at the EA? Do they have real influence?
- ▶ Are election committees aware of issues that might affect women? For example, family voting? Have they taken any actions to address these issues?
- ▶ Are EA bodies sufficiently diverse and do they reflect to some extent the ethnic composition at national and local levels?
- ▶ Are officials in election observation bodies aware of issues facing representatives of national minorities, IDPs, refugees or nomadic communities? Are they prepared to effectively address these issues?

D. Voter education

Reporting on voter education and information should start from clearly defining the two notions and deciding which aspects will be monitored. This decision is based on what the scope of the observation is for the election cycle in question. Civil society organisations typically assess the extent and effectiveness of voter information and education programmes implemented by various stakeholders, such as the EA, political parties or other CSOs. Links can be made between education programmes and the level of participation of various groups in elections (women, youth and ethnic groups).

Voter-information programmes usually provide basic information on voting procedures, registration requirements, deadlines, general information about the election. They also provide information and use methods aimed at motivating citizens to participate in elections, inform about the right to participate in the overall democratic process, making connections between elections and broader aspects like human

rights, such as participation of first-time voters, women, minorities, people with disabilities and elderly people.

Civil society organisations might decide to focus on one of these aspects or both. The following questions could be explored.

Strategy

▶ Does the law oblige the EA to inform voters about all aspects of the electoral process?

▶ Does the election administration have a voter-education strategy?

▶ Who is involved in voter education/information (EA bodies, political parties, central government agencies, media outlets, civil society organisations)?

▶ Is there any form of co-operation among the EA and civil society regarding voter information/education or broader civic education programmes?

▶ Does the EA have methods for assessing the effectiveness of voter-information/education programmes (to assess if voters are aware of the election process and have information about candidates, parties, registration and voting requirements)?

Timing

▶ Is the information made available to all eligible voters and in a timely manner?

▶ Is information about procedures, dates and locations available also before the start of voter registration?

▶ Are changes in election legislation/procedures explained in time for voters to understand them?

Content

▶ Do voter-education programmes provide information about roles and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy? Are there broader civic education programmes? Who implements them?

▶ Is the information clearly presented to voters? Is the information presented in an impartial and adequate manner (for example, are ballots not marked with certain names of contestants)?

▶ Is there sufficient information about voters' rights and obligations?

▶ Is there sufficient information on dates and procedures (voting procedures, where, when, how)?

▶ Is information about voter-registration procedures clear – where, when, how? Are voters able to check their names on the voter list?

Target audience

▶ What communication channels are used (traditional or online media and social networks)?

▶ Are communication channels or information techniques adapted to the audience (for example, is social media used for young voters? When and how are printed or audio materials employed, etc.)?

Voter information targeting women

▶ Is there any information specifically aimed at women?

▶ Is information on voting available to women (for example, are literacy levels and different languages addressed)?

▶ Is information about voter registration accessible to all women?

▶ Do authorities, political parties, media outlets or NGOs engage in voter-registration outreach activities targeting women?

▶ Is women's access to information about elections limited by any factor?

Voter information targeting national minorities

▶ Does the EA have voter-information/education activities planned for minorities living in the country? Is there information about registration and voting procedures available in those languages?

▶ Do voter-education programmes presented by the media reach all parts of the country, including areas populated by national minorities?

▶ Are prospective candidates representing national minorities informed adequately about nomination and registration procedures?

▶ Are there NGOs implementing voter-information/education programmes targeting minorities? Are there active NGOs representing minority groups and conducting voter-information activities?

Voter information targeting groups with specific needs

▶ Is there voter education directed at particular segments of the population with a traditionally low voter turnout?

▶ Are there voter-education activities targeting first-time voters, elderly or illiterate voters?

▶ Are there voter-information materials available for citizens living outside the country, refugees or IDPs?

▶ Do IDPs, refugees, nomadic communities or persons residing in remote areas have access to civic and voter-education materials?

▶ Are there a high number of invalid ballots, indicating a possible lack of understanding of the process by voters? Are the invalid ballots concentrated in a particular area or did they affect a particular community?

E. Voter lists and voter registration

In order to assess the overall voter-registration process questions related to the legislation regulating it, the manner in which legislation is implemented and the quality of the voter lists need to be considered.

When making the decision on what to monitor in terms of voter registration, civil society organisations can decide to focus on one of the aspects listed or on all of them, based on the scope of their observation project:

▶ the quality of the voter list itself (keeping in mind that no voter list is completely accurate);

▶ the overall voter-registration process;

▶ the public information campaign to inform voters about registration procedures and deadlines.

The following questions, that could be considered in order to report on the voter-registration process, also cover the quality of the voter list itself.

Legislation

▶ Is the law clear on requirements governing the voter-registration process and how to establish voter eligibility?

▶ Has the voter-registration legislation created controversies in the past and what were the main issues raised?

▶ Do the criteria for voter eligibility meet national legislation requirements and existing international standards and good practice (citizenship, age, residence)?

▶ Are exclusions or restrictions to the right to vote reasonable and in accordance with other existing legislation?

▶ Are there important recommendations to improve the registration process, by domestic and international observers, and what is the status of their implementation?

▶ Is the process of reviewing legislation governing voter registration transparent to the public?

Voter lists and voter registration prior to election day

▶ Do the criteria for voter eligibility meet national legislation requirements and existing international standards?

▶ When was the last time the voter list was updated by the responsible institutions? Do responsible institutions provide reports on their activity to update the voter list?

▶ Are the voter lists assembled and updated according to the provisions of the existing legislation? Does the update of the voter list require revisions of any existing law?

▶ What were the main issues raised in the past about the quality of the voter list? Are they connected to a certain group or geographic region?

▶ What are the current concerns raised by stakeholders? Is the process transparent?

▶ Do voters have opportunities to verify their names on the list and the accuracy of information? What kind of opportunities does it include?

▶ Are there any names on the voter list that should not be there for various reasons?

- ▶ Do citizens have enough opportunities to submit complaints and ask for corrections to be made to the voter list?

- ▶ Do voters, contestants and civil society organisations have access to verify how the complaints related to the voter list are processed?

- ▶ Are all citizens able to register to vote without discrimination of any kind? Are there barriers for certain groups to register (for example, minority groups)?

- ▶ Are there clear procedures to ensure all voters eligible to vote will be included, only eligible voters will be allowed to vote and multiple registration will be prevented?

- ▶ Are there specific provisions (if yes, how detailed?) on alternative registration procedures (absentee voter certificate, voter cards)? If yes, are they properly implemented?

- ▶ Are voter-registration centres set up in accordance with existing legislation and their locations publicised?

- ▶ Are civil society organisations and contestants provided with enough opportunities to verify the accuracy of the voter list (for example, are copies of the voter list available for them)? Do these organisations and individuals have opportunities to submit complaints and ask for corrections to be made to the voter list?

- ▶ Are civil society organisations allowed to monitor all stages of the voter list formation and are they required additional accreditation for this activity?

- ▶ Are there information campaigns by the authorities to encourage citizens to be registered or to check the accuracy of their information on the list? How is the impact of such information campaigns assessed?

- ▶ Are civil society groups engaged in information campaigns for voter registration and how do they assess the impact of their campaigns? Are there groups working in coalitions to conduct such information campaigns?

- ▶ Are copies of the voter list posted at the polling stations the same as the official final list?

- ▶ Are there clear rules about publicising the number of voters on the list, per administrative district and polling station, early enough before election day? Are the rules enforced?

Voter lists during election day

- ▶ What types of problem arose on election day related to the voter lists and how were they processed?

- ▶ Are the provisions related to a supplementary voter list in accordance with national registration and existing international standards?

Women participation

- ▶ Are there any obstacles to women registering to vote?

- ▶ Are accurate records kept of name changes, following marriage for example?

- ▶ Are offices conveniently sited and open at times that women can attend to register?
- ▶ Are women able to register individually or are they registered as part of a family or household?

**Participation of national minorities
and groups with specific needs**

- ▶ Are registration forms available in different languages?
- ▶ Is help available to those with literacy problems?
- ▶ How does the existing registration system reflect the registration and participation in elections of national minorities?
- ▶ Do any national minority communities face problems registering as voters or obtaining citizenship? What is the nature of these problems? Are they technical or political? Do they require a change in the legislation?
- ▶ What identity documents are necessary to register to vote? Do such documents carry ethnicity or religious identification of their holders?
- ▶ Is there adequate information available to national minority communities about the voter-registration process? Was information available in minority languages?
- ▶ How does the existing registration system attract voters with disabilities? Are there alternative ways that allow those with disabilities to register without incurring additional expenses or practical difficulties?
- ▶ Does the election administration create special awareness materials or mechanisms that accommodate registration of voters with disabilities?
- ▶ Is registration of permanent residence or an address a requirement for voter registration? How does it affect IDPs and nomadic populations?

F. Registration of contestants

In order to evaluate the process of contestant registration (political parties, candidates) questions related to the legislation regulating it and the manner in which legislation is implemented need to be taken into account. For an election process to be genuine, an open and inclusive registration process for political parties and candidates needs to be created, through legislation and the introduction of good practice. The legal framework must provide a level playing field for the participation and registration of political parties and candidates, regardless of their ideology.

Domestic election observation should examine procedures for registration and evaluate whether they are clear and applied consistently. The types of restrictions on candidacies should be thoroughly analysed. Although it is very often the case that limitations are imposed by legislation, these should be reasonable and non-discriminatory (contrary to requirements obliging excessive numbers of signatures on lists supporting candidacies or unreasonable requirements for financial deposits).

In addition, various deadlines associated with the registration of parties and candidates should also be examined. The legal framework should provide a sufficiently meaningful time frame for candidates to submit their registration documents. At the same time, candidates whose applications were rejected due to insufficient documentation should be given an opportunity to resubmit them early enough to take part in the campaign. Domestic election observers should report on the process of disqualification of candidates and follow the complaints process to be able to evaluate how the disputes were resolved. Special attention should be given to the withdrawal of candidates and report on instances that would indicate pressure or intimidation.

The following questions could be considered in order to report on the registration of contestants.

Registration of contestants

▶ Are procedures for the registration and functioning of political parties clear and transparent?

▶ Is the right to stand for elections clearly regulated in the law and does it provide equal opportunities for all contestants across the political spectrum?

▶ Have contestants raised concerns with the registration process in the past? What were the main issues and were they also noted by domestic and international observers?

▶ Are the procedures for registration of contestants open and inclusive?

▶ Are the procedures applied consistently and fairly?

▶ Are the restrictions to the right to stand reasonable within legal limits? How are they applied?

▶ Do contestants have the right to complain in case of denial of registration? Is there enough opportunity for remedy within sufficient time in advance of the elections, to enable contestants to campaign?

▶ How was the decision to reject a candidacy made?

▶ Are the requirements on financial deposits reasonable and non-discriminatory?

▶ Are the requirements on supporting signatures reasonable and non-discriminatory?

▶ Are there clear rules for checking signatures in support of each candidate? Are the rules applied consistently?

▶ In the process of registration as candidates, are there groups who face more barriers (women, minority groups, for example)?

▶ In case of technical errors in the application folder, are the candidates able to correct them and resubmit the application?

▶ Were there many candidates who withdrew after they were registered? If so, were the grounds for this reasonable and justifiable (for example, were they subject to pressure or intimidation)?

▶ Was any pattern observed in the withdrawal process (a certain political affiliation, regional distribution)?

G. Election campaign

Campaign

In order for elections to be both free and fair, it is necessary for all contestants (parties, candidates), and their supporters to be able to freely convey their political messages to the electorate, so that voters can make informed choices. Campaigns should be based on the free and unhindered exercise of freedom of assembly and expression.

Specifically, the legal framework must ensure that each political party and candidate enjoys on a fair and equal basis access to the electorate and opportunities to communicate their policies, promote their qualifications for office, hold meetings and travel around the country. Guarantees of equal opportunities may be further regulated by administrative bodies such as the Central Election Commission, which should oversee the proper conduct of campaigns. The authorities should implement and enforce campaign regulations in a consistent and impartial manner.

Regulations should also ensure equal access to state resources and prevent arbitrary administrative action. It is particularly important that campaigning should be free from violence, pressure or intimidation. Citizens should not fear retribution, such as loss of employment, for their campaign activities. All persons should be free from coercion by the authorities; special attention in this regard may be focused on such groups as students, soldiers, public-sector employees or local leaders. In addition, security forces have a duty to refrain from intimidation and to prevent intimidation by others.

The following questions could be considered in this context.

Campaign assessment

▶ Is there freedom to engage in political campaigning (are freedoms of expression, assembly, association and movement guaranteed by law without discrimination)? Are restrictions on these rights "necessary in a democratic society"?

▶ Are all political parties and candidates ensured equal treatment before the law? Does the legal framework provide a level playing field for all contestants?

▶ Does the law regulate the conduct of political parties and candidates during electoral campaigns and provide for active and open campaigning free from government interference?

▶ Are there direct or indirect restrictions on the ability of women candidates and their supporters to campaign? Are there direct or indirect restrictions on the ability of national minority candidates and their supporters to campaign?

▶ Are campaign regulations implemented and enforced in a consistent, impartial and effective manner?

▶ Are there verifiable instances of violence, intimidation or harassment, or the advocacy of violence, hatred and incitement of national, racial or religious hatred? Have any women candidates encountered interference or intimidation with their campaign? Are these also experienced by men? Are such incidents promptly, consistently and effectively addressed?

▶ Are law-enforcement and other regulatory agencies (for example, tax administrations) during the campaign acting in an impartial, restrained, professional and appropriate manner?

Campaign finance and misuse of administrative resources

Political parties and candidates need money and other resources to compete in elections, which may be obtained from private or public sources. The former are typically donations/contributions, while the latter may be legitimate contributions from the state (such as subsidies) or less legitimate use of public resources such as staff, offices and equipment. The latter may be viewed as hidden forms of campaign finance. This may be distinguished from the more coercive uses of administrative resources mentioned in the previous checklist. Since the late 1990s, methodologies for monitoring election campaign finance and misuse of public or "administrative" resources have been developed and used in practice.

The following list may serve as a guide for observers reporting on a campaign's finances.

Campaign finances

▶ Is state funding for parties or candidates (where applicable) provided on a fair basis?

▶ Did contestants disclose their income and spending as required by law? Was such disclosure sufficiently clear, detailed and timely to enable effective scrutiny of their financing?

- ► Were the sources of income declared by contestants consistent with the information on sources of income obtained by observation?

- ► Was the spending observed (or the estimated total expenditure based on extrapolation from samples) consistent with the spending declared by contestants?

- ► Did institutions responsible for oversight perform their function properly and/or assess the adequacy of the legal framework itself?

- ► Which aspects of campaign finance were monitored and how: income (donations, state contributions, etc.), expenditure or both?

- ► What were the specific objectives of monitoring in each case – for example in the case of monitoring income or expenditure of contestants, was the objective to compare disclosed income/expenditure with other sources of information (for example, disclosure by donors, visible in-kind contributions to parties, expenditure observed), analyse disclosure statements to identify unlikely donors or interconnected donations, or to identify donations correlated with benefits received by donors (for example, public contracts)?

- ► Was state assistance provided for contestants (such as subsidies, campaigning resources/space, airtime, etc.) in accordance with legal requirements, and in a fair and non-discriminatory manner?

- ► Were any complaints filed for violations of campaign finance regulations? If so, were they dealt with in a timely and impartial manner?

The following list may serve as a guide for reporting on the misuse of administrative resources.

Misuse of administrative resources

- ► Is the misuse of state resources (state/public premises, infrastructure, vehicles and employees) for election campaigning regulated? If so, is such conduct clearly and sufficiently restricted or prohibited by law?

- ► Are state resources being used to coerce or harass one or more political contestants?

- ► What types of administrative resources were observed? Campaigning resources may be institutional (offices, staff, equipment, vehicles, etc.), budgetary (direct use of public budgets) or media-related (use of state/public media organisations).

- ► Were the premises, infrastructure or vehicles of public institutions used for the election campaign purposes of particular political parties or candidates in ways not provided for by legal provisions on state assistance?

- ► Did public administration employees participate in or attend campaigning activities during their working hours?

- ► If administrative resources were misused, what is the estimated financial benefit of these resources to the parties or candidates?

Participation by women

▶ Have any candidates encountered gender-motivated interference or intimidation with their campaign?

▶ Do women candidates have the same access to resources as men in the campaign?

Participaion of national minorities and groups with specific needs

▶ Do authorities uphold freedom of movement and assembly in national minority-populated areas?

▶ Are voters able freely to attend campaign events without impediment, intimidation or fear of reprisals?

▶ Are candidates, including those representing national minority parties, able to travel freely and organise campaign events? Are national minority candidates, associations and parties able to use public facilities during the campaign on a fair basis?

▶ Are national minorities able to print and display campaign posters and other campaign materials? Can they display them in minority languages?

▶ Are candidates and parties able to address campaign events in minority languages?

▶ Is there any anti-minority campaigning or intimidation carried out by any party, individual or group or the authorities targeting minorities in the course of elections? Are there any cases where hate speech is used in the campaign?

▶ How do candidates, parties or associations address issues related to national minorities in their election campaigns?

▶ Are meeting venues, campaign offices and constituency offices used during election campaigns accessible to people with disabilities?

▶ Are campaign materials or websites of political parties accessible to people with disabilities, IDPs, refugees or nomadic communities?

H. Media coverage of elections

The media play a vital role in elections as they provide platforms for candidates to communicate their campaign messages to voters, analyse campaigns, communicate the views of various political groups and report unhindered about those who hold power and seek to gain it again. At the same time the media should adhere to the principles of fair coverage. A free and fair election process requires the media to treat all the contestants in a balanced manner and to strive to provide timely, correct and unbiased reports about all key political and election developments.

As a part of the observation effort, media monitoring aims, through rigorous methodology, to assess the fairness of the media during the electoral process and evaluate their compliance with international standards and domestic legislation. It analyses whether the candidates were given access to the media to convey their messages to

voters and whether information available through the media was adequate for voters to make a well-informed choice at the ballot box. Statistical data on the amount of time dedicated to contestants, the manner in which contestants and other key political figures are covered by the media, analyses of bias, extent and quality of voter-education campaigns or relevancy of election-related information serve as bases for analysis.

However, the media monitoring per se should be preceded by a review of the relevant laws and regulations that govern media conduct. At the same time, it is necessary to be familiar with the role and functions of the regulatory bodies that oversee the election campaign in the media. Moreover, the analysis should also contain handling of media-related complaints in the course of the electoral process.

The following list may serve as a guide for reporting on the election media coverage.

Media environment

▶ Does the legal framework guarantee the freedom of the media? If so, is this freedom respected in practice? Is the media able to work freely and operate without prior censorship (including self-censorship), intimidation, obstruction or interference?

▶ Is there a pluralistic and diverse media environment, which provides access to a broad range of political opinion? Do the public media operate independently of the government? Are private media outlets owned by candidates or political parties? Is ownership of private media outlets concentrated on a few owners in a manner that could lead to biased or unbalanced coverage of the election?

▶ Has there been any violence against journalists? If so, does it appear election-related?

▶ Has there been any legal or administrative action or harassment against the media (such as lawsuits, tax audits, licence suspension/revocation, closure)? If so, does it appear politically motivated?

Election coverage

▶ Have the media provided fair, unbiased and impartial coverage in their news programmes (in particular public/state-funded media)?

▶ Has there been any coverage that may be regarded as hate speech? Are there instances of defamation of candidates?

▶ Has there been any discrimination in reporting based on racial, ethnic, gender or religious background?

▶ Were provisions for free airtime respected?

▶ Were provisions for paid advertisements equal and non-restrictive/reasonable for all contestants (price, volume, airing time, transmission time)? Were paid political advertisements clearly labelled as such?

▶ Have the media provided sufficient and interesting information to enable voters to make an informed choice on the election through news reports, analysis and debates?

▶ Have the media delivered objective information on the election administration and provided any voter-education initiatives?

► Has the election or media regulatory body acted independently in an impartial, transparent and professional manner? Has it been free to work without undue interference? Has it independently monitored the media's coverage of the election? Has it dealt in a timely and effective manner with media-related complaints?

Women's participation

► In general how are women candidates presented by the media during the campaign?

► Do women candidates have equal access to the media?

► Are there any sexist comments or stereotypes used by the media about women candidates or leaders during the campaign?

► Is there any political advertising or coverage aimed directly at women voters?

Participation of national minorities

► Do national minority parties and candidates have unimpeded access to the media to present their views?

► What media sources can national minority-populated areas receive?

► Is the national/regional media landscape polarised along ethnic lines?

► Is campaign and election information provided in minority languages?

► Are there any incidents of hate speech that may negatively affect national minority candidates, parties or communities?

Participation of people with disabilities

► How do the media report on candidates with disabilities competing for public office? Do the media use stereotypes or are they otherwise prejudiced towards candidates or voters with disabilities?

► Are there incidents of hate speech towards such candidates or voters in the media? What is the reaction of the authorities?

► Do candidates with disabilities have equal access to the media as other candidates?

► Do the media report on incidents of discrimination towards candidates or voters with disabilities?

► Do people with disabilities have access to their own specialist media that is covering elections? Do election administrators address their needs through special media programmes that take into account the nature of their disabilities?

Participation of internally displaced persons

► How are candidates for public office or voters from groups of IDPs, refugees and people belonging to nomadic communities reported and/or presented in the media? Does the media use stereotypes? Is it otherwise prejudiced towards such candidates for public office or voters?

► Are there incidents of hate speech towards IDPs, refugees or people belonging to nomadic communities that stand for public office or voters that represent these communities? What is the reaction of the authorities?

- ▶ Do candidates representing such communities have access to the media on a par with other candidates?
- ▶ Do the media objectively report on incidents of discrimination towards candidates for public office or voters, representing IDPs, refugees and people belonging to nomadic groups?

I. Election day

The election day observation is primarily focused on assessing whether all the main phases of the final day of the election process – voting, counting and tabulation – are conducted in an orderly manner, and most importantly, in accordance with domestic legislation and international standards.

In this regard, the observation of election day requires very serious preparation given its comprehensiveness, in particular from the perspective that election day should represent the peak of the whole electoral process. As such, various aspects are to be observed and analysed, both quantitatively (based on the statistical data from the observation forms filled in by short-term observers) and qualitatively (based on the accompanying and additional comments) so that the complexity of the procedures is properly analysed in the observation report.

Previous experience of observing voting and counting, combined with an analysis of election day procedures, should enable a domestic observer group to determine which aspects of the voting and counting processes require particular attention.

The following principal areas could be covered in the report.

General procedures

- ▶ The opportunity of eligible voters to exercise their right to vote
- ▶ The right to a secret ballot
- ▶ Performance of the election officials
- ▶ Analysing whether voting and counting are conducted in a peaceful and orderly atmosphere, so that voters are freely able to make their choice, without any hindrance, intimidation or violence
- ▶ The exercise of the rights of election observers (party/candidate, domestic non-partisan, international) and the media without interference
- ▶ The publication of detailed results, done accurately, in a timely manner and broken down to the lowest possible level
- ▶ Aggregation and tabulation of results by higher levels of election administration should be done accurately, transparently and in a timely manner.

Observing the tabulation is particularly important, since errors or irregularities can have a much greater impact on the election results than problems at individual polling stations.

Opening procedures

► Timing
► Performance of polling officials (compliance with the procedures)
► Ballot papers
► Ballot box.

Voting procedures

► Voter list
► Ballot papers
► Ballot box
► Secrecy of vote (traditional voting, mobile voting, e-voting)
► Performance of polling officials (compliance with the procedures)
► Special voting procedures
► Atmosphere within the polling station (presence of other persons)
► Participation of other social groups (women, minorities, disabled people, prisoners)
► Problems with family voting, carousel, assisted persons, proxies, open, multiple, under-aged, impersonation, ballot-box stuffing).

Counting procedures

► Timing
► Performance of polling officials (compliance with the procedures)
► Atmosphere during the count (presence of other persons)
► Reconciliation and counting
► Discrepancies
► Results
► Problems (stuffed ballots)
► Complaints.

At the same time, the reporting and analysis of election day findings could be constructed from a topics-related perspective, rather than in chronological order, as provided above. In such cases, the following issues should be considered.

► Polling station environment
► Election officials (members of polling stations)
► Voting materials
► Voter list
► Voting procedures (including special voting procedures)
► Counting procedures
► Results completion
► Transportation.

In addition, in some cases domestic observation groups conduct parallel vote tabulation (PVT) – that is, they provide election stakeholders (political parties, candidates, election administration), as well as the public, with credible information to help them assess the legitimacy of the results. It is then immensely important that the comparison with the preliminary results is presented by the official election administration.

Participation of women

► Is there a balanced participation of women and men on polling station committees? Are women chairs of these committees?

► Is there any evidence of family voting/proxy voting?

► Are women able to participate in the election in the same way as men?

Participation of persons with disabilities

► Does the election administration use special means to accommodate the voting rights of people with disabilities (for example, a tactile ballot guide to enable blind voters to vote independently and in secret)?

► Are polling stations and polling booths accessible for people with disabilities?

► Are technical means employed to facilitate the voting rights of people with disabilities?

► Can people with disabilities avail themselves of assistance from a trusted third person in order to cast their vote? How is this procedure respected and implemented in practice? Are there any concerns?

Participation of national minorities and groups with specific needs

► Does the election administration use special means to accommodate the voting rights of national minorities (for example, is information available in polling stations about registration and voting procedures, including a ballot in national minority languages)?

► Does the election administration use special means to accommodate the voting rights of IDPs, refugees and people belonging to nomadic groups (for example, do polling stations established near their settlements allow them easy access)?

J. Tabulation and publication of the results

Tabulation of results is a process under which the electoral authorities collect results of the ballot count and consolidate them in order to project the total number of votes received by the candidate or the list in the constituency/country. Tabulation can involve collection and adding the results on several levels and is one of the most sensitive points in the electoral process.

The following questions may serve as a guide on how to report the most important principles of tabulation.

Integrity

► What are the measures undertaken by the electoral administration to protect the results of voting through the tabulation process?

► What are the steps in the tabulation process?

► Are the tabulation procedures sufficiently regulated by the legal framework?

► Are there deadlines and methods for the transfer of the results?

► Were the established procedures followed or was the integrity of the process damaged?

Transparency

► Does the legal framework allow access to observers?

► In how many instances were observers not given access?

► What are the methods for capturing the results?

► Do the counting forms/protocols include sufficient information, such as unused and used ballots, numbers of invalid and spoilt ballots, number of voters voted, results for each party, segregated results per voting method and similar?

Publication

► Is the process of publishing results sufficiently regulated by a legal framework?

► Is there a clear distinction between official, unofficial, preliminary and final results?

► How structured are the presented results – are they publicised by polling stations or only as aggregated results?

► How complete are the results – do they provide results for all contestants and for voters (registered on voter list, participated)?

► What additional information is released at the publication of results (gender, national minorities, other)?

► Are the results available online? Are they presented progressively or only upon completion of the counting process?

► What is the accessibility of the released results – are the results displayed publicly at polling station level, or only centrally?

Participation of women and national minorities

► What is the number and proportion of elected women and representatives of national minorities (the percentage of women and national minorities elected)? What is the trend in comparison with previous elections?

K. Complaints and appeals

When a domestic election observation mission focuses on the issue of complaints and appeals it should analyse the legal framework for complaints and appeals and, furthermore, closely follow any election-related appeals and complaints filed in the context of the election (including during the observation period, or at least during the official campaign period, including election day and post-election period). If the

CSO or its members decide, in the context of their election observation activities, to lodge an appeal, the report should also contain a separate part on that.

When reporting on complaints and appeals, the questions below may be considered. Potential problems identified and ensuing conclusions and recommendations may then relate to/target the legal framework for appeals and complaints or its practical implementation.

Effective remedy

▶ Do national rules and/or their application offer the procedural guarantees of an effective system of appeal?

▶ Do all voters, all candidates and all parties have the right to file an appeal?

▶ Do they have other procedural rights: such as the right to produce evidence in support of their claims, the right to a public and fair hearing, impartial and transparent, the right to an effective and speedy remedy, namely with respect to decisions on voting rights and registers, on the right to stand for election and the validity of candidatures, on access to the media, etc.?

▶ Do they have the right to appeal to an appellate court if a remedy is denied by the first instance that hears the appeal (while the first instance of appeal can be a court or another body such as the electoral commission, the instance of final appeal should be a court)?

▶ Is the appeal procedure clear, transparent and understandable (this requires clear legal provisions which leave no room for interpretation; and it also implies that members of the appeal bodies are sufficiently trained)?

▶ Is the procedure simple and possible to launch without formality?

▶ Are the deadlines respected (the time frame for filing an appeal is short, usually three to five days, but so must also be the time limit for the appeal body to make its ruling, in particular on decisions to be taken before the elections – on voting rights, the right to stand as a candidate, access to media, etc.; while the higher-level courts can have a little more time for their rulings)?

▶ Are appeal procedures and the powers and responsibilities of the bodies involved clearly and unambiguously predefined in the law (namely, the power to annul the election, in a constituency or more broadly, if irregularities may have affected the distribution of seats)? Are they correctly implemented?

▶ Have judicial decisions and other international recommendations on complaints and appeals procedures (for example, the European Court of Human Rights or national courts' final decisions, OSCE/ODIHR recommendations contained in previous election observation reports) been reflected in the national legislation and in practice?

The participation of women

▶ Do women have equal access to complaints/appeals mechanisms?

▶ Are the bodies hearing complaints gender balanced?

▶ Is gender awareness included in training of election officials and appeals bodies?

▶ What percentage of complaints are registered by men/women. What percentage of each are successful?

► Do people belonging to groups of national minorities, IDPs or refugees, or representatives of nomadic communities have equal access to complaints and appeals mechanisms?

► What are the specific issues raised by representatives of such communities in their complaints and appeals?

L. Post-election developments

Electoral activities after the elections are dependent on the electoral system, on the specific political environment of the country and most importantly on election results – whether all the stakeholders accept them. At this stage it would be necessary to observe possible political and judicial implications (complaints and appeals process) on the electoral process. Additionally, during this phase the election observation mission should closely follow adjudication of the complaints and appeals from election day.

If the organisation extends its observation to the post-election period it may consider some of the following questions for its reporting.

Official reporting

► Did the EA bodies (or in some cases the auditor general) issue their assessment reports after the elections? These could be:

– a review of the strategic plan's goals met throughout the electoral process;

– an assessment of the shortcomings in the legal framework;

– proposals based on the problematic areas and lessons learned, including recommendations and concrete follow-up steps aimed at addressing them.

► Does the report present and acknowledge some of the operational challenges and provide recommendations for reforms to legislators?

Recounts

► Does the legal framework include recounts of disputed election results?

► Are the recounts properly regulated to avoid pushing recounts for political purposes and obstruction of the electoral process?

► Are there cases when a recount was not conducted, even though the circumstances required one (that is, close results)?

► Is there any discrimination against contestants on political or any other grounds (of ethnicity, religion or gender)?

Cancellation of the results

► What are the circumstances, legal grounds and time frame under which elections can be cancelled or declared void?

- ► Does the law provide enough safeguards to prevent arbitrary decisions to cancel elections?
- ► Is there a time frame for new elections provided in the legal framework?

Appointment of elected representatives

- ► Were the elected representatives appointed in a reasonable and legal time frame?
- ► Are there any appointments which are on hold because of complaints and appeals procedures?

Follow-up procedures

- ► Were electoral violations systematically investigated and were those responsible held accountable?

4.5. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION OF THE REPORT

Tools and means

During the developing of reports it should be planned how the information will be distributed. Not all groups within the target audience might read the reports fully. The organisation needs to find appropriate and effective ways to present the key information.

In the external communication plan the team should identify tools for distributing the findings and the means to reach different target groups. Here are some common tools.

- ► **Press release**

   Short statement with key findings; mainly addressed to the media.

- ► **Infographic**

   Presents statistics of findings about violations, turnout or election results.

Figure 13: Presenting statistics

Source: www.isfed.ge

- ▶ **PowerPoint (PPT)**

  A format for aggregating and presenting key findings. The presentation should not have more than 20 to 25 slides, each with short texts and few visuals.

- ▶ **Mailing lists**

  Combination of stakeholders' e-mail addresses representing the donors, international and CSO communities, media, election administration, government, political parties.

- ▶ **Incident map**

  Visual format reflecting violations reported by observers and citizens, mapped by category and district (www.electionsportal.ge/geo/map).

- ▶ **Extracts**

  Excerpts from chapters/sub-chapters that can be presented separately to different target groups.

- ▶ **Brochure for citizens**

  Shortened and simplified version of the report, including visuals and information focused on general interest.

Common means for presenting reports to the public can include the following.

- ▶ **Press conference**

  Event mostly attended by journalists, where the key findings of the observation are presented.

- ▶ **Presentation**

  Meeting organised for presenting and discussing reports with political parties, the government, the election administration, the media, donors and CSO communities. A PowerPoint presentation might be a tool for distributing the information at the meeting.

- ▶ **Internet**

  One of the most popular ways for reaching a wide audience.

- ▶ **E-mail**

  A means for sending the information to stakeholders using mailing lists.

- ▶ **Website**

  A space to upload all materials and information about the election observation.

- ▶ **Social media (Facebook, Vkontakte, Twitter)**

  A place for sharing brief extracts of key findings for the general public. It can be shared by friends and followers that will spread the information.

- ▶ **Webinars**

  A type of online press conference that enables distant communication – based on prior login.

- ▶ **Working groups, round-table meetings**

  Effective forums for discussing key issues and future improvements with representatives from the government, embassies and other stakeholders.

> ▶ **Door-to-door distribution of reports, brochures, extracts**

> A way to deliver the printed versions of your report to relevant target groups. Special attention should be paid to villages and areas where Internet access and TV channels are limited and to places settled with ethnic minorities.

It is strongly advisable that all materials – including, reports, extracts and press releases –distributed via the Internet are converted into PDF files.

Establishing contact with journalists

A list of the most important national media houses, television channels, radio stations, newspapers and online services can be the first step. Freelancers, bloggers or groups in the social media can be a target audience as well as a source.

It is more difficult to attract the international media's attention. Partners in the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (www.gndem.org) or partners in regional networks like ENEMO (www.enemo.eu) or EPDE (www.epde.org) may be able to help source addresses or contacts.

Media without personal contacts are not very useful. In order to find responsible correspondents it is reasonable to search all the types of media dealing with politics – television, radio, print, online. Many international media cover Eastern Europe and Central Asia through their offices in Moscow. In countries undergoing conflict or an international crisis journalists can be seen long before elections – at public events, press conferences with politicians or other CSOs.

A media list should at least contain the name of the correspondent or responsible editor for the country of the respective CSO, their function, the phone number of their editorial office, mobile number (ideally both in the country of their office and in the respective country), e-mail address and Twitter account name.

After completion of this list the organisation might create one or more mailing groups. Journalists, often busy, are interested in press releases and press conferences while analysts, other experts and academics are more interested in the longer versions of reports and discussions after a presentation. So, different mailing lists are useful.

With all the information from the media list an electronic database can be built. It is crucial for any CSO to test and guarantee easy access to the database, thus enabling quick distribution of urgent documents. The organisation must pay even more attention to regular updates of the media list and database. It is embarrassing to send an e-mail to a retired person or a widow of a journalist who died months before.

For the first direct contact a phone call should be preferred with a brief discussion of domestic election observation. In reality, domestic CSOs that conduct election observation missions are the best sources of information during election day, since serious international observation missions usually do not provide comments on particular parts of the process and present their full statements and assessments only after election day.

In these situations, it is advisable to inform the media about the reporting plan of election day statements (schedule of press conferences, new online updates) so that

journalists are prepared in advanced rather than taken by surprise: journalists often receive hundreds of e-mails at such a time.

Writing and distributing a press release

The headline should be as short and interesting as possible. It should clearly capture the main message of the press release.

This is the common format: the text should be as short as possible, as long as necessary. Preferably write one page with about 25 lines, 60 printed characters each; 250 words are enough to say everything. Add a link if specific details need to be added. A basic font like Arial or Calibri (or standard Times New Roman) should be used, no exotic fonts – they do not work as eye-catchers. The font size should not be smaller than 11 point (pt), the distance between the lines not smaller than one. The logo of the organisation should be fine to include, but might cause a problem with the amount of data in the e-mail.

The structure of a press release almost always follows a pattern. The text should not have more than five paragraphs; fewer than five is better. Each paragraph mentions only one aspect.

Paragraph 1 – The news that attracts the interest of the journalists. The first sentence has to be clear and short.

Paragraph 2 – Summary of the message and answers to the standard journalism questions: who, what, when, where, how, why, which source?

Paragraph 3 – Straight to the message. This might be a quote, maybe consisting of an assessment by the chairperson or deputy director of the CSO, with the correct name and function of the person. People quoted should be available for interview. In the quote they should not repeat the facts and figures of the paragraph above.

Paragraph 4 – Additional important facts; for example, about the mission, the number of observers.

Contact details are put at the end of the page. "For more information please contact", name, phone, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, links to the CSO's website. The contact person, the press officer, has to be available for any requests.

Before sending an e-mail, consider the amount of data to be included. Do not send an e-mail with several attachments. Send the link to a photo file. Never send a ZIP file; graphics might fill up the journalist's inbox.

Organising a press conference or a presentation

The date and time of the CSO's event should not compete with other news events on the same day or at the same time. In particular for the press conference after election day it is advisable to book the timing well in advance or to check

information on press events of the other election stakeholders (CEC, contestants, international observation missions, etc.).

The room should be in a well-known, central location, not too large but furnished with enough chairs and space at the back for TV cameras. Display large visuals such as logos or banners. At the entrance a member of staff should greet the journalists or invited guests and ask them to sign the list of attendees. In the case of attending international guests simultaneous translation should be provided; at least, consecutive translation.

When inviting journalists to a press conference the main focus should be on the most influential national and international media listed with personal contacts in the database. The invitation (sometimes referred to as a "media advisory") should be sent in written form – the text should be short and simple with the following basic facts.

- ► What, Who, When, Where, Why?
- ► A contact name with mobile number and e-mail address included.

After the first "save the date" information delivered by the written invitation three to five days before the event (in the case of non-election-related events, the period between the initial notification and the actual event should be longer – some 7 to 10 days), the most important journalists might be reminded by phone one day before the event (or even on the morning of the given day).

The CSO's speakers should be prepared in a briefing: they must be able to articulate the main message in a short and clear manner and to answer critical questions. Each speaker should emphasise different points, but not more than one or two. Technical jargon and abbreviations should be avoided. Consideration should be given to a balance of male and female speakers.

At the beginning of the event a moderator introduces the speakers, then manages the questions from the floor. Each speaker should present their statement in not more than 10 minutes, ideally three to five minutes. A press conference should not last longer than 30 to 45 minutes, with the entire presentation (including discussion) spanning no more than two hours. However, it is advisable that the duration be adjusted based on the interest of the participating audience, in particular of reporting journalists.

4.6. POSSIBLE CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

External reporting is the ultimate goal of an election observation mission. One may consider that if the report is done, nothing can intervene and disturb their presentation to the public. In fact, the final steps until the public presentation of the report, the presentation itself and the period after its public release may be even more important. A series of constraints, both internal and external, could endanger the presentation of the public reports, thus affecting the image and credibility of the mission.

When planning the election observation mission, the Core Team should identify potential constraints and develop strategies that would transform them into

manageable challenges and not allow them to become shortcomings. The most common constraints with regard to external reporting are:

- ▶ limited time to process the information;
- ▶ scarce and inaccurate information;
- ▶ limited access to the media for reporting;
- ▶ public exposure of the mission and a risk of intimidation/pressure.

Figure 14: Constraints
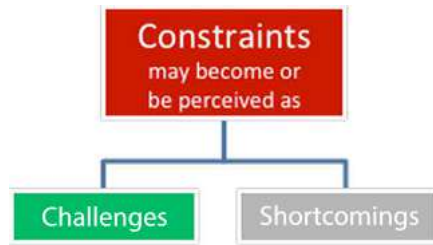
Below, there are suggestions on how to cope with these constraints.

Limited time to process the information

Domestic election observers usually present interim reports every two to three weeks during the election campaign period, a statement with preliminary findings on the next day(s) after election day, and a final report about two months after the elections. In addition, on election day(s) the missions produce several (three to four) public statements that reflect the conduct of the electoral procedures in the polling stations. Both the public reports and statements are based on a large volume of data that have to be processed in a short time (except the final reports). Although the analysts are responsible for compiling the information (with a leading and decisive role for the Deputy Head of Mission – for more see Chapter 3.2) they should be fully supported during the report-writing process by other Core Team members (the Head of Mission, Network/LTO Co-ordinators, the Press Officer). A series of suggestions can be made on how to turn this constraint into good practice.

- ▶ Clearly distribute the tasks and writing portfolios among the analysts within the Core Team.
- ▶ Start writing the reports (except election day statements) well ahead of their public presentation.
- ▶ Ensure that nobody/nothing distracts the analysts during their report writing.
- ▶ Allocate enough time for checking, editing and proofreading the reports.
- ▶ Allocate enough time for translation of the reports before their public presentation.
- ▶ Avoid including in the reports findings gathered shortly before their public presentation: they may still require additional verification (it would be better to include the respective pieces of information in the next report after additional checks).

Scarce and inaccurate information

Sometimes, the information available for the public reports or statements may not be very complete and accurate. In such situations, it is advisable to understand the cause in order to undertake appropriate measures for improving it. The Core Team should clarify whether there is a problem with the quantity of information gathered by LTOs/STOs, its quality or both.

The following measures could be undertaken in order to overcome this shortcoming.

► Ask LTOs to provide additional information or details on the reported cases. Offer additional training and guidance to LTOs on how to conduct interviews, to take testimonies of the witnesses and to look for additional documentation (protocols, voter list extracts, PEC log book, ballots, equipment, etc.) from different relevant institutions (electoral bodies, courts, police, hospitals, etc.).

► The analysts should analyse in detail the records/documents/evidence of a specific case in order to retrieve the information that could be lost or distorted at an earlier stage of the analysis.

► Some information reported by LTOs/STOs may lack details or evidence. Therefore, such information should be detailed more and formulated accordingly, or excluded from the report (see the following example).

Good practice example: how to formulate a conclusion in the absence of supporting evidence

▬ "Out of the numerous specific allegations examined by the observers, several were clearly found to be credible, including a number of verified cases of pressure exerted by local officials from XY electoral district on opposition supporters, including on teachers, to resist from campaigning for or supporting ZZ."

► Ensure the accuracy of the information by specifying whether the facts were observed by the observers or were reported to them.

Good practice example: how to distinguish between personal observation and other reports

▬ "This case was widely reported by the local media and became the subject of a police investigation."

► When possible, provide balanced reporting by presenting both the positive and negative findings that strictly reflect facts.

Good practice example: how to report in a balanced manner

▬ "The CEC held frequent sessions which were open to observers, party proxies and the media, and generally operated in a transparent manner. However, the CEC usually did not act in a collegial manner."

Limited access to the media for reporting

Limited access to the media represents a significant constraint for a domestic election observation mission. Such a situation may be the result of poor and uninteresting reports, produced by inexperienced, biased observers, or could be determined by a politicised and polarised media. The Core Team should look for causes and try to overcome this problem. Some possible solutions or instruments to surpass this constraint may include the following.

► Adopt/revise the communication strategy in order to better target the media.
► Build/strengthen a communication team within the Core Team to monitor the public appearances of the mission.
► Identify the editorial policy of media outlets concerning election and politics-related activities.
► Balance the information presented in the reports/statements so that even the politicised media would be interested and motivated to reflect them.
► Diversify media tools, use social media (Twitter, Facebook, Vkontakte, other social networks, etc.) and Internet portals for informing the general public and the media about the results of the mission.

Public exposure of the mission and risk of intimidation/pressure

The presentation of external reports brings a lot of visibility and attention from different stakeholders. Although the reports of the mission may be unbiased, independent and fact-based, some electoral stakeholders still may not accept the findings and conclusions presented in public. As a result, the STOs, LTOs and Core Team may be exposed to pressure and criticism. The following measures could be undertaken in order to mitigate this risk and protect the mission against electoral violence.

► Stay neutral, independent, and strictly impartial in order to protect your credibility.
► Be constructive and fact-based when putting forward criticism in the external reports.
► Explain to electoral stakeholders the observation methodology, structure and content of the reports.
► Assure all electoral stakeholders that the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the mission are based on direct observation, facts and verified evidence.
► Refer to international standards on elections and international obligations the country has committed to while presenting the conclusions and recommendations of the mission.
► Instruct the observers to report immediately to the Core Team about intimidation committed against them and, in severe cases, also to the police or other law-enforcement bodies.
► Redeploy the observers who are exposed to electoral intimidation to other regions (in exceptional cases).

4.7. ADVOCACY/FOLLOW-UP TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an increased level of involvement of civil society organisations in post-election activities. More and more organisations contribute to the debate on improving the electoral process. The increased professionalisation and trust in civil society organisations presents domestic observers with new opportunities for involvement throughout the entire electoral cycle. New types of output, going beyond releasing statements shortly after election day, are not only possible but also expected from civic organisations monitoring elections.

The Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation states clearly that organisations engaging in election observation "should offer recommendations for improving electoral and political processes". The recommendations included in final reports can form the basis for engagement in post-election advocacy aimed at promoting compliance with the requirements of national legislation, international standards and international obligations signed by various states. Moreover, domestic observers act in accordance with their watchdog role over the entire democratic process if they also undertake to monitor the manner in which recommendations made by international organisations are implemented by national governments.

Civil society organisations have many options available to follow up on their recommendations and those of international organisations and engage in post-election advocacy activities.

It has become part of good practice for CSOs to convene post-election round-table events with all stakeholders to discuss recommendations for improving the electoral process. These recommendations should be constructive and presented in a manner that will lead to effective dialogue and help their implementation. The discussions during the round-table events should guide future advocacy efforts by civil society.

There are three roles civil society can play in the period between elections.

1.	Promote their own proposals for electoral reform (draft laws or other policy proposals).

2.	Monitor the implementation of recommendations.

3.	Initiate activities (research) to provide authorities with information on the reform agenda.

An additional form of external reporting is the participation of CSOs in the reporting process of implementation of political rights and freedoms enshrined in the ICCPR and other international treaties, such as CEDAW.

Implementation of the ICCPR is monitored by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC). All states parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the committee on how the rights are being implemented. The committee examines each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the state party in the form of "concluding observations". NGOs have a critical role to play as outside observers and commentators in the monitoring of the implementation of the concluding observations, both by lobbying the state and with their own follow-up activities, including reporting.

CSOs can have an input into the common core document (CCD) produced by governments on their implementation of CEDAW, or if they do not feel that this represents their concerns they can submit a shadow CCD and make representation to the monitoring committee. They also have an important role in following up any observations.

To play such a role, CSOs may consider the following.

▶ Building knowledge on the stages and documents of the ICCPR and other international conventions' reporting processes. For the ICCPR this includes the following steps: the state reports – HRC adopts the list of issues – the state replies to the list of issues – a review by the HRC – concluding observations by the HRC – implementation and follow-up report by the state.

▶ Building knowledge on their possible role in the different phases of the reporting process: pre-sessional activities, lobbying during sessions and their role in the follow-up procedure.

▶ Raising awareness about the concluding observations by issuing press releases and organising press conferences, making the concluding observations available in the national language, lobbying for their implementation and reporting back to the HRC and other monitoring committees.

1. Supporting election legislation reform

Civil society organisations could conduct comprehensive advocacy campaigns, with all elements clearly determined and agreed upon internally, in the period between elections, to advance electoral reform. It is important that CSOs set realistic and achievable targets for their campaigns, taking into account existing resources of the organisation, the opportunities to increase these resources, from within the country or from international donors, the political environment and the readiness of authorities for dialogue and implementation of reforms, opportunities for working in coalition with other organisations, etc.

Following issuing of recommendations and setting up advocacy goals civil society organisations could engage in a number of follow-up activities. The post-election round-table events could be followed by smaller-scale events or working sessions involving one or more stakeholders in the electoral process, to discuss reforms and build support. Consequently, organisations could draft legislative proposals themselves.

Another format to discuss issues related to electoral reform consists of working groups involving decision makers and other stakeholders in the electoral process. In some places, these groups have functioned continuously for several election cycles and have involved local as well as international actors.

Good practice example: dialogue with political stakeholders

▬ In an effort to follow up to election recommendations, the OSCE in Georgia initiated the following working groups.

▶ Technical Working Group (TWG) – Meetings attended by international organisations working directly on election issues and staff from interested

embassies, organised with the aim of exchanging information on electoral assistance and election preparation.

▶ Ambassadorial Working Group (AWG) – Meetings at Ambassador's level, with briefings from the TWG regarding issues of concern, aimed at formulating action to be taken at political level, and to discuss electoral issues with Georgian authorities and opposition representatives.

▶ Election Legislation Working Group (EWG) – Meetings with political parties, CSOs, CEC and Ministry of Justice with the aim of bringing the election legislation into further compliance with reports and legal reviews/opinions of the ODIHR, Venice Commission and other international standards; and of improving the consistency and cohesion of the election legislation.

▬▬ After the closure of the OSCE Mission in Georgia in April 2014, the first working group (TWG) was transferred to EU/UNDP and the second working group (AWG) to the UNDP/Council of Europe (both of whom are co-chairing the group). The last group (EWG) was reformed since the parliament initiated its own Election Working Group. Civil society groups and political parties outside the parliament had their own working groups formulating suggestions for election legislation reform.

▬▬ In 2014, ahead of early presidential elections in Ukraine, civil society organisation OPORA lobbied for the adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code of Ukraine regarding enhancement of criminal punishment for electoral violations, in particular for vote-buying and fraud with electoral documentation.

2. Monitoring the implementation of recommendations

The Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation clarifies the role civil society is expected to play throughout the electoral cycle, listing monitoring "the development of changes to electoral related laws, rules, regulations and administrative procedures preceding and following elections".

This is a long-term effort which would benefit from co-operation with other groups in civil society, as well as with media organisations, and which requires ongoing dialogue and methodologies to monitor various government agencies.

Civil society organisations should define the areas they will monitor in accordance with their long-term strategies for the electoral cycle. Possible areas of focus are the use of administrative resources during elections or political party financing. At the same time, organisations should co-ordinate their efforts with international organisations involved in post-election work in the country. It has become very common for organisations like the OSCE or the Council of Europe to organise post-election events to discuss their final reports. Domestic observer groups should use these events as an opportunity to advance their issues. In turn, international donors might decide to support domestic efforts aimed at electoral reform.

Good practice example: reforming the PEC membership process

▬▬ After the 2010 local elections in Georgia, ISFED recommended that the election administration reform the recruitment process for PEC members. ISFED proposed to exclude persons who had been exposed to disciplinary liabilities from precinct election commissions for the next elections. Starting from 1 August through 31 October 2012, ISFED, jointly with GYLA (another local NGO), monitored the staffing of the precinct election commissions by conducting statistical research of 396 randomly and representatively selected election precincts. The monitoring revealed that 75 persons who had been exposed with disciplinary liability during the 2010 municipal elections were re-elected as PEC members by DECs for the 2012 parliamentary elections. No action was taken by the respective authorities. ISFED considers that such repeated monitoring activities could contribute to greater awareness among the election commissions and at some point to action.

3. Research and comparative studies

Civil society organisations could conduct research and comparative studies to provide information that government agencies could use when reforming the electoral system, for example. They could also engage in practical activities that will assist the work of government agencies in implementing reforms. Voter list audits conducted by CSOs are a valuable source of information for authorities engaged in improving the quality of the list and addressing shortcomings in the overall voter-registration process.

Good practice example: improving voter lists

▬▬ Between 2008 and 2012, the CEC undertook substantial efforts to improve the quality of the voter lists. In order to evaluate the work done and to assess the quality of the current voter lists, ISFED signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the CEC. The MoU allowed ISFED to work with the full version of the voter list, including personal numbers.

▬▬ The voter lists audit was performed using a national representative sample of 8 800 voters. ISFED repeatedly conducted voter list audits in all 75 election districts of Georgia by using two voter list auditing methods: List-to-People and People-to-List.

▬▬ As a result of the voter list audit the percentage of errors in it and its accuracy was assessed, and the work of the election administration related to the voter lists evaluated. The findings were shared with the CEC; both organisations decided to continue working towards:

▶ improvement of the legal base;

▶ harmonisation of databases existing in Georgia, both in content and software; and

▶ correction of mistakes still remaining in the voter lists.

Annexes
Annex 1 – Abbreviations and acronyms

CCD	Common core document
CEC	Central Election Commission
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO(s)	Civil society organisation(s)
CT	Core Team
DEC	District election commissions
DEOM	Domestic election observation mission
DHoM	Deputy Head of Mission
EA	Election administration
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
EOM	Election observation mission
EU	European Union
EUEOM	European Union Election Observation Mission
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
GNDEM	Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors
HoM	Head of Mission
HRC	United Nations Human Rights Committee
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICTs	Information and communication technologies

IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IDP(s)	Internally displaced person(s)
ISFED	International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy
LTO(s)	Long-term observer(s)
MPs	Members of Parliament
NGO(s)	Non-governmental organisation(s)
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PECs	Precinct election commissions
PR	Public relations
PS	Polling station
PVT	Paralell Vote Tabulation
STO(s)	Short-term observer(s)
ToT	Training of trainers
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

Annex 2 – Definitions

Capacity building

Initiatives that intend to strengthen institutional skills and faculties of an entity.

Case study

A type of training activity based on a comparative analysis. Taking one external case, which presents similar challenges to one's own, repeated mistakes could be avoided. Case studies and subsequent good practices generate global knowledge growth, and complex situations may be addressed with more efficient means.

Interdisciplinarity

An overall common approach that takes into account the different disciplines and perspectives that are involved in the entire electoral process.

Mock elections

A type of training simulation that consists of virtually reproducing the whole electoral process.

Role playing

A type of training simulation that consists of changing one's tasks. Each participant will acquire a broader knowledge and better practical skills since s/he will be able to understand others' commitments and responsibilities.

Simulation

A training exercise that intends to reproduce real-life situations so that participants can foresee what has to be done in each case. Different skills can be strengthened on a virtual basis, leading to better preparation for when real elections have to be implemented. Mock elections and role-playing strategies are simulation strategies that are normally used for electoral training.

Sustainability

The ability to maintain a CSO's activities and to face new projects with a proper assessment of the CSO's own means and resources.

Annex 3 – Reporting forms (examples)

Long-term observation reporting forms: pre-election

Observer names	
Team #	
Area of responsibility	
Reporting period	

ITINERARY
- ► List events and meetings you attended
- ► List areas visited

POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT
- ► What is the attitude towards elections?
- ► What is the nature of debate between political parties?
- ► How are election processes affecting governance?

VOTERS
- ► Observation on the process of the voter registration
- ► Concerns of the political parties, NGOs and voters
- ► State of the voter lists

ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

- ► Overview of activities of EA
- ► Compliance of the EA with the legal framework
- ► Transparency of the EA's work

CANDIDACY

- ► Observations of the processes for registration of candidates and political parties
- ► Complaints of candidates/parties
- ► Actions of the EA

CAMPAIGNS

- ► Violence in campaigning
- ► Character of the public rallies
- ► Observation of hate speech
- ► Intensity of campaigns

SECURITY ISSUES

- ► Any violence?
- ► Any perceived threat towards voters, political parties, EA or observers?

ANNEX – CONTACTS

- ► Include contact information of your interlocutors

Rally report forms

Observer names	
Team #	
Area of responsibility	
Date and time of the rally	
Location of the rally	

Name of the organising contestant (political party, candidate):

Name (if possible) and gender of speakers:

Approximate number of attendees:

Approximate percentage of gender division:

Summary (bullet points) of the political message:

Atmosphere and reaction of the attendees:

Has any inflammatory language been used?

If so, please provide concrete examples (including identification of speakers):

Have you noticed any incidents or moments worth mentioning?

Have the police/security been present during the rally?

If so, how was their behaviour?

Note: when reporting, please strictly indicate if you refer to observations, views, assessments made by your interlocutors or different people.

Incident report forms

Observer names	
Team #	
Area of responsibility	
Date and time of the incident	
Location of the incident	

Incident (please describe it as precisely and in as much detail as possible):

Were you present during the incident?

Did you see it on your own?

Do you know whether any formal actions/measures were taken (by police or other law-enforcement bodies, including detention, formal complaints, etc.)?

What is the planned follow-up of your team?

Can the Core Team assist you?

What is your assessment of the incident?

What impact does it have on the electoral process?

What might happen next?

Note: when reporting, please strictly indicate if you refer to observations, views, assessments made by your interlocutors or different people.

Long-term observation reporting forms: post-election

Observer names	
Team #	
Area of responsibility	
Reporting period	

TABULATION

- ► Received transmission of polling station results
- ► Transparency of tabulation process
- ► Presence of the media, non-partisan observers and poll-watchers

APPEALS PROCESS

- ► Number and nature of appeals
- ► Availability of appeals procedures
- ► Rejected appeals
- ► Result of the review of appeals

CERTIFICATION OF RESULTS

- ► Final results reported by returning officers

SHORT-TERM OBSERVATION

The short-term observer forms are the main source of information about election day. That way the Core Team can collect quantitative and qualitative data and come up with findings and conclusions about election day. The content of the forms depends on each country's specifics as well as on the domestic organisation's structure and observation methodology.

Statement/complaint (underline the relevant one)

a) If the statement/complaint is submitted to the precinct, the name of the precinct and the district, their number and an official (recipient) should be indicated.

b) If the statement/complaint is submitted to the electoral district, the name and number of the electoral district and the official (recipient) should be indicated.

Applicant/claimant _____

<div align="center">Name, surname, address according to registration, and phone number</div>

Institution, address, contact details, contact persons _____

Violation: ☐ Voting procedure   ☐ Vote-counting/summarising
                                          of voting results procedure

Time: _____ (hour) _____ (minutes)

Place: "___"" _____" election precinct

Essence of the violation

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Witness (if available)

_____

<div align="center">Name, surname, address according to registration place</div>

In case the violator is identified, his/her identification information that you were able to establish

_____
_____

Statement/explanation of violator (if available)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Other additional information

_____

_____

_____

According to the above-mentioned, please consider my statement/complaint and make a relevant response.

_____

_____

_____

"day""month""year" **Applicant/claimant:** _____

surname, name

Time of submitting application/complaint _____ **(hour, minutes)**

_____

Signature

Monitoring card: election day inside polling station

Observer's name
and surname _____

Monitoring
start time

1. Precinct centre n° /

2. Is the polling station accessible for wheelchair users – floor, ramps, wide doors, etc.

_____

_____

3. Please describe the arrangement of the polling booth, ballot box and tables for handing out the ballots.

_____

_____

4. Does the voting room have enough space to ensure the normal voting process and the activities of the persons entitled to stay in the voting room (Article 55(2))?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If no, describe it please:

_____

_____

5. Does the polling station have sample ballots?

Yes ☐   No ☐

6. Number of Electoral Commission members:

7. Were the functions of the Electoral Commission members laid down?

Yes ☐   No ☐

8. Are all the ballots signed or sealed by three Commission members?

Yes ☐   No ☐

_____

_____

9. Proxies of which candidates are present: _____

_____

_____

10. Are there observers from other organisations?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, specify the name of such organisations:

_____

_____

_____

11. Were there any problems with the opening of the polling station or before that?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, describe them, please:

_____

_____

_____

12. Were there any problems with the voters' lists (signatures of persons not voting, absence of a voter's name, data of the deceased, etc.)?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

_____

_____

_____

13. Are the same pens used during voting?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

14. Are there any instances of multiple voting by the same persons?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

15. Are there any instances of several persons entering the polling booth together?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

16. Are there any instances of voters marking the ballots outside the polling booths?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

17. Are there any trends among voters towards informing the Electoral Commission members or proxies, of or just announcing loudly, their voting after casting their vote?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, please describe how:

_____

_____

_____

18. Are there any other obstacles to the secrecy of the ballot?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, describe them:

    _____
    _____

    _____

19. Are there any persons in the voting room not entitled to be there?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, do you know them?

    _____

20. Who helps the persons in need of assistance? (Circle the answer)
    ► various strangers
    ► persons not entitled to help such people (persons who have already helped
      such people once, Electoral Commission members, proxies, other persons not
      entitled to stay at the polling station)
    ► no such incidents registered during the monitoring

21. Are the data of the persons helping the people unable to vote on their own
entered into the register?

    Yes ☐   No ☐   Not always ☐

22. What is the voting room discipline like? Are there often more than 15 voters at
a time there and how does the Local Electoral Commission control the situation?

    _____
    _____

    _____

23. Are there any campaign materials or campaign events at the polling station?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, describe them please:

    _____

    _____

24. Are the violations entered into the registry?

    Yes ☐   No ☐   Not always ☐

25. Were there any complaints on voting at the polling station?

    Yes ☐   No ☐

    If yes, describe them, please:

    _____

    _____

26. What actions does the Commission take to eliminate violations?

_____

_____

_____

27. How would you assess the work of the Commission members? (Assess by the scale below, circling your answer and noting the reasons for your assessment; 1 is "very good", 10 is "very poor").

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

_____

_____

_____

28. Is there any discriminatory treatment towards the proxies, journalists or observers?

Yes ☐   No ☐

_____

_____

_____

29. Number of the voters unable to vote on their own, according to the registry (find out before closing up the polling station): _____

30. Additional observations:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Monitoring end time   ☐☐

Monitoring card: election day around polling station

Observer's name
and surname _____

Monitoring
start time

1. Precinct centre n°/

2. Are there any items or groups of people within the radius of 50 metres around the precinct centre?

► Campaign materials/posters/calendars with the picture of a candidate's party, etc.

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, in favour of which candidate?

_____

_____

► Groups of people:

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, provide your opinion on the reasons for the group's presence: do you know them?

_____

_____

3. Have you noticed any incidents of:

► pressure, threat or coercion:

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, describe such incidents:

_____

_____

► collecting signatures:

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, for which candidate(s)?

_____

_____

► election bribes:

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, please describe where and how:

_____

_____

▶ transporting groups of people to the precinct centre?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If yes, in favour of which candidate(s)?

_____

_____

how often? _____

by what types of vehicles (circle the options)?

– cars

• licence plate numbers:

• brand(s): _____

– minibuses

• which minibus(es)? _____

• licence plate numbers:

Please take a photo of the vehicle(s) transporting groups of voters

4. Additional observations:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Monitoring end time   ┌──────┬──────┐
                         │   │   │
                         └──────┴──────┘

Monitoring card: vote-counting

Observer's name
and surname _____

Monitoring
start time ▢▢

1. Precinct centre n°/

2. Polling station closing time ▢▢

3. Number of:
   ► commission members _____
   ► observers _____
   ► proxies _____
   ► persons not entitled to be present at the vote-count sum-up _____

4. Number of voters having voted by a reference from the Passport Department: _____

5. Total number of voters: _____

6. Did the vote-counting begin immediately after the voting?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

   If not, when did the vote-counting begin and why was it delayed?

   _____
   _____
   _____

7. Were the ballots counted under the established procedure?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

   If not, please describe how.

   _____
   _____

8. Number of empty envelopes taken out of the ballot box: _____

9. Were there any incidents of a biased attitude to considering marked ballots valid or invalid (please take a photo of invalid ballots)?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

   If yes, how is it shown and in favour of which candidate?

   _____
   _____

10. Did the vote sum-up participants have free access to witness the entire vote-counting process?

　　Yes ☐　　　　　　No ☐

　　If no, describe why.

_____

_____

11. Additional observations:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please ensure you obtain a voting results statement.

　　　　Monitoring end time　　　☐☐

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The right to free elections, as enshrined in the Article 3 of the Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, is a "fundamental principle in a truly democratic political regime". It comprises a series of safeguards and procedures that ensure respect for active and passive electoral rights and the conduct of genuine free and fair elections. Civil society has a distinct role to play since it observes the electoral process and contributes to the development of national electoral procedures through advice and recommendations.

The Council of Europe handbook Reporting on elections aims to help observers become more efficient and to produce more effective reports, specifically focusing on the reporting of core team members. At the same time, it also covers the reporting of long- and short-term observers. It deals mainly with final election reports and reports/statements on preliminary findings, while also providing insight into interim reports and ideas for ad hoc reports and press releases, in addition to tips on how to follow up on recommendations.

This handbook gives an overview of the planning of observation activities from a reporting perspective: the scope of election observation, assessment of the organisations' reporting capacities, key observation principles and what observers could focus on, how to assess the reporting capacities of one's own organisation, and how to conduct training on reporting.

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