

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONDUCTING ELECTIONS SAFELY DURING THE PANDEMIC



განვითარებისა და დემოკრატიის ცენტრი  
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COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to significant technical, political and social threats to holding elections around the globe. the Coronavirus Pandemic has jeopardized more than 70 national elections, over 100 local elections and up to 10 referendums that were planned in 2020 all around the world. From March 1, 2020 to date, more than 50 countries of the world have decided to postpone national or local elections/referendums.

Up to 20 countries have managed to hold national or local elections/referendums, notwithstanding the pandemic. Since the spread of the Coronavirus is attended by considerable risks (technical and human) of delaying the electoral process, the countries had to cope with important threats (see the article) to be able to hold elections in a proper way; these threats have made it hard, or, in some cases -- impossible to organize elections appropriately, in-country, as well as abroad.

Georgia has upcoming Parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2020. Considering the level of the global pandemic and the situation in our country, state

institutions, political decision-makers, the Election Administration and all electoral stakeholders should timely assess expected threats and considering the practice of other countries and the recommendations of healthcare organizations, they should develop risks prevention/management action plan/strategy for conducting elections in a transparent and democratic manner.

The Center for Development and Democracy (CDD) has studied international practice related to the elections during the pandemic. Respectively, in our view, certain higher or lower risk electoral activities may affect the spread of the virus, public health and legitimization of elections, in particular:



- **DURING THE PRE-ELECTION/ELECTION PERIOD:** electoral campaign (Meetings with the citizens); registration of candidates; completing the lists of supporters; staffing election commissions; voter registration and verifying the list; trainings, voter education and awareness-raising; setting up polling stations (Especially abroad); public opinion survey, etc.;
- **ON THE ELECTION DAY:** the voting process, at polling stations as well as on its territory (Mobile ballot box); voter activeness and the participation of high risk voters (Physicians, border officers and quarantined voters) and etc.;

- **DURING THE POST-ELECTIONS PERIOD:** electoral disputes (Filing and review of complaints); summarizing election results and appealing; runoff elections, etc.;
- **THROUGHOUT THE ELECTIONS PERIOD:** sessions of election commissions; activities of various working groups (The CEC working groups, the Interagency Commission, technical team TWG and etc.).

In consideration of the above-mentioned risks, the relevant agencies should pay attention to and consider the following recommendations:

- **IT IS IMPORTANT TO ESTABLISH A COORDINATION COUNCIL PRIOR TO APPOINTING ELECTIONS;** the council would be made up of the representatives of the government, local and international organizations and health experts. The council will design preventive activities and recommendations for ensuring safe conduct of elections. The council shall also be in charge of timely delivery of relevant information and updates to voters.
- **TO MINIMIZE PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH THE CONSTITUENTS (Supporters),** for their campaigning electoral contestants shall use alternative mechanisms only, such as: social media platforms, the Internet or traditional media;



- IT IS IMPORTANT TO DEVELOP A SAFE mechanism of completing the lists of supporters of electoral contestants, in order to prevent the spread of the virus and to minimize physical contact with the constituents (supporters);
- IT IS DESIRABLE TO CONSIDER THE ONLINE REGISTRATION POSSIBILITY (E-mail, electronic platform, etc.) for the registration of candidates willing to run for elections;
- IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER A DISTANT OPTION FOR HOLDING A CONTEST (E-mail, electronic platform, etc.) for holding a contest to select the members of election commissions;
- THE ENHANCEMENT OF EXISTING DISTANT SERVICES and informing voters effectively is important for voter registration and verification in the list;
- IT IS IMPORTANT THAT TRAININGS OF COMMISSION members and stakeholders, public opinion survey; voter education and awareness-raising programs are implemented online;
- IT IS NECESSARY TO EXAMINE AND ANALYZE buildings and structures where polling stations will be housed to ensure that election commissions exercise own powers via maintaining social distance, as well as for safe conduct of the voting process. If necessary, an alternative of small polling rooms should be identified for setting up polling stations in a manner to enable all authorized individuals to exercise their rights without limitation and to minimize physical contact;
- SAFE AND ALTERNATIVE VOTING OPTIONS (Perhaps, early voting) should be considered to ensure effective participation of high risk voters (Medical personnel, border officers, quarantined voters, etc.), voters on consular registration





and vulnerable groups (Convicts/accused persons, the elderly, women, youth, ethnic minorities, benefit/assistance recipients and persons with disabilities, and etc.);

- **IT IS NECESSARY TO DEVELOP GUIDELINES:** for commission members, local and international observers, candidates, electoral contestants and mass media representatives, to ensure that they exercise their powers while maintaining social distance and that the voting process is conducted in a safe setting;
- **IT IS DESIRABLE THAT THE SESSIONS OF ELECTION** commissions and activities of various thematic working groups are implemented via maintaining social distance, if necessary, effective online platforms (e.g., direct broadcasting of sessions) should be used;
- **IT IS DESIRABLE TO ESTABLISH** an age cap for members of precinct election commissions, local and international observers, electoral contestants and mass media representatives, to prevent the spread of the virus and protect the health of risk groups;



- **IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER THE** possibilities of encouraging participation in elections to maintain the activeness of voters;
- **TO IMPLEMENT PREVENTIVE ACTIVITIES ON ELECTIONS DAY,** polling stations should be equipped with the personal protective gear (face mask, gloves, disinfectant solution, clothing as necessary, etc.) recommended by the WHO.