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Assessment of Voter Registration in Bosnia and Herzegovina



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April 2019

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1. Document Objectives

This document is designed to provide a summary of the status of voter registration in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and is the result of an assessment carried out by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), including discussions conducted with election stakeholders in BiH from March 18-28, 2019. Discussions were held with the Central Election Commission (CEC), civil society organizations, government agencies, and municipality-level registrar offices and voter registration centers (VRC).

The document provides an outline of the status, issues and considerations related to voter registration, and presents a series of indicative recommendations for consideration in the development of plans for improvements to voter registration in BiH.

This document does not attempt to provide detailed or technical guidance for any future voter registration systems or processes. Any detailed and technical plans and process improvements should be developed following dialogue and agreement between relevant agencies and other stakeholders and the subsequent full consideration of available options.

2. Legal Framework

The Central Voter Register (CVR) is established and maintained under the provisions of Chapter 3 of the Election Law of BiH. The law stipulates that the CVR will be a unique, permanent, and a regularly updated record of the citizens of BiH meeting the following criteria:

- a) Those age 18 or older;
- b) Those who will become 18 years of age on or before Election Day;
- c) Those who have the right to vote in accordance with the law but are temporarily residing abroad;
and
- d) Those who have the right to vote as provided by Article 20.8, paragraph (6) of the law as it relates to citizens with refugee status.

The Election Law further stipulates under Article 3.2 that the CVR shall not contain names of BiH citizens whose full legal capacity has been withdrawn by a final and binding decision of a competent authority. Under Article 1.7 citizens who are serving sentences or who have failed to comply with an order to appear before a court in relation to serious violations of humanitarian law as reviewed by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia shall not be included in the CVR.

The law outlines under Article 3.3 that the CVR will be established and maintained on the basis of records on permanent and temporary residence, from other public identification documents, official records maintained by the CEC and other competent authorities, and on the basis of public documents and data received directly from citizens.

Article 3.5 further clarifies that the CVR shall be maintained *ex-officio*, on the basis of records of the state authority that maintain the records of citizens of BiH in accordance with the Law on Central Registers and Data Exchange, this being the Agency for Identification Documents, Registers and Data Exchange (IDDEEA) of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Therefore, IDDEEA provides to the CVR data from registrar and Ministries of

Internal Affairs (MIA) offices relating to the change of permanent residence, civil detail changes, and the death of all citizens over 18 years of age, and as received from the competent ministry of BiH on deregistration of BiH citizenship.

Under the Election Law the CEC is in charge of technical maintenance of the CVR, and in addition to receiving data from IDDEEA under the Law on Central Registers and Data Exchange as above, shall also receive data from:

- Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) in relation to polling stations; and
- The CEC and MECs on changes of voting options.

Article 3.15 stipulates that citizens who have the right to vote under this law and are temporarily residing abroad shall be recorded in the CVR for the basic electoral unit in which they have registered as a permanent resident before departing BiH. A citizen who has the right to vote under the law and has the status of a refugee from BiH is to be recorded in the CVR for the basic electoral unit where they previously had permanent residence in accordance with the provisions of Article 20.8 of the law. Citizens with the right to vote under Article 3.15 are required to apply for every election.

Citizens who have the right to vote under this law and who have the status of a displaced person shall be recorded in the CVR on the basis of their expressed voting option, or place of voting, in accordance with the provisions of Article 20.8 of the law.

Article 3.8 outlines that a VRC will be established in each municipality and that the VRC shall:

- Provide technical support to the in identifying the polling stations on the municipal territory and in allocating of voters by polling station;
- Update polling station data in accordance with changes in number of voters and CEC regulations;
- Provide access to the printed extract from the CVR of the municipality territory;
- Provide data for the CVR as established by CEC regulations;
- Provide technical support to the MEC regarding requests and appeals of voters related to the extract from the CVR; and
- Carry out other tasks assigned by the CEC and the MEC, in accordance with CEC regulations.

3. Voter Registration in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Voter registration in BiH was an active process until 2006, requiring eligible citizens to apply. Since 2006, the registration process has been passive for in-country voters, with eligible citizens automatically being registered as voters based on their record of permanent residence when reaching the eligible age. The voter registration process however remains active for out-of-country voters, who are required to update their voting option for each election by mail, electronically, or by visiting diplomatic missions, and for in-country displaced voters to select their preferred voting option. The transition from active to passive

registration has resulted in a significant increase in the number of registered voters, from 2,322,687 for the 2004 local elections to 2,734,287 for the 2006 general elections and 3,024,127 for the 2008 local elections¹.

On August 30, 2018, the CVR for the October 2018 general elections consisted of 3,352,933 registered voters, including 77,814 out-of-country voters registered for postal voting, and 1,085 registered to vote in foreign diplomatic missions. The CEC reported a voter turnout of 53.3 percent for the 2018 elections.² The latest official population census for BiH was conducted from October 1-15, 2013. The census reference moment was September 30, 2013, with target coverage of all persons with a place of usual residence in BiH, regardless of whether at the time of the census they were physically present in BiH. The total population as of September 30, 2013, as published in the 2013 population census, was 3,531,159 persons, with 2,838,458 being 18 years and older. The population growth rate of BiH is negligible³, and therefore population estimates from the census could be assumed to be generally reflective of the 2018-19 population when projected forward.

The number of citizens registered with permanent residence in BiH by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (eligible voters), when compared to the number of persons registered in the 2013 population census, identifies a significant discrepancy between these figures. This discrepancy is potentially accounted for by members of the diaspora who have maintained their legal permanent residence but are not “usually resident” in BiH.

Observation reports from the 2014, 2016 and 2018 elections as published by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and Pod Lupom reported issues relating to deceased voters on the voter register, and issues with the potential abuse of out-of-country voting through the falsification of registration and misuse of ID cards and signatures.

Issues with deceased voters appear to have become more topical in the 2018 general elections, with increased criticism from the media and political parties. While detailed analysis of the pattern of deceased voters is not available, the reporting appears to indicate variation in scale between municipalities.

3.1. Stakeholders in Voter Registration

3.1.1. Central Election Commission

The CEC is responsible for maintaining the CVR, and although the CVR is maintained *ex-officio* on the basis of records maintained by other competent state authorities, the CEC is legally responsible for the accuracy and general integrity of the CVR. Under the Law on Central Registers and Data Exchange only originating authorities can update the data on which the CVR is based and are responsible for the accuracy of the data.

In terms of maintaining the CVR, the CEC is required to:

¹ Election Indicators 2002-14, Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina, https://www.izbori.ba/Documents/Statistika_i_rezultati_izbora/Statistika_izbora/IZBORNI_POKAZATELJI_2002-2014-eng.pdf

² OSCE/ODIHR *Election Observation Mission Final Report on General Elections 2018*, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bih/409905>

³ The World Bank derives from multiples sources a population growth rate of -0.29 percent.

- Inform competent authorities regarding any deficiencies in the provided data and take appropriate measures to remove the irregularities and establish an accurate and updated CVR;
- Draw up the excerpts from the CVR for displaced persons within BiH;
- Draw up the excerpts from the CVR for out-of-country voters;
- Keep special records of persons whose right to vote was withdrawn in accordance with the law; and
- Complete and verify the final excerpts from the CVR to be used for the elections.

3.1.2. Agency for Identification Documents, Registers and Data Exchange

IDDEEA is a technical agency established within the Ministry of Civil Affairs under the provisions of the Law on Central Registers and Data Exchange. The IDDEEA center is legally established as a multi-institutional service unit, physically located within the premises of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and at the entity level in the headquarters of the MIA. Under the law the center administers the following registers:

- a) JMBs – *jedinstveni matični brojevi* (unique citizen identity numbers).
- b) Passports.
- c) ID cards.
- d) Permanent and temporary residence.
- e) Visas and residency permits.
- f) Driver's licenses.
- g) Vehicle registration.
- h) Criminal records.

The IDDEEA center maintains registers on behalf of the Ministry for Civil Affairs or other public bodies. These bodies are the "originating authorities" for the data contained in the registers, and the specific contents of each database or set of records are determined in laws to be applied by the relevant originating authority. Unless otherwise stated by law, only the originating authority can alter or delete any data falling under its responsibility and retains full responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the information.

In essence, while IDDEEA provides the technical facilities including database and communications infrastructure to support the register of permanent and temporary residence on which the CVR is based, the accuracy and maintenance of the register data remains responsibility of the relevant originating agency.

3.1.3. Registrar Offices

Municipality Registrar Offices serve as the focal point for the registration of civil events including birth, citizenship, marriage and death. The structure of registries is based on the concept of registry books, with independent books being maintained by each respective municipality. Registries are progressively being digitized and this process has been completed for the vast majority of registries, and digitized registries are electronically linked within state entities in the Federation of BiH (FBiH) and *Republika Srpska* (RS), but not across entities.

Civil events including deaths are processed through an active process initiated by family or household members or other persons legally required to report the death according to law. To report the death of a

family member family members must provide accurate information regarding the birth, citizenship, marriage, ID card and other documents as required.

Registrar officers are required to verify personal and document details including the place of issuance of documents, and to prepare notifications to be sent to the registrars and MIA offices of the place of birth, citizenship, marriage and ID card issuance to facilitate the cancellation of the documents. Any errors in the notification details including unique numbers or spelling of names may result in documents not being cancelled, and death not being recorded in the central register of permanent and temporary residence and therefore continuing to be included in the CVR.

As there is no sharing of citizen registry data between entities, the verification of personal and document details across entities can only be conducted through informal communication between registrar offices of each entity, including telephone calls.

3.1.4. Ministries of Internal Affairs

The agency that conducts the registration and deregistration of citizen's permanent and temporary residence varies between the entities. For the FBiH the process is conducted by police administrations within the Cantonal MIA. For the RS the process is conducted by public security stations within the RS MIA. In Brcko District the process is conducted by the competent authority, which operates as a state institution.

The respective offices of the MIA are the only institutions in the voter registration process that have access to update the details of the central registry of citizens as maintained by IDDEEA. This means that the MIA is the only institution that can update citizen's place of permanent or temporary residence, and affect the deregistration of citizens as the result of a death notification.

3.1.5. Municipality Voter Registration Centers

VRCs are established in each municipality under the provisions of Article 3.8 of the Election Law and are supervised by MECs. The VRCs provide a public interface to the voting public and elections stakeholders at the municipality level and access to excerpts of the CVR for the municipality.

The VRC provide technical support to MECs, who are responsible for the designation of polling stations and the allocation of voters to the polling stations. The VRC use a system provided by the CEC to allocate voters to polling station according to street or street segment.

In the lead-up to 2018 general elections the VRCs undertook to cooperate with state and entity institutions to identify deceased voters on the voter register, and through this process identified around 5,000 records of deceased voters. The VRCs are able to identify and notate with "*" on the CVR voters who remain on the registry of citizens with permanent or temporary residence – and therefore CVR – but for whom deaths have been registered by municipality registrar offices. The VRCs are not authorized to undertake any direct action to remove the deceased voters from the central registry of citizens with permanent or temporary residence, as this must be done by MIAs.

3.2. Diaspora and Refugees

BiH citizens who are included in the CVR and temporarily residing abroad or have refugee status are eligible under provisions of Article 3.15 of the Election Law to be included in an excerpt of the CVR for out-of-country voting.

To be included in the register, citizens are required to apply to the CEC for every election. Applications must include proof of identity, accurate details of their address abroad, proof of permanent residence in BiH and a declaration regarding their preferred voting option. By law, applications must be signed by the applicant and may be submitted to a diplomatic and consular representation office or to the CEC by mail, fax or electronically.

Citizens who have refugee status but are not included in the CVR may also apply to the CEC. To meet proof of identity requirements, the following documents are admissible:

- a) Passport
- b) Driving license
- c) Valid ID card issued by the host country
- d) Refugee card issued by the government of the host country or another international organization

3.3. Displaced Persons

Under Article 20.8 of the Election Law citizens who have the status of displaced persons and are included in the CVR have the right to register and vote in person or as absentee for the municipality in which they had their permanent place of residence according to the last census conducted by the State of BiH, except in cases where they can provide proof of a change of his or her permanent residence in the period from the last census until they acquired status as a displaced person. Displaced persons may also apply to vote in person for the municipality of their current, temporary residence, provided that they became a resident of that municipality at least six months prior to Election Day.

The Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees is responsible for maintaining the central database of displaced persons and provided a digital list of approximately 100,000 displaced persons to the CEC. Prior to the 2018 general elections the CEC reported that 84,207 entries were complete, with the remaining records either containing incomplete or missing identity details.

3.4. Voter Registration Process

The voter registration process has been passive since 2006 based on the central register of citizen's permanent and temporary residence as administered by IDDEEA.

The register of permanent and temporary residence is maintained and updated based on citizen-initiated actions reported through municipality registrar offices and MIA offices – police administrations and public security stations. Citizens or their family members report life events to registrar offices, which are responsible for recording and issuing certificates for civil events such as birth, marriage, death and name change.

To record civil events on the central register of citizen's permanent and temporary residence, municipality registrar offices issue paper and electronic notifications to the relevant police administration or public security station according to the citizen's last place of issuance of their ID card. Upon receiving the notification, the police administration or public security station is then responsible for updating the central register of citizen's permanent and temporary residence.

For citizens to update their permanent or temporary residence or have ID cards or other official documents issued with change of name or other personal details, they are required to verify their civil documents with the municipality registrar offices prior to applying directly to their police administration or public security station. The police administration or public security station is then responsible for updating the central register of citizen's permanent and temporary residence to reflect these changes.

Only MIA offices have the ability and responsibility to update the central register of citizen's permanent and temporary residence as administered by IDDEEA. The CEC, MECs, VRCs and municipality registrar offices do not have access to or the ability to update any information on the central register of citizen's permanent and temporary residence.

The CEC maintains the CVR as an independent database, updated daily based on changes made to the central register of permanent and temporary residence as provided by IDDEEA. IDDEEA provides a full, monthly extract of voter registration data from the central register of permanent and temporary residence, which is then used to statistically verify the ongoing compatibility and accuracy of the CEC CVR.

The CEC makes no changes to citizens' data as provided from the central register of permanent and temporary residence. The CEC only updates a voter's eligibility on the CVR based on statements from the courts if his or her right to vote is withdrawn in accordance with the law and updates the voting option for prisoners based on listings provided by the courts.

MECs and VRCs are responsible for updating the CVR for the assignment of voters to polling stations and updating the voting options for displaced voters. They may indicate voters for whom deaths have been registered; however, the voter still appears on the CVR. MECs and VRCs are unable to update any other details on the CVR.

MECs and VRCs make extracts of the voter register available for inspection. Voters may also verify their voter registration details at any time through the CEC's web-based interface by inputting their name and ID number, and through a text messaging portal during the election period. If citizens wish to update any details of their voter registration record, they are advised to request amendment through their relevant municipality registrar and MIA office.

A diagram of the voter registration processes is attached as **Annex A**.

3.5. Challenges for Voter Registration

While perceptions of the overall voter register were generally positive during IFES' discussions with stakeholders, there were frequent concerns regarding the reported appearance of deceased citizens on the voter register and perceptions of the manipulation of the out-of-country voting provisions. These issues,

along with the large diaspora, were perceived to facilitate the opportunity for the possible abuse and manipulation of the registration and voting processes.

The CEC faces technical resource and capacity challenges with information and communication technology (ICT), which impact its ability to address procedural and timeframe challenges relating to voter registration. These include support and monitoring of MEC and VRC activities and the processing of applications for out-of-country voting in a timely and thorough manner. These issues impact the routine internal maintenance of the voter register and its ability to address the publicly perceived issues of deceased voters and out-of-country registration.

The voter registration process, including access to the process and the public perception of the quality of the resulting voter register, are significantly affected by a general lack of voter and stakeholder awareness and education. The lack of awareness and education impacts voters' understanding of their rights, particularly groups such as refugees and displaced persons. It also affects their understanding of the requirement to update their voting address and which agency is responsible for the management of their personal details.

The general lack of voter and stakeholder awareness and education potentially opens the opportunity for stakeholders with specific interest to manipulate the process and provide incorrect or misleading information to voters.

3.5.1. Deceased Voters

Deceased voters can only be removed from the central register of permanent and temporary residence and then voter register as the result of processes actively initiated at the municipality registrar office, and subsequent processing by the relevant MIA office.

The process for recording citizens' death is an active one and can only be initiated by family and household members or other individuals required to report the death to the municipality registrar office. When the death is reported, the registrar must search for or verify the document details of the deceased citizen, including birth, citizenship, marriage and ID card details. It should be noted that municipalities within the FBiH can search all registry records within the FBiH and municipalities within the RS can search all registry records within the RS, but searching across entities is not possible.

Following the document search and verification process, the registrar office is required to develop a paper-based notification for the cancellation of documents. This notification must be sent to the respective municipality registrar offices that issued the birth, citizenship or marriage documents, and to the police administration or public security station in the citizen's place of registered permanent residence.

The police administration or public security station updates the citizen's record on the central register of permanent and temporary residence as "deceased" upon the receipt and successful processing of this registrar notification, and the citizen's record is therefore removed from the CVR. The CEC, MEC, VRC and registrar offices cannot update citizen records as "deceased" on the central register of permanent and temporary residence.

No systematic process exists for reporting the deaths of members of the diaspora, particularly for those that have adopted a second citizenship. There is the possibility that deaths may be reported to a BiH diplomatic mission for citizens who hold only documents for BiH including permanent residence, no systematic process exists for these deaths to be reported back to the MIA and for their record on the central register of permanent and temporary residence to be marked as deceased. As with citizens deceased within BiH, the process for the reporting of death for members of the diaspora will only be initiated by family or household members or other individuals required to report the death reporting the death to the municipality registrar office, and this typically will commonly occur to facilitate the resolution of property ownership and inheritance.

While mechanisms are generally in place for the in-country reporting of deaths and the subsequent marking of these records as deceased on the central register of permanent and temporary residence, the successful and consistent completion of this process is reliant on the following factors:

- Active reporting of deaths by family and household members or other persons legally required to report the death, including for members of the diaspora;
- The ability for municipality registrar offices to successfully search for and validate details of civil documents. This challenge is further complicated due to the lack of integration between civil registers of the FBiH and RS;
- Notifications of death being developed by municipality registrar offices, including all correct details, and sent to the police administrations and public security station where the citizen was issued their latest ID card;
- Police administrations and public security stations are only able to update the deceased citizen records on the central register of permanent and temporary residence if all details on the received notification are correct, including birth certificate and ID details and all names spelled and notated exactly correctly; and
- No systematic follow-up processes exist for registrar offices to follow up with MIA to ensure that citizens reported as deceased by family members are removed from the central register.

The CEC has previously issued instructions for MECs and VRCs to identify deceased voters that still appear on the voter register for their municipalities. The MEC were requested to verify the voter register against the registrar offices' registry of deceased citizens, and to then identify any deceased voters on the CVR with a notation of "*" to inform polling committees during elections. Through this process approximately 5,000 deceased voters were notated prior to 2018 elections.

3.5.2. Out-of-Country Voters

Comparisons between the number of citizens on the central register of permanent and temporary residence and the population census indicate a significant diaspora population in BiH. The CEC opens active registration 150 days prior to each election for citizens who are included in the CVR but are temporarily residing abroad, and the application window is closed 75 days prior to Election Day. The closure date for applications is regulated to provide sufficient time for the verification and processing of applications and to ensure adequate time for mailing voting packages to voters.

Although the number of applications received is typically very low in comparison to the size of the diaspora, the CEC is under high pressure to process applications in the available time while diligently ensuring the legitimacy of applications. As noted by the CEC, the majority of applicants submit their applications late in the application window, leaving the CEC with little time for data processing and the verification of application and identity details.

Some diaspora associations have indicated that the low number of diaspora voters utilizing out-of-country voting is due to the active registration requirement, a lack of awareness of the process, and the restriction imposed by the requirement to utilize diplomatic missions and the mail system.

Due to limited resources the CEC faces a significant challenge in raising awareness and access to voter registration for eligible voters temporarily residing abroad, while still being able to process and verify applications to meet critical timelines and maintain the integrity of the process.

3.5.3. Central Election Commission Technical Resources

The CEC has developed systems in recent years to facilitate the CVR database update from the IDDEEA central register of permanent and temporary residence, to generate and manage voter register extracts, to facilitate the MEC and VRC processes (polling station allocation, updates to voting option, marking of deceased voters), and to provide web-based and text messaging voter verification.

The CVR database systems were developed by an external contractor based on Microsoft architecture, and, while functional, the CEC has limited resources to maintain and support the system. The MEC and VRC functionalities are based on an older system which is close to end-of-life and was developed using Oracle Forms under a technical architecture determined by IDDEEA.

The CEC faces significant challenges to engage, train and retain ICT capacity, which limits the CEC's ability to support and further develop the systems' efficiency and capability. These capacity challenges are made more critical by the requirement to support and maintain systems across two disparate architectures such as Microsoft and Oracle.

3.5.4. Voter Awareness

The CEC has limited resources for voter and stakeholder awareness, which creates a vacuum of information regarding the voter registration process, eligibility provisions and voting options, and how voters should update and maintain their voter registration and which agency is responsible for updating the data.

In a passive registration system voters need limited awareness of the routine processes of registration, but do need to understand the linkage between civil and voter registration, the respective responsibilities between civil and electoral agencies, and the cut-off times relating to changes in permanent residence and voting address.

Voter awareness is particularly critical for more marginalized communities such as refugees, displaced citizens and members of the diaspora. These communities are not more marginalized but also must take active steps to access their voting rights.

The absence of modern, effective voter awareness provides an opportunity for other stakeholders to provide inaccurate or misleading information on voter registration and the electoral process. The lack of accurate information on registration and voting options provides some opportunity for the loss or misuse of the voting rights of marginalized communities, whose voting rights could be abused through enrollment under their non-preferred voting option.

4. Recommendations to the Central Election Commission

Although the voter register for BiH is maintained through passive registration processes in conjunction with a relevant state agency such as the Ministry of Civil Affairs, there are a number of areas within the CEC's responsibility where qualitative improvements could be made.

4.1. Deceased Voter Process

Reports of deceased voters appearing on the voter register are inconsistent between municipalities, with some municipalities being reported through political parties, the media and in election observation reports as having a high number of deceased voters on the list and others as having very low numbers. These disparities indicate variations in the processing, updating, and communications within the respective municipality-level agencies, including registrar office, MEC, VRC and MIA.

Subject to further discussion and analysis, the CEC could consider developing instructions and accompanying ICT-based data capture and reporting tools that would facilitate VRCs to receive and verify on a regular basis copies of the notifications as developed by registrar offices and forwarded to MIA on a fortnightly or monthly basis. While this process is effectively similar to the procedure conducted prior to the 2018 general elections, the process should be expanded to include an interface through the VRC application that would facilitate greater recording, follow-up, monitoring and reporting.

The VRC application could be expanded to facilitate:

- Entry and capture of deceased voter's ID number and name from the registrar office notification, using an interface similar to the existing verification process;
- CVR verification to establish if the deceased voter remains on the voter register, and if so, marking the voter with "*" ;
- Establishment of an audit log of the ID numbers and names entered, actions taken and result of the verification; and
- Monthly or fortnightly reporting generated both at CEC and VRC to provide statistical reporting of the process by municipality and enable the follow-up of unresolved deceased voters.

The expanded VRC application would ensure that CEC can monitor the regularity of the process as conducted by VRC, and therefore support the consistency and regularity of the process. The CEC would be able to generate summary statistical reports by municipality that would demonstrate that the VRCs regularly check to verify if deceased voters remain on the register, the results of the verifications, how many unresolved deaths remain on the voter register for each municipality, and for how long the unresolved deaths have remained on the register. The statistical reporting would ensure that the CEC can target additional support and training for VRCs that are unable to conduct regular verifications or have high

numbers of unresolved deaths, and would place the CEC to respond to queries regarding the status of deceased voters, including their demographic and geographic patterns.

4.2. Out-of-Country Registration

The CEC should conduct further analysis into the feasibility of developing additional ICT-based tools to increase access to the registration process, streamline data processing and verification, and meet the strict timeline pressures.

The CEC could consider the development of an online web-based portal for applications for out-of-country voting, which could be accessed through the CEC website and other stakeholder sites. The use of a web-based portal could significantly improve access to the active voter registration process for the diaspora community, and the linkage to the portal from stakeholder websites could provide integration with broader voter awareness initiatives.

Subject to further discussion and analysis, the CEC could consider the development of a portal for the active registration of voters temporarily residing abroad. The portal could be developed using the following guidelines:

- Eligible voters temporarily residing abroad would be directed from the CEC website and other stakeholder websites to a web portal to complete an application form for their inclusion in the CVR extract for out-of-country voting.
- The web portal would include a complete, downloadable application form based on the following criteria:
 - The portal would ask the elector to review the eligibility criteria and confirm their eligibility for out-of-country voting and if they are temporarily residing abroad or have refugee status.
 - For voters temporarily residing abroad:
 - The voter will be required to provide proof of identity, and upload an image of the proof of identity document.
 - The voter will be required to enter their address abroad in a format that would facilitate verification and matching by the CEC.
 - The voter will be required to provide details of their permanent residence in BiH and to upload evidence.
 - For voters with refugee status:
 - The voter will be required to provide details of their proof of identity (passport, driving license, ID card of host country, refugee card) and upload an image of the proof of identity document.
 - The voter will be required to provide input proof of BiH citizenship and upload an image of the proof of identity document.
 - The voter will be required to enter their address abroad in a format that would facilitate verification and matching by the CEC.
 - The voter will be required to provide details of their permanent residence in BiH and upload evidence.

- The portal would display the form and ask the voter to confirm that all details are correct, and then ask if the voter wished to download and print the completed form for signature or if he or she wished for the completed form to be sent to their e-mail address.
- On confirmation of the details, the completed electronic form would be provisionally saved in the portal and CVR for internal CEC processing when the signed application is received.
- The voter would sign the downloaded and completed form.
- The signed form could be scanned and e-mailed directly through the portal or from the voter's e-mail device. The voter may alternately send the completed and signed form through fax, mail or a diplomatic mission.
- Voters would receive an electronic receipt confirming their application, including a unique application number to facilitate follow-up.
- All applications completed through the portal would be received by the CEC as both formatted electronic data and signed images. The electronic formatted data would facilitate electronic verification of identity data across agency databases, and the attached images can be used for verification of signatures and authenticity. Formatted electronic data will also facilitate additional checking, including the matching of address information for analysis of residential numbers.
- Voters with approved applications would be included in the extract of the voter register for out-of-country voting.

The additional points should be considered in evaluating the potential adoption of the registration portal:

- Voters would be guided by the portal through the completion of applications forms, and therefore all details should be complete and correctly formatted to enable automated processing and verification processes.
- No data entry will be required by CEC for any applications developed through the portal, which would reduce processing time significantly. Therefore, wide use of the portal should be encouraged over handwritten mail and fax-based applications or applications manually submitted through diplomatic missions. Where feasible, applicants reporting to diplomatic missions could be assisted to use the portal within the mission.
- Additional security and identity verification processes could be integrated with the system through web, e-mail, phone and device confirmation tools.

The adoption of the registration portal for voters temporarily residing abroad should improve outreach to eligible out-of-country voters, link with voter awareness initiatives, decrease processing times through reduction of CEC data processing and facilitate automated database verification by ensuring that data received is complete and correctly formatted. These steps would ensure that the CEC would have additional time to conduct more comprehensive due review of applications to ensure the integrity of applications prior to the cut-off date for finalizing the extracts.

4.3. Information and Communication Technology Systems

Due to the difficulty in recruiting, training and retaining competent ICT staff, the CEC faces serious capacity challenges in the support and maintenance of ICT systems. Having the two major parts of the voter registration system on different platforms (Microsoft and Oracle) further exacerbates the CEC's capacity challenges and affects the overall sustainability of the systems and ability to improve functionally.

The VRC application as used by MECs and VRCs for polling station allocation, updating of voting options and the marking of deceased voters is built on Oracle Forms and is close to end-of-life. Additionally, the VRC application requires further development to increase the functionality of the centers to enable systematic follow-up with municipality registrars, the local production and verification of extracts and the ability to produce regular statistical and qualitative reports.

It is therefore recommended that the CEC consider the redevelopment of the CVR applications to meet the following requirements:

- Develop all systems on a common integrated technical architecture, including standardized hardware, network, operating system and application platforms;
- Develop functionality to facilitate the follow-up of registrar death notifications as outlined in Section 5.1;
- Develop functionality to enable the MECs and VRCs to locally produce extracts of the voter register for verification; and
- Develop more comprehensive statistical and qualitative reporting to enable VRCs to monitor variations to the voting population in their municipality and facilitate verification against other local registers. The reporting tools should be flexible to facilitate statistical reporting, including registrants by polling station, age- and gender- disaggregated data, additions, changes and removals (e.g., deaths).

4.4. Voter and Stakeholder Awareness

The limited levels of comprehensive, accurate, informative and well-targeted voter awareness from the CEC opens the opportunity for other stakeholders to fill this void with potentially inaccurate or misleading information.

The CEC should consider the development of specific and targeted voter awareness strategy and programs using creative and modern approaches and media. The strategies should be developed specifically for targeted groups utilizing passive registration (in-country voters with permanent residence in BiH), and targeted groups subject to active registration (displaced voters, refugees, voters with permanent residence in BiH but temporarily abroad). The strategies and programs should be linked to the CEC processes for registration and verification, including mechanisms for eligible voters to update or verify their voting options that already exist.

The awareness strategy development should be developed focussed on addressing the following questions:

- Who does the CEC want to communicate with (targeted groups)?
- What actions or behavior does CEC want to promote with these targeted groups?
- What key messages and services does CEC want to deliver?
- What media and other communication mechanisms, including stakeholders, will the CEC use to deliver the awareness messages?
- Who is authorized to deliver messages and to speak to the media on behalf of CEC?
- How will CEC evaluate the results of the communication and awareness strategy?

Following the development and approval of the communication and awareness strategy the CEC should develop an estimate of the timing and resource requirements for the programs, and develop plans for the implementation of an innovative, modern and targeted awareness program for voter registration.

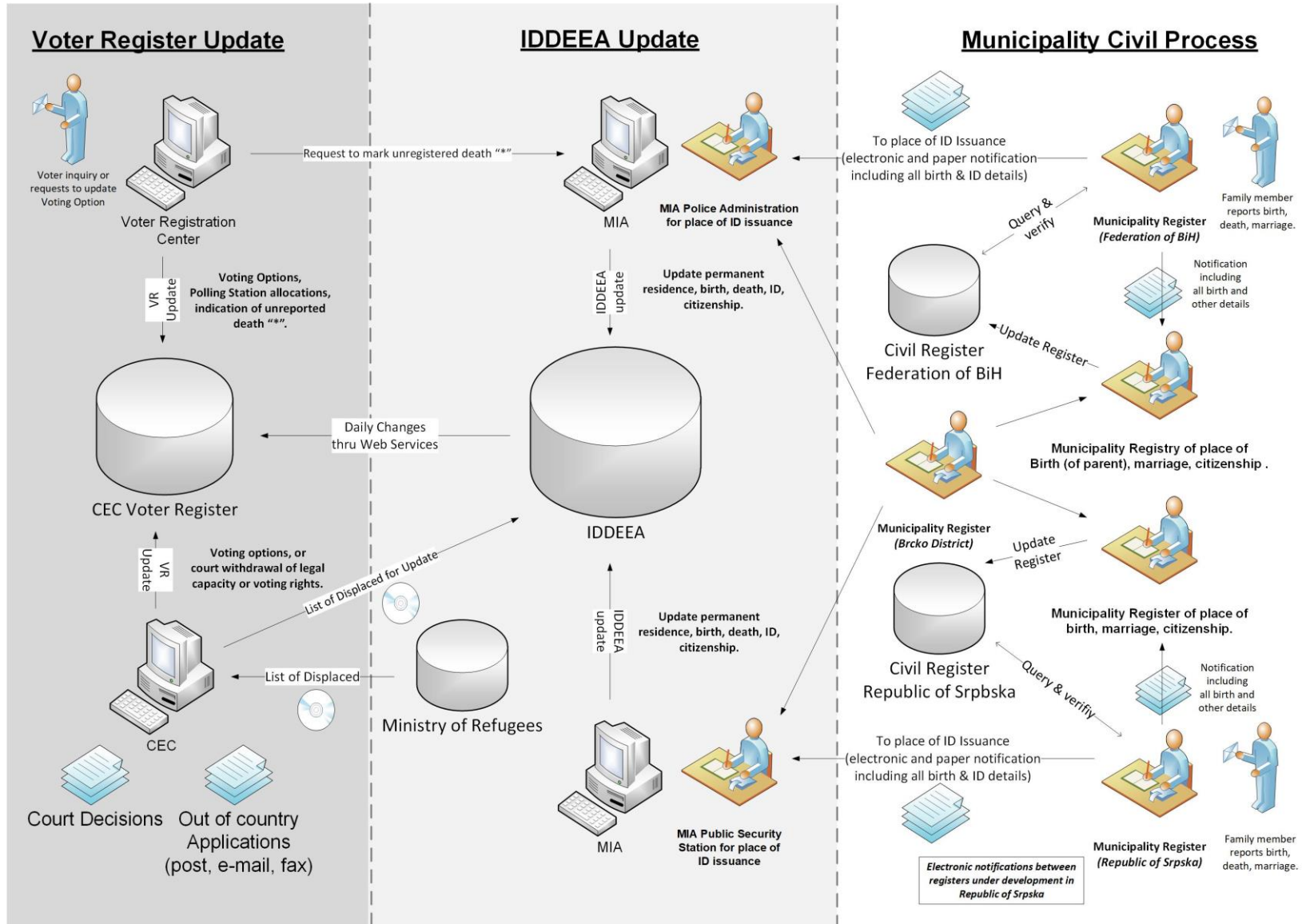
5. Recommendations Relating to Other Agencies

Further to the above recommendations relating directly to the areas of authority and responsibility of the CEC, additional recommendations could be considered by other stakeholders that play key roles in the voter registration process. These recommendations include the following:

- As also recommended in the CEC report titled “New Technologies in the Electoral Process – Challenges and Opportunities for Application in Bosnia and Herzegovina,”⁴ the accuracy and integrity of the CVR would benefit from further technical integration of the feeder registers such as the civil registers of the FBiH, RS, and the IDDEEA central register of permanent and temporary residence. The technical integration and enhancement of connectivity and communication between these registers would ensure more timely and accurate verification between the civil registers of the entities, enhance the ability of MIA offices to verify the accuracy of death notifications from registrar offices and facilitate feedback and communication between MIA offices and registrar offices on the removal of deceased citizens from the central register for permanent and temporary residence and therefore the CVR.
- The CEC could consider discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding integration and information sharing between the consular registration process of BiH diplomatic missions and the registration processes for out-of-country voters. At minimum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and CEC could consider the provision of awareness material to citizens on out-of-country voting at the time of consular registration, passport application or other consular service provision, and could also consider the use of electronic (e-mail, phone) notification of registered citizens at the time of opening of the active out-of-country voter application window and the provision of a linkage to the application portal as discussed in the out-of-country registration recommendations.
- The CEC could consider discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the notification process for deceased citizens in the diaspora. Mechanisms could be considered for the periodic notification of deaths reported to BiH diplomatic missions to municipality registrar offices or the CEC. These mechanisms could facilitate the pre-recording of deaths by registrar offices pending reporting by family or household members, and the notation of deceased voters from the diaspora with “*” on the CVR.
- The CEC should consider engaging relevant stakeholders in a CEC-led consultative working group, aiming to jointly work to address voter registration challenges. Stakeholders’ understanding of roles and functions of various institutions involved in development of CVR is critical. Stakeholders, including political parties, civil society and media, can play an important role in raising voters’ awareness of voter registration, which could be achieved through regular CEC-facilitated meetings with stakeholders, coordination and information sharing on relevant activities, and collaboration during election and non-election periods.

⁴ http://www.izbori.ba/Documents/2017/N_T_2017/New_tehnologije.pdf

Annex A – Schematic of Voter Registration Process in Bosnia and Herzegovina





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