Assessment Study on the electoral information and training needs of target groups of stakeholders in Albania

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABA	Albanian Blind Association
APS	Academy of Political Studies
BCC	Ballot Counting Centre, Albania
CDO	Coalition of Domestic Observers
CEAZ	Commission of Electoral Administration Zone, Albania
CEC	Central Elections Commission of Albania
CFFE	Coalition for Free and Fair Elections, Albania
CRCA	Children's Human Rights Centre of Albania
CoE	Council of Europe
CT	Counting Team, Albania
EAZ	Election Administration Zone
IRCA	Institute of Romani Culture in Albania
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSCE/ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
PAK	Albanian abbreviation for disabled persons (persona me aftësi të kufizuar)
RW	Roma Women, Albania
VCC	Voting Centre Commission, Albania
WDNA	Women's Democracy Network Albania
WR	Women's Rights, Albania

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Part I - Introduction

1. ABOUT THE STUDY

The present study was commissioned by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Presence in Albania, with the financial assistance of the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania, and in close cooperation with the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and the Council of Europe.

The aim of the study is to identify election-related information and training needs of various groups of voters, including those particularly vulnerable. Three target groups were identified: vulnerable voters (women, national minorities, Roma and Egyptian communities the disabled/PAK and young voters), local elected officials and domestic observers. The study should be based on feedback gathered through interviews conducted with 1215 citizens, representing the mentioned target groups, in four regions of Albania: Tirana, Shkodra, Fier and Gjirokastra. Furthermore the assessment study should provide guidelines for developing specific training curricula tailored to the particular needs of the above-mentioned groups.

The study is part of a broader effort by the OSCE Presence and the Council of Europe to support the CEC in identifying and implementing successful models of electoral training and of electoral information and education. Following past work in this area, the CEC has identified the setting up of an autonomous Centre under CEC as the preferred model. A proposal to modify the law in this direction was extended to Parliament.

Both the Presence and the Council of Europe are committed to pursuing their assistance to the CEC in view of creating and consolidating a future Centre which should deal with these issues. While this objective requires substantial efforts and resources, it should be preceded by a strategic assessment on the information and training needs pertaining to the Centre's different target groups. The present study is part of such an assessment work and focuses on the needs of vulnerable voters, local elected officials and domestic observers as well as on ways to address them.

Improving electoral information and education of the target groups serves the overall aim of increasing their electoral knowledge and competences. This in turn is expected to contribute to respecting election rights, fighting electoral fraud and malpractice, increasing participation and ultimately trust in elections.

The present report is organised as follows:

- Part I includes a summary of key findings (chap.2) and methodology (chap.3).

- Part II is the main one. It presents the legal framework (chap. 4), recent findings and recommendations of expert bodies on the topic of electoral information and education (chap.5). The findings of the survey of vulnerable voters, local elected officials and observers are presented and discussed (chap.6). Conclusions are listed in chapter 7.

- Based on the findings of Part II, Part III of the study introduces proposals for organising the electoral information and education in the future (chap.8) and for evaluating the impact of educational activities (chap.9).

The specificity of the present study compared to previous ones resides in the survey of vulnerable voters, local elected officials and domestic observers in order to identify their evaluation of the current situation and to gather their proposals for improvement.

Important to note, the present study only considers electoral information and education needs of vulnerable groups of voters, of local elected officials in charge of organising elections and of domestic observers. The study does not deal with the needs of election commissioners (although reference to them is made by several respondents). The needs of election commission-

ers and proposals to address them were part of a previous study to which the author participated.[1]

One of the challenges for the study was the short time at disposal for analysing results of the survey of 1215 interviewed who replied to a total of 131 questions (devided in three questionnaires, one for each group). Several questions were open ones (free text) and their content needed to by analysed and summarized. The data gathered can be further and deeper analysed, especially if they are to inform a future long-term strategy on electoral information and education and/or if the questionnaires are to be used for future surveys.

Another limitation relates to the willingness and readiness of respondents to sincerely reply to delicate questions like those on electoral irregularities and violations. Some results, which clearly were different from what is commonly known and accepted (e.g. on the existence of electoral irregularities), had to be further examined and interpreted.

2. KEY FINDINGS

The Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and its Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights (ODIHR) assist the Albanian authorities with electoral expertise. The objective is for Albania to meet Council of Europe and OSCE standards for democratic elections.

The Central Election Commission of Albania (CEC), national and international election observation organisations including OSCE/ODIHR, the Council of Europe, its Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and its Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) have identified throughout the years needs for improvement in electoral information, education and training of different stakeholders, including vulnerable voters, domestic observers and local elected officials. Proposals for modifications to the electoral law have been extended to the Parliament.

The present study is based on a survey organised with 1215 respondents from three target groups: vulnerable voters (including women, minorities, the disabled and youth), local elected officials and domestic observers. It also takes into account previous findings and recommendations from international and national bodies.

The study identified a number of areas where information and education work should be considered a priority. CEC should explain voters, especially vulnerable ones, how to deal with electoral irregularities and violations. It is necessary that CEC clarifies the conditions and possibilities for individuals and groups to complain in case their right to free elections is breached. It is also important that CEC and judicial bodies become more active and transparent in pursuing violations and informing about them. This is even more important given the fact that political parties and candidates did not seem to make full use of their right to complain in past elections. These measures will contribute to building trust in elections.

Pedagogic work is also needed when it comes to the role of the media. Informing the public about media's role in democratic elections is necessary. Vulnerable voters heavily rely on media, especially TV, to obtain electoral information. By becoming more aware of the role of the media in elections and critic towards information they receive from it, they will contribute to improving media electoral information (in addition to other factors, such as application of legal sanctions).

More information on special needs of PAK is necessary, especially towards local government in charge of organising elections. Targeted information and education for candidates from vulnerable voters would help promote their representation rights. The study makes proposals for the future organisation of information and education activities.

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[1] « Enhancing CEC-driven electoral training », Nov. 2015, available at Council of Europe Office in Tirana.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The study

The study is organised in three parts.

Part I introduces the context, presents a summary of key findings and explains the methodology used.

Part II discusses the legal framework, conclusions and recommendations from previous evaluations and the results of the survey.

The legal framework includes both national and international legislation applicable to the organisation of elections and to electoral information and education. Decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) are part of it. The legal framework also includes interpretative documents (so-called soft law instruments), such as Venice Commission's Code of good practice on electoral matters, which reflect the principles of the European electoral heritage. Soft law elements become mandatory as the ECtHR includes/refers to them in its case law.

Conclusions and recommendations on election information and education in Albania, mainly from OSCE/ODIHR, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and Congress of regional and local authorities, refer to good international practice. They provide guidance to Albanian authorities on how to comply with/implement European electoral heritage standards. Work of domestic observers is also based on such European and international standards. CEC 2015 strategy and projects on information and education are examples of recent work in this area in Albania.

The results of the survey organised with 1215 respondents, belonging to three main groups (vulnerable voters, local elected, domestic observers) in four regions of Albania are analysed from a statistical point of view. Results are then discussed and put into perspective. Information and education needs of respondents are identified and their proposals for improvement are summarized. The three questionnaires (one for each target group) can be perused for future surveys in order to obtain comparable data from same groups in time, in different areas and in other districts. The comparison will provide a basis for evaluating the impact of future information and education strategy and activities. A concluding chapter presents a summary of the results of the survey. It may help orient future decisions on information and education.

The concluding Part III presents proposals for future work. They include proposals for addressing electoral information and education needs of the target groups (by the CEC or by the future Centre specialised in electoral training and education) and proposals for evaluating work in this field. Proposals rely on suggestions from the survey, international and domestic observers' recommendations and lessons learned from past CEC work in this field.

3.2 The survey

OSCE Presence identified three target groups and the regions to be covered by the survey. The target groups are: vulnerable voters (including women, national minorities, Roma and Egyptian communities, people with disabilities and young voters); local elected officials and domestic observers. The regions covered are: Fier, Gjirokastra, Shkodra and Tirana.

The author of the study prepared three questionnaires, one for each target group. The questionnaires are in Albanian. They are annexed to this report. The aim of the questionnaires is to identify election information and education needs specific to each group and suggestions for improvement. Questions were compiled taking into account previous, election related evaluations and conclusions by national and international players.

The questionnaire for vulnerable voters includes 36 questions and 23 sub questions. The questionnaire for local elected officials includes 18 questions and 27 sub questions and the one for domestic observers has 17 questions and 10 sub questions. For most questions and sub-question a number of options for reply were proposed. Almost always it's possible to choose more than one reply. All in all 71 questions and 60 sub questions were asked to 1215 respondents in face to face interviews. Replies are analysed in chapter 6.

The author also prepared a database (MS access) and the digital forms for collecting the data. After receiving the results of the survey the author prepared tabular presentations (MS excel) of the results for each question and sub-question (153 documents total). Questions to vulnerable voters are labelled "A" to "F"; questions to local elected are "G" to "H" and questions to domestic observers are labelled "J"). The data collected (in MS access and excel) is available at OSCE Presence.

A local partner, the Academy of Political Studies (APS), conducted the survey of the 1215 interviewed and collected the information. APS hired 12 interviewers, drawing from its network of alumni and from other NGOs. APS organised mid January a one-day training to explain the aim, content and format of the questionnaires as well as the modalities for filling them in, saving and transmitting data. APS liaised with the author, saved and transmitted the filled-in questionnaires and provided some general statistical information. The questionnaires were anonymized and the data handled in accordance with legislation on data protection.

The interviewed persons were identified by APS and its interviewers, in cooperation with civil society organisations. Wherever possible the gender balance among the interviewed persons was respected. The interviews were conducted face to face, from 16 January to 10 February 2017 in the four selected electoral districts selected. The importance of obtaining sincere replies from respondents was underlined. APS supervised the work of the interviewers to make sure that they proceeded in a professional and timely manner.

Part II – Discussion

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

A national legal framework for elections is composed of principles of constitutional level, of laws and regulations.

The **principles of constitutional level** are higher level principles to be found in the international treaties and conventions ratified by the country and in the national Constitution. Decisions of the ECtHR are also part of the higher level principles.

In particular, the following international instruments contain principles of constitutional level applicable to elections:

- Article 25 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[2] which recognizes and protects the rights of every citizen to take part in the conduct of public affairs, the right to vote and to be elected and the right to have access to public service. General Comment nr. 25 are of the same constitutional level.

- Article 3 of Protocol 1 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms[3] (ECHR) on the right to free elections and related case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

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[2] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. New York, 16 December 1966,
https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en.
[3] http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/treaties/html/009.htm.

- Election related articles 9 to 11, art. 14 ECHR and article 1 of Protocol 12 (P12-1) to ECHR dealing with freedom of association, of opinion and of assembly as well as with prohibition of arbitrary and related ECtHR case law.

The following universal and regional instruments also contain provisions dealing with elections:

- Election related articles in a number of international and regional treaties and conventions ratified by Albania[4] as well as in interpretative (soft-law) instruments, dealing, among others, with voting and representation rights of women, minorities and the disabled. At the UN level: ICERD, CPRW, CEDAW, CRPD and soft-law documents (Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to minorities, Declaration on the elimination of discrimination against women, Declaration on the rights of disabled persons, Declaration on the elimination of racial discrimination, among others). At the regional level: treaties ECHR, ECHR-P1, ECHR-P12, FCPNM, CPFPL, etc. and not-treaties standards (several Recommendations) contain election related provisions.

At the national level, constitutional principles on elections are:

- Art.45 to 48 (chapter III) of the Albanian Constitution dealing with Political Rights and Freedoms, namely the right to vote, the right to organize collectively, the right to demonstrate peacefully, the right to address requests, complaints or comments of individuals or organisations to public organs.

Provisions of constitutional level provide the general frame. They are implemented by more **detailed provisions to be found in the national law on elections**.

Election information and education provisions are to be found in the Law nr.10019, of 29.12.2008 "Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania" as modified by subsequent acts[5].

Relevant and important provisions are found also in the Penal Code, title X, articles 325 to 333, which deal with infringements to free elections and to a democratic system.

The following articles in the electoral Code assign specific tasks on election information and education to the CEC:

- art. 21§9 of the Code trusts the CEC with taking measures and organizing voter education programmes for citizens,

- and art. 21§10 trusts the CEC with conducting training on election administration periodically outside the electoral period for all persons interested and distribute the respective certificates.

Constitutional and law-level principles are implemented through detailed regulations. These include the three Regulations concerning CEC activities as well as the decisions (vendime) and instructions (udhëzime) issued by CEC and the decisions of the Electoral College (judiciary).

More specific provisions on election information and education are found in the internal Regulation on the organisation and functioning of CEC, of 2.11.2010 (Rregullore e brend-

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[4] For an overview of instruments ratified by Albania, see EODS (2016), Matrix on the Status of Ratification of Instruments within the UN system (pp. 95-114) ; Matrix on the Status of Ratification of Instruments within the Council of Europe (pp. 162-164) ; Council of Europe non treaty standards (pp. 165-181).

[5] The Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, approved by Law no. 10 019, dated 29 December 2008, amended by Law no. 74/2012, dated 19 July 2012 and Law no. 31/2015, dated 2 April 2015

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shme e organizimit dhe funksionimit të administratës së KQZ-së, miratuar me Vendimin nr. 40, datë 02.11.2010)[6]:

- art.13 on the organisation and duties of the "Sector for voter education" which foresees that this sector compiles and publishes a *strategy* as well as the *materials* necessary for implementing it. In addition, it *coordinates* with a number of other stakeholders which also work in the field of information and education, including media, central and local government and civil society organisations.

When translating constitutional principles into law and into detailed regulations, the legislator and the administration can be guided by soft law instruments such as Venice Commission's Code of good practice in electoral matters and related interpretative documents.[7] These soft law instruments constitute the legal background of OSCE/ODIHR conclusions and recommendations as well.

5. PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

5.1   General

Only a few conclusions and recommendations from international organisations are specific to electoral information and education of vulnerable voters – the target groups of this study. Recommendations from OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe (Parliamentary Assembly, Congress of Regional and Local Authorities, Venice Commission) focus primarily on professionalism and independence of election commissioners – an important group which is outside the scope of this study. However, addressing the issue of electoral education and training of election commissioners – e.g., through the creation of an autonomous Centre – will strengthen institutional capacities in this field and, as a result, will contribute also to better electoral information and education of vulnerable voters.

A certain number of other recommendations from international organisations have also been included. Although not directly focusing on information and education, their implementation would have a direct impact on the exercise of voting rights by the target groups, for instance by improving their freedom to vote (recommendations on fighting vote buying or voter coercion, for instance). To the extent that they point to problematic phenomena, particularly affecting the target groups of this study, these recommendations need to be thematized and discussed as part of the information and education effort too. This would contribute to increasing voters' awareness.

Furthermore, domestic observers have reached a number of conclusions and issued recommendations, based on European electoral standards, with respect to the information and education of the target groups. Their main proposals, discussed mainly in 2015, will be reported below. We will also refer to work by CEC on information and education in the municipal elections 2015 and lessons learned from that experience.[8]

5.2   OSCE/ODIHR

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[6]

http://www.cec.org.al/Portals/0/Documents/CEC%202013/LOGO%20KQZ/Regullore%20e%20administrates%20se%20KQZ.pdf

[7] Venice Commission opinions are based on the European electoral heritage which is part of the common heritage mentioned in the ECHR Preamble. Its main guidelines and studies concerning electoral matters have been published in a single volume: Venice Commission (2013) *Electoral Law*.

[8] CEC experiences and domestic observers' conclusions were discussed in the post-electoral conference co-organised by CEC, Council of Europe and OSCE/ODIHR in September 2015 in Tirana.

OSCE/ODIHR 2015 priority recommendations focus on the electoral administration, as already mentioned. One recommendation is specific to one vulnerable group:

- ensuring comprehensive voter education programs tailored to the needs of Roma and Egyptian and other national minorities.

Other recommendations from 2015 and 2013 OSCE/ODIHR reports on resp. general and municipal elections, aim at improving active and passive voting rights of vulnerable groups. They are addressed to the legislator and to election administration however their message should be included in future information and education messages as well, to help raise voters' awareness of their rights and obligations. Raising voters' awareness may in turn contribute to increasing accountability of those in charge of implementing the recommendations. Such recommendations include:

- clarifying restrictions to the right of vote;
- ensuring that pressure is not applied to public sector employees, etc., to participate in campaign events or to vote in a particular way;
- more resolute steps to prevent, identify, investigate and prosecute proven instances of such pressure and intimidation as well as the misuse of state resources for campaign purposes;
- addressing the persistent issue of vote buying both through voter education and prosecutions; genuine commitment from political parties to condemn vote-buying practices;
- allowing reduced mobility persons (incl. the elderly) to exercise their right to vote;
- discontinuing the practice of automatically removing voters over the age of 100 from voting lists;
- adopting well-in-advance clear rules for candidate registration and withdraws;
- ensuring equal access of candidates to public funding;
- ensuring equal rights for independent candidates;
- positive discrimination measures to promote women candidates;
- media monitoring to ensure unbiased coverage of political actors and to sanction unbalanced coverage;
- afford citizen observers the same rights as partisan observers;
- increase transparency of the tabulation process. All observers should be entitled to receive certified copies of the results;
- publish information on complaints and decisions in a timely manner.

5.3   Council of Europe

In its 2015 report, the Council of Europe Congress of regional and local authorities highlighted the following aspects, which can be mentioned in future information and education activities, to increase awareness of vulnerable voters:

- the risk of electoral fraud and manipulation of voters needs to be addressed;
- a level playing field for independent candidates should be ensured;
- measures should be taken to ensure independent, sustainable and balanced journalism particularly during electoral campaigns.

5.4   Civil society

A summary of findings and recommendations, related to information and education activities, by domestic observers (CFFE, the Albanian Helsinki Committee, Electoral Room)[9], is presented below. They highlight problematic issues which need to be addressed, among others, also through information and education of voters, esp. vulnerable ones. They include following findings and recommendations:

- more work is needed on voter information and education on their right to vote;
- more work is needed to strengthen voters' role in the electoral process, by ensuring the correctness of voters' lists, informing voters on the lists, informing voters on the possibilities to communicate with the electoral administration to make sure their voting rights - namely of vulnerable voters - are respected;
- lack of public discussion on the programs proposed by candidates. Citizens had no possibility to form their opinion because they were not offered substantive information on programs;
- lack of access to personal characteristics of candidates. The law should foresee that a curriculum vitae of candidates is published in order to have transparency on the quality of candidates. It is also important that people with criminal records are not allowed to candidate;
- the composition of 80% of parliament/council/mayors is known 40 days prior to elections by the parties. In such a case elections do not fulfil their role of offering a real choice to voters. The president of the party monopolizes everything and elections are basically transformed into a choice of party presidents;
- need to stimulate independent candidates;
- need to stimulate representation of minorities on the lists;
- media should offer free/reasonable access to opinions of civil society on electoral campaign. Currently it is prohibitively expensive for civil society to echo their opinion on the TV media;
- media should play its role and offer a platform for discussion. Currently media limits itself to a kind of reporting which is pre-prepared by political parties and exercises no critique;
- in the local elections in 2015 women made up 50% of candidates on lists and 47% of entitled voters. Participation in elections for women was 42%. Some 37% of elected councils' members were women but only 5% of mayors (9 mayor women) (statistics on gender participation were for the first time provided by CEC). However there are a lot of disparities among regions and it is necessary to raise awareness among political parties and media. Media coverage of women candidates was poor (only 5% was dedicated to them);
- information and education are important not just before elections. The initiative on an electoral training centre could be a good step towards improving education;
- international organizations should be more attentive to civil society.

5.5 CEC 2015 information and education strategy

CEC 2015 voter education strategy paper presents both a strategy on electoral information and education and a collection of measures to implement the strategy in the context of the local elections that year. CEC strategy aimed at reaching at all vulnerable groups considered in the present study, plus emigrants. It was organised in three axes: information (on the date, time of elections and other organisational details), education (focusing on freedom to vote) and sensibilisation about the importance of voting.

[9] They were presented at the post-electoral conference coorganised by CEC, the Council of Europe and OSCE Presence in September 2015

CEC conducted several projects to raise awareness among voters. So did also other organisations, such as women associations with respect to participation of women both as candidates and as voters. APS supported by the Council of Europe worked with Matura students; OSCE Presence focused on national minorities (Roma).

6. SURVEY RESULTS

6.1   General information

The interviews were conducted from 16.01.2017 to 10.02.2017, by twelve interviewers selected by APS from its alumni network and from other NGOs. Altogether 1215 people were interviewed in four districts: 400 in Tirana, 321 in Fier, 254 in Shkodra and 240 in Gjirokastra. The distribution per district is proportional to the electoral strength of the district.

988 of the interviewed (81%) were vulnerable voters, including 327 women, 295 youth, 252 minorities and 114 disabled. The distribution per sub-group reflects the electoral strength of each sub-group in the electorate (without being proportional to it). So some 33% of the vulnerable voters interviewed are women, 30% are youth, 26% minorities and 12% disabled. The last two sub-groups are certainly overrepresented compared to their real weight in the electorate; however a higher number of representatives from these groups were necessary to obtain meaningful results from the survey.

152 were domestic observers (13%) and 75 were locally elected officials (6%). Respondents were grouped in five groups of ages (18-29, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, 60+). Both for vulnerable voters generally and for domestic observers the group of 18-29 was the most represented (39 and 50% of them respectively). For locally elected officials, the most represented group of age were the 60+ (32%) followed by 40-50 (almost 30%).

Some 50% of the interviewed (all groups taken together) had completed university or post-university studies. Almost 30% had completed high-school, 13% had elementary school and some 7% had not gone to school. The percentage of university or post university was similar in the four districts (at around 50%, slightly higher in Gjirokastra). High-school graduates oscillated between 26% in Gjirokaster to 32% in Shkodër. People with elementary school only oscillated from 10% in Shkodër to 16% in Gjirokastër. Respondents with no school background oscillated from 4% in Gjirokastër, 8% in Fier and a highest 11% in Shkodër.

31% of the interviewed were unemployed; more than 50% were employed in the private or public sector or were independent. Almost 10% were students and some 8% were retired.

In conclusion, young persons (18-29 and 30-40) were the great majority of the interviewed in the vulnerable and domestic observers groups; older ones (60+ and 40-50) in the locally elected. The greatest majority of the interviewed (almost 80%) had completed university/post university or high-school studies. Some 70% were actively employed, studying or retired and 31% unemployed. The respondents were selected by the interviewers designated by APS.[10]

6.2   Questions

Each question is identified by a letter and a number (e.g. A1). The substance of the question and the replies are summarized and discussed below. The full text of the question (in Albanian) can be found in the respective questionnaire (attached to the present report).

6.3   Information on target groups

6.3.1   Vulnerable groups

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[10] One domestic observers' organization (CFFE) provided a list with contact details of observers from this organization as one source for selecting individuals (observers) to interview.

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The numbers of interviewed per target group and per district were the following:

Qarku	E re/i ri	Grua	Minoritete	PAK
Fier	86	77	51	39
Gjirokastër	51	48	79	17
Shkodër	70	57	60	19
Tiranë	88	145	62	39
TOTAL	295	327	252	114

The detailed figures per each sub-group of minority voters (Roma, Egyptian, Greek, Monte-negrin, Vllah-Aremen, and Serb) and sub-group of the disabled/PAK (persons with physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments) are presented below:

Qarku	E re/i ri	Grua	M_ Egjip-tian	M_ Grek	M_ Malaze z	M_ Rom	M_ Vllah-Arëmën	PAK fiziz	PAK mendor	PAK shqisor - i/e verbër	PAK shqisor - shurdh- me-mec/e	Tjetër mi-noritet (Serb)
Fier	86	77	2	7		28	4	20	13	4	2	10
Gjirokastër	51	48	13	50		14	2	7		10		
Shkodër	70	57	9		19	21		8	7	3	1	11
Tiranë	88	145	16	10		25	11	4		35		
TOTAL	295	327	40	67	19	88	17	39	20	52	3	21

The group ages' distribution for all vulnerable voters is the following:

Qarku	Vulnerable voters	18-29	30-40	40-50	50-60	60+
Fier	253	112	47	47	26	21
Gjirokastër	194	69	45	20	37	23
Shkodër	206	88	36	32	33	17
Tiranë	335	115	66	58	67	29
TOTAL	988	384	194	157	163	90

The group ages per sub-group of vulnerable voters are shown below (in alphabetic order in Albanian: young, women, Egyptian, Greek, Montenegrin, Roma, Vllah, physically disabled, mentally disabled, blind, deaf, other minorities/Serb).

Grupi përkatës	TOTAL	18-29	30-40	40-50	50-60	60+
E re/i ri	295	293		2**		
Grua	327	15	117	76	82	37
M. Egjiptian	40	14	6	5	14	1
M. Grek	67	14	13	11	19	10
M. Malazez	19	2	4	5	5	3
M. Rom	88	18	24	19	17	10
M. Vllah-Arëmën	17	5	4	4	3	1
PAK fiziz	39	6	7	9	8	9
PAK mendor	20	7	1	6	2	4

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PAK shqisor - i/e verbër	51	5	12	13	9	12
PAK shqisor - shurdh-memec/e	3		1		1	1
Tjetër minoritet (Serb)	21	5	4	7	3	2
TOTAL	**987***	384	193	157	163	90

* one interviewed did not indicate the age

** Two 40-50 were erroneously attributed to the "young voters" group/or the age indicated was wrong

In conclusion, women represent 33% of the interviewed in the vulnerable voters' group, youth make up the 30%, minorities some 25% and the disabled form the 12%.

39% of vulnerable voters interviewed (all groups together) are young (18-29); almost 20% are 30-40, followed by 16% (40-50), 16% (50-60) and 9% (60+).

While for the other categories the distribution among groups of ages is quite even, the youth belong exclusively to the 18-29 group and 30-40 years are over-represented in the women's group (36% of them).

The greatest majority of the interviewed voters live in urban areas. In both Tirana and Shkodër less than 20 interviewed live in rural areas. 149 interviewed in Fier (almost 60% of all interviewed in the district) live in the town of Fier alone. They are 158 interviewed (82% of all interviewed in the district) to live in the town of Gjirokastra.

The fact that the greatest majority of respondents live in urban areas is an important element to take into account when evaluating the results, namely on election irregularities, which, allegedly, occur more often in rural areas. It should be noted that all interviewed, in their replies to open questions, underline that more should be done with respect to information, sensibilisation and training of the voters and candidates in rural areas.

6.3.2 Local elected officials

The group ages of local elected officials interviewed:

Qarku	18-29	30-40	40-50	50-60	60+	TOTAL/DISTRICT
Fier	6	3	9	10	3	**31**
Gjirokastër		2	6	6	1	**15**
Shkodër		7	4	2	2	**15**
Tiranë	6	4	3	1		**14**
TOTAL/GROUP AGE	12	16	22	19	6	75

Middle aged (40-50 and 50-60) make up some 55% of local elected officials interviewed.

The majority of the officials were interviewed in Fier (31)[11]. In Tirana, in addition to the 14 indicated officials interviewed, 5 additional interviews were received late and could not be included in the statistics of participants. However their suggestions (in open questions) will be taken into account.

The party affiliation of locally elected officials interviewed was the following:

- 28 PS (+5)[12] PS
- 16 PD

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[11] Due to the boycott of the PD it was not possible to interview more locally elected in Tirana.

[12] The five interviews of locally elected in Tirana which were received late are officials elected as PS members.

- 13 LSI
- 11 Did not wish to provide this information
- 3 PDIU
- 2 Other
- 1 PBDNJ

The party affiliation of locally elected officials interviewed was the following: 37% from PS (without the 5 from Tirana which came later), 21% PD, 17% LSI, 15% did not provide information, 4% PDIU, 0.75% PBDNJ.

6.3.3 Domestic observers

The organizations to which domestic observers interviewed belong are:

Qarku	KRIIK/CDO	KZLN/CFFE	Other organisation	TOTAL/DISTRICT
Fier	3	22	12	37
Gjirokastër	4	18	8	30
Shkodër	1	17	15	33
Tiranë	36	16		52
TOTAL/ORGANISATION	44	73	35	152

The group ages of domestic observers interviewed:

Qarku	18-29	30-40	40-50	50-60	60+	TOTAL DOMESTIC OB-SERVERS
Fier	14	7	8	7	1	37
Gjirokastër	8	12	6	3	1	30
Shkodër	29	4				33
Tiranë	25	24	1	2		52
TOTAL/GROUP OF AGE	76	47	15	12	2	152

Of the 152 domestic observers interviewed, 34% were in Tirana, 24% in Fier, 20% in Gjirokastra and 22% in Shkodra.

73 (48%) had observed for CFFE (KZLN), 44 (29%) for CDO (KRIIK) and the rest 35 (23%) for other organisations.

50% of the observers were young (18-29), 31% were 30-40 and 17% were 60+ aged.

105 of them had observed in 2015 local elections and 29 had observed in the 2013 general elections (J2). 54 (36%) of them said they would observe in the upcoming June 2017 elections (J4). The majority of respondents (78 or 51% of them) said they did not yet know.

6.4   Questions to vulnerable voters

6.4.1   Participation in elections

The first two questions were about participation in elections: whether voters voted in the 2015 local elections (A1) and whether they intend to participate in the upcoming June 2017 general elections (A2).

15% of the respondents did not participate in the 2015 elections. 6.6% did not indicate the reason; 3.5% had not reached the voting age; 2.3% were absent at the time. 21 persons were absent for another reason, 6 could not remember why.

77% of respondents said they would vote in the upcoming June 2017 elections. 20% said they had not decided yet and some 3% said they would not vote either because out of the country or because of other reasons.

The voters were then asked about the main reasons for them to vote (A3), respectively not to vote (A4) in elections. Reply options were suggested.

959 interviewed replied on the reasons for them to vote, 29 did not. More answers were possible.[13] The explanations are the following (percentages refer to the all 988 interviewed, not to the 959 respondents):

> 69% - it's my right / është e drejta ime
>
> 12% - it's my duty / e kam për detyrë
>
> 6% - to influence the outcome of the election / për të ndikuar në rezultatin e zgjedhjes
>
> 10% - I always vote / gjithmonë votoj
>
> 0.4% (four individuals) – I was/am forced to / më detyruan/detyrojnë të votoj
> 0.6% - other reason / Tjetër (shpjego)

A majority of Egyptian minority (85% of them), physically impaired (83%), youth and the blind (76% each), mentally disabled (75%), women (68%), Greek minority (67%), Roma minority (63%), Vllah-Arëmen minority (56%) see *voting as a right*. Follow: deaf mute (50%), Serb minority (43%) and Montenegrin minority (33%).

A majority of the Montenegrin minority (56%) see *voting as a duty*. They are followed by deaf mute (50%), Vllah-Arëmen (38%), Roma minority (22%), Greek minority (20%), mentally disabled (19%), blind (17%), Egyptian minority and women (10% each), Serb minority (almost 10%), youth (6%) and physically disabled (3%).

2% of blind people, 1% of Roma and almost 1% of women said they were *forced to vote*. Youth were the most numerous ones (12%) to say that through their vote they were hoping to *influence the outcome of the election*. Serb minority were those who considered themselves as most *regular voters* (43% said they always vote), followed by 17% of the women.

111 interviewed (11%) indicated the **reasons** for them **not to vote (A4)**, 877 did not. More answers were possible. The explanations are the following (percentages refer to the all 988 interviewed, not to the 111 respondents):

> 3% - I am not interested in politics / Nuk më intereson politika
>
> 5% - I don't trust politicians / Nuk i besoj politikanëve dhe premtimeve të tyre
>
> 2% - No use of voting, results are fixed / Nuk ia vlen të votoj se rezultati dihet që para votimit
>
> 1.5 % indicated other reasons (not present ; no free vote).

Among the 57 young people who replied to this question, 42% indicated they had no trust in politicians, 25% said results were fixed and another 25% that they had no interest in politics. Of the 21 women who replied to this question, 52% did not trust politicians, 19% said results were fixed, 14% said they lacked interest in politics and another 14% referred to other reasons. Lack of trust in politicians is the main reason not to vote, according to respondents.

6.4.2 Accessibility

111 (of the 114) PAK replied to the question on the **accessibility of voting centres (A5)**.[14] They were asked to assess four aspects of the accessibility (sub questions A51 to A54) by rating them from 0 to 3 where 0 is the lowest (unsatisfactory) level and 3 is the highest level

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[13] This explains why the sum of the % of respondents which choosed one the proposed replies can be bigger than 100%.

[14] 111 PAK respondents replied at least to one of the sub-questions A51 to A54.

of accessibility. The replies are indicated below. Percentages refer to those PAK who replied to each sub question.

51% of the 110 respondents to **A51** considered the **accessibility of the voting centre** as being bad (1), 19% considered it to be inexistent (0) ; 28% considered it to be sufficient (2) and 2% said it was satisfactory. The least satisfied were deaf mute (100% said 0 or 1) followed by physically impaired (75% said 0 or 1), the blind (67% said 0 or 1) and the mentally impaired (65% said 0 or 1).

The evaluation by 110 PAK respondents of existing **facilities for PAK** in voting centres (**A52**) yielded the following results: 56% evaluated it as bad (1), 27% as inexistent (0), 16% as sufficient (2) and 0.9% as satisfactory (3).

The **ease of use (by PAK) of the voting system (A53)** was judged as inexistent by 44% of 110 respondent PAK and bad by 45% of them. Some 10% said it was sufficient and less than 2% had no idea.

109 PAK evaluated the **information provided before the elections on the accessibility**, voting facilities and voting system (for PAK) in the polling station (**A54**), as follows : 60% said it was bad, 24% considered it to be inexistent, almost 16% sufficient and less than 1% very good.

In conclusion, according to the greatest majority of PAK, the accessibility of polling stations, the facilities for PAK, the user-friendliness (for PAK) of the voting system and the pre-election information on accessibility were all considered either very bad or nonexistent. Interestingly, as we will see later (A74), this evaluation contrasts with that made by other vulnerable voters and elected officials, which were asked a similar question.

6.4.3   Evaluation of elections

The next questions were an evaluation of elections and of their importance to democracy by the different vulnerable groups.

First, voters were asked about their opinion on the following issue: **do you agree that the voters' vote is key to determining how Albania is governed (A6)**. A number of alternative replies were suggested. 26 did not reply and 962 did provide an answer. Percentages refer to the overall 988 interviewed.

A majority of 33% agreed « more or less » with the statement. 29% « totally agreed » with it. On the other side, 23% said « yes and no », 3% did « not agree », 7% thought « mainly no » and 2.5% had « no opinion ».

The majority hesitates (more or less, yes and no) on the importance of elections to determine how Albania is governed.

The second question was whether, according to the voters, the following statements were true (an evaluation scale of 0-3 was given where 0 means that the alleged situation is not at all true and 3 means that the alleged situation is very true) (A7). 982 replied to these questions, 6 did not.

(**A71**) Are elections in your district based on **competing programmes**, ideas and proposals?

47% considered this to be true and almost 8% very true. 38% said it was partially true and 6% said it was not true.

(**A72**) Are elections in your district **well administered**?

Respectively 32% found this to be "partially true" and 54% found it "true". 5% said this was "not true" and almost 9% said this was very much the case ("very true").

The highest percentage of "not true" was in Shkodra (nearly 10%). "Partially true" replies came mostly from Fier (47% of respondents). The highest number of "this is true" replies came from Gjirokastra (60.5%) and most "very true" notes were registered in Gjirokastra and Tirana (14% in both cases).

(**A73**) Are elections in your district held in a **calm atmosphere** and is the right to free elections respected?

47% considered this to be true. 35% said it was partially true. 11% found this to be completely true and almost 6% to be not at all true. The most "not at all true" replies were registered in Shkodra (7%); most "partially true" were registered in Fier (60%); "true" was majoritarian in Gjirokastra (52%) and "very true" highest scores were also registered in Gjirokastra.

A majority of respondents in Fier replied "partially true" (60%) and "true" (34%). A majority of respondents in Gjirokastra replied "true" (52%) and "partially true (23%). A majority in Shkodra also oscillated between "true" (47%) and "partially true" (39%). In Tirana "true" (56%), "partially true" (22%) and "very true" (17%) prevailed.

(**A74**) Are specific **needs of groups of voters with special needs** taken into account?

982 respondents replied to this question, so almost all vulnerable voters not only the PAK ones. The majority (50%) says this is partially true. Almost 27% say this is true. 19% think this is not true at all and 3.5% say this is very true.

This contrasts with PAK's own evaluation of accessibility of polling stations.

It results from the replies to this group of questions that election administration and climate are considered well by respondents. Yet, the majority of respondents hesitate as to the role of elections in determining the way Albania is governed. This puts into perspective the otherwise good appreciation. This may also be interpreted to show that more information work on the role and importance of elections is needed.

6.4.4 Electoral information

The next group of questions relate to voters' information about the steps of the electoral process.

The first question is whether the voter was **informed in time by the local government** about the fact that she is registered as a voter and about the location of the polling station where she can vote (**B1**). Possible replies were yes, no and other.

85% of the 986 respondents said yes and 13% no. Among those who said no, the highest figures were from the young, women and Roma. The majority of "no" was registered in Tirana (44), followed by Shkodra (40), Fier (22) and Gjirokastra (20).

These are very good scores and indicate satisfaction with this local government service.

The second question with this respect is whether the voter had **information on what she needs to do** if she does not find her name on the voters' list or whether she discovers another **irregularity** (**B2**). Is it possible, according to the voter, to require that this is corrected? The possible options were suggested: don't know; no; yes.

Of the 983 respondents 48% replied yes to the question and 50% replied "I don't know". Less than 2% said that it was not possible to correct. Half of the interviewed do not know how to deal with missing or wrong information.

This shows that it is certainly necessary to inform on this aspect in future information and education campaigns.

To those who replied yes, the next questions addressed were: **where (B21) should this be done; when (B22); and whether, according to them, this would cost money (B23)**. Several optional replies were proposed to the interviewed.

69% of the 485 respondents to question B21 indicated the civil registry office, 23% the Electoral Administration Zone (CEAZ/KZAZ) office, almost 7% said at the district's court and less than 1% said they didn't know or it should be done elsewhere.

As to the question when the correction could be done (B22), 40% of 485 respondents said at any time, 38% chose until 24h before voting day, 18% up to 60 days before Election Day, less than 5% said they didn't know or it should be at another moment.

On the question "how much" the procedure could cost (B23), the suggested replies were the following. A great majority of 73% said the procedure was free of charge and 26% of respondents said they didn't know.

Theses replies indicate that half of respondents (those who said they knew what to do in case of irregularities with registration) also have an idea where to go to correct this and when. However all would benefit from a clarification, through informative messages, on these aspects. Deadlines and competent instances for correcting such information should be clear.

The next question is **what documents are necessary for voting (B3)**. Optional replies were proposed. 58% opted for valid biometric identity card. 38% said both a valid identity card and a valid passport.

Next, voters were asked about their evaluation of **information provided by CEC** on electoral procedures. The question is "**how interesting is this for you**" **(B4)**. Replies suggested range from 0 (not at all interesting) to 3 (very much interesting). 973 replied to the question, 15 did not. 60% evaluated the information provided by CEC on electoral procedures as being interesting and 15% said it's very interesting. Almost 21% considered it of little interest and a small 3% of no interest at all.

75% find the information from CEC as interesting to very interesting. This shows that CEC's information and education work is necessary and appreciated by vulnerable voters.

The following question asked respondents to **evaluate information provided by media (press, radio, television) on electoral procedures and candidates (B5)**. More specifically they were asked to evaluate the following aspects: impartiality, quality of information, independence from political parties. Suggested replies ranged from 0 to 3, with 0 indicating the lower level of impartiality, quality and independence and 3 the highest level.

Media was considered "partly impartial" by 55% and "mostly partial" by 33%. 6% said it's "clearly partial" and 5% consider it "totally impartial".

The quality of information it provides was considered good by 70%, mediocre by 18% and excellent by 9%. Less than 3% held it to be very bad.

As for political independence of the media, 55% said it's only "partly independent" and 31% said it's dependent. 10% said it's "completely dependent" and 4% held them as "totally independent".

Replies to B51 and B53 are very similar. Media are considered partly impartial/independent to mostly partial/dependent, to clearly partial/dependent by the greatest majority of respondents. Given the great reliance of the public on media to form their opinion in elections, as we will see in next questions, a greater informative and educational effort could be done to explain what is needed and required from media in the electoral debate. Empowering voters (media consumers) to understand the role and importance of media and to sharpen their critical mind, will hopefully have a positive impact on media's work too. This seems even more necessary when looking at replies to B52: contrary to the negative evaluations in B51 and

B53, B52 suggests that "quality" of information is good. What is considered "good quality" information by respondents who, in same proportions, suggested that media are mostly partial and politically dependent, is puzzling. This is reason more to do pedagogic work to explain the needed role of media in elections.

The next issue was about the **duration of the information campaign (B6)**. The following was suggested: information provided before the specific election is sufficient; it's necessary to provide information also in the period in between two elections; nothing of this.

52% held that providing the information before the election is sufficient; 36% considered more should be done in between two elections with respect to information; and some 11% said they agreed with neither of the two options.

Although a majority suggested that providing information just before the election may be sufficient, suggestions were provided by a strong minority (see next, consolidated replies to open questions) on information and education needs in between two elections.

Question **B7** aimed at gathering information about **what are the most used platforms for voters to get informed about electoral procedures and about candidates**. Several platforms were suggested and voters were asked to rank their importance to them from 0 (not at all relevant) to 3 (very relevant).

(B71) 37% said electoral meetings played a role and 10% said they played a major role. 27% said they played a little role; 26% that they played no role at all.

(B72) Meetings in working premises were considered of no value by a majority of 58%. 21% said they had a small impact while 18% estimated their role as important. Finally 2% said their role was very important. Half of women said the role of such meetings was small, medium and important, the other half said they had no importance. The great majority of young people also discarded this information platform.

This seems to contradict previous conclusions by CEC surveys which suggest that this is a very important channel especially for working women (in factories for instance) who have no time to consecrate to other information channels. Despite the seemingly little interest by our respondents, this channel should be used to target working women identified by the CEC surveys.

(B73) Press was considered as relatively important and important by respectively 29% and 39% of respondents. Some 24% considered it not at all important and 9 % said it had a great influence.

(B74) Internet was considered important by 36% and very important by 21%. 18% said it had little importance, while 26% said it was not important.

(B75) Television was considered as quite important by 39% and very important by 41%. 14% said it's of little interest and 5% said it's of no interest at all.

(B76) Radio was held as not important by 34% of respondents, as playing a little role by 32% and as having a major importance by 6%.

(B77) School was considered as irrelevant by 40% of respondents (and 40% of youth!, 34% of women and around 60% of Roma and Egyptian minorities). It was held to play a minor role by 29% of respondents; to be a useful platform by 23% of respondents (among them 26% of youth, 28% of women, only 10% of Egyptian and Roma minorities) and as playing a very important role by 8%.

Replies to B71 to B77 suggest the following order of importance of information platforms: TV, written press, internet, electoral meetings, school, and meetings in working places. This shows the key role of media. At the same time they are perceived to be to a certain degree partial and politically dependent as shown before. This commends information and education

work to increase public's awareness on what the media is supposed to do during an electoral campaign.

PAK were asked about the **preferred format** in which they would wish to receive information (**B8**). Other respondents also replied on the **preferred language**.

49 PAK said they would like to have information in Braille or audio.

A majority of respondents are satisfied with information in Albanian language. The Egyptian community noted that they only speak Albanian. Vllah-Arëmen said information in Albanian was sufficient and given the very small number of people in this community they did not expect bilingual information.

Among those who were satisfied with the language as it is, many said that improving user-friendliness, for instance by increasing the size of letters would be welcomed. Several said they had eventually got used to the current system but initially had had difficulties.

Bi-lingual information (mostly in Greek and in Roma language, and, for a few, in Montenegrin languages) would be welcomed by some 165 respondents. They see information in their own language as a possibility to improve understanding, especially of poorer and less instructed voters. A few said that electoral information is already translated. Others said that having their own representatives would contribute to increase interest and participation more than having bilingual information. A few voters said that they do not understand what's at stake in an election and need assistance.

The last question on information aims at gathering feedback on the relevance of the several elements in voters' decision for who to vote (B9).

(**B91**) **Electoral programme and promises** play no role at all for almost 9%, a small role for 26%, play a role for 43% and play an important role for 22%.

(**B92**) **Voting as the rest of the family** was considered as playing no role by 29%, playing a small role by 33%, playing a role by 27% and playing a big role by around 10%.

(**B93**) **Voting as the rest of the social circle** was considered as playing no role by 71%, playing a small role by 24%, playing a role by 4% and playing a big role by less than 1%.

(**B94**) **Voting according to party instructions** was considered as playing no role by 74%, playing a small role by 17%, playing a role by 7% and playing a big role by almost 2%.

(**B95**) Voting for **candidates issued by his/her own target group** was considered as playing no role by 30%, playing a small role by 22%, playing a role by 33% and playing a big role by 14%.

(**B96**) **Voting as instructed** by someone else was considered as playing no role by 92%, playing a small role by 5%, playing a role by 2% and playing a big role by 1%.

(**B97**) **Other ways** of deciding on whom to vote for were mentioned by some 8% of the interviewed.

The decisive element for a voter seems to be the program and promises of the candidate/party. This underlines the importance of informing on such programs. Loyalty to the family seems to be much more important than loyalty to the social circle or to a party. Voters seem much more open to vote for candidates issued by the same group.

6.4.5   Political engagement

Question **C1 aims at identifying political involvement** of the vulnerable voters interviewed. 74% said they did not participate in a political party actively, 15% said they did so to a lesser extent, 9% said they did participate and 3% said they did so intensively (C11).

As to the question of sympathising with a political party and/or its candidates (C12), 35% said no, 33% said yes to a lesser extent, 23% said yes and 8% said yes very much so.

The percentage of sympathisers (replies 1, 2, 3 to C12) was around 64%. The percentage of active participants in political activities was lower, around 27% (replies 1, 2, 3 to C11).

6.4.6   Electoral irregularities

The next group of questions relates to irregularities. The first question (**D1**) was about the **voter's reaction when she is confronted with a procedural or other irregularity**. A majority of 45% said they did not react to this. 24% indicated they would inform the electoral commissioners about the irregularity. 23% indicated they would inform observers, national or international. 5% said they would inform a political party/candidate. 3% would inform someone else.

Respondents were then asked if they or a family member were once **confronted with vote buying**, against money or other material advantages such as a job or another favour (**D2**). 82% replied no and 12% said yes.

To the question whether they or a family member had ever been **obliged to participate in elections or vote for a certain candidate (D3)**, 97% said no and 3% yes. The highest number of yes came from Roma community.

To the question whether they had been **prevented from voting (D4)**, 98% replied no and 2% yes. Again the highest figure of yes came from Roma.

To the question whether they had ever been **obliged**, by hierarchical responsible at work, school, etc., **to take part in political activities (D5)**, 94% replied no and 6% yes.

The following question was whether they had **voted twice and/or for someone else (D6)**. Almost 99% said no. The only yes replies came from youth (5), women (3), minorities (2) and PAK (1).

How did they go to the voting booth – was the next question **(D7)**. 90% said alone, however some 6%, mainly PAK/the blind, said they were accompanied.

Replies to questions D1 to D7 indicate an almost absence of reported irregularities by vulnerable voters which contrasts with replies from elected officials (see below) and findings from all previous reports from domestic and international observers as well as from CEC itself.

Question **D8** aimed at identifying whether vulnerable voters felt **discriminated due to their belonging to a vulnerable group** (women, youth, minority, disabled). 91% said no and some 8% yes. Highest numbers of those who felt discriminated were from Roma (36), physically disabled (14), mentally disabled (11) and Egyptian (9).

A complementary question on whether they felt **any other kind of discrimination or pressure** was asked (**D9**). 94% said no and 4% said yes. Those who said yes referred to the accessibility of voting centres and voting systems for the disabled, to tensions with their reference countries which are reflected in the position towards them (for certain minorities), to the fact of being a negligible size of voters and thus neglected (both disabled and minorities), to political tensions at the voting station, to irregularities with their registration, to lack of instruction and electoral knowledge, to the fact that they do not feel free to vote, votes are photographed, etc.

Vulnerable voters were asked to evaluate the organisation and conduct of elections in their respective district (D10). They were asked about several aspects.

With respect to their evaluation of "**how much does the election administration know electoral legislation**" (**D101**), a majority of 60% said the electoral administration knows it well

and 12% said very well. 23% estimate the electoral administration has little knowledge and 4% say it has no knowledge of electoral law.

On the other side, 60% again estimate **the election administration respects the law**, 9% say it respects it very well, while 27% estimate such respect as being low and 7% say it's inexistent (**D102**).

The same question about **knowledge of the legislation** (**D103**) **and respect of it** (**D104**) **by the local government** when organising elections, yielded the following results. 68% estimated the knowledge as good and 10% as very good. 19% said local government had little knowledge and 3% said it had no knowledge. 59% said implementation of legislation by the local government was good and 9% said it was very good. 28% find it low and 5% said it's inexistent.

Perceptions of knowledge and application of electoral legislation by the electoral administration and the local government are quite high (at around 60%) and higher for local government.

The last sub question (**D105**) was about voters' evaluation of **local observers' professionalism**. A majority of 51% found them to be professional and 13% said they were very professional. For 29% they are little professional and 6% say they are not professional.

The last question on irregularities aimed at identifying **how much trust voters have that they will receive support (help, information, etc.) from the authorities** (election administration, local government, electoral judges) in case they are victim of irregularities (**D11**). 56% said this would be the case and 7% said this would very much be the case. 29% said there would be few chances to have such support and 5% said there was no chance at all.

This shows important trust in the respective authorities, although slightly lower compared to the above replies (D101 to D104). Yet, numerous suggestions in reply to open questions, which we try to summarize below, suggest that basic elements of electoral administration and conduct still need to be improved.

6.4.7 Suggestions for improvement

Part E of the questionnaire was composed of open questions (replies are free text of unlimited length) aiming at gathering vulnerable voters' suggestions on shortcomings and on improvements.

On the main **shortcomings of voter education and training (E1)**, some 60% of women and 54% of youth replied to the question. More than 800 respondents replied to this question and gave **suggestions to improve things (E2) and other suggestions (E3)** (however a certain number indicated they had nothing to say).

Feedback on shortcomings and suggestions for improvement from around 800 respondents (who replied to at least one of the three questions) are summarized below. They can be used as a check-list when compiling the new information and education messages for the vulnerable groups.

Information and education content

-   More electoral education and sensibilisation
-   More general information on procedural rules
-   More general information for all groups
-   Less publicity for parties, more factual information on electoral law and voting procedures
-   More information about candidates and their programmes
-   More information about political parties programmes

- More information about selection of lists of candidates by the parties
- A true information campaign to prevent family voting, vote buying and selling
- More discussion to prevent pressure from employers etc.
- More information on sanctions in case of violation of electoral code
- Greater sensibilisation about the importance of the vote
- Greater sensibilisation of voters about the electoral information they receive
- Greater sensibilisation about equality (e.g. of women)
- More information about electoral systems: majority and proportional ones
- Have a crash course on electoral processes

Information and education quality, timing, format

- There is room from improvement of the quality of information everywhere: from political parties' programmes to electoral information by CEC
- Necessary to introduce European standards in information
- Language used is sometime unclear. It should be clearer, simple, to avoid the risk that unclarity is exploited to manipulate voters
- Information on procedures should be more understandable, in particular to the attention of Roma and Egyptian, or the elderly
- Information is currently more similar to political propaganda. This should change
- Information is "politized" esp. when those in charge of giving it are politically active
- Information is "distorted" by party activists whose objective is to maximise voting results for their party/candidate and not to ensure free elections
- Information is partial. More impartiality and independence of the media are needed for a better informed citizen
- Politically impartial information on procedures and candidates/programmes is needed. It should be published in time, to allow voters to make informed decisions
- Impartial information on the importance of voting is needed
- Objective (factual-based) information allows voters to choose
- Transparent information is needed, from information to results, to create trust of voters
- Sensibilization of voters on manipulation of information is needed
- Parties and candidates should produce (better) programs and explain them to voters
- More balanced information time and space for different political forces in the media
- More qualitative meetings to learn about the programmes of the parties and candidates
- Information to be better distributed between the moment when the election date is determined and Election Day. Currently voters tend to receive all the information only during the week preceding Election Day
- Information activities should take place in between two elections
- Discussions should continue to take place outside electoral periods
- Importance of using visuals of voting procedures esp. for the analphabetic
- Visuals and prospects that publicize the electoral law
- More educational TV spots on voting procedures
- More conferences, more meetings, more information needed

Target public

- Information is mostly distributed according to political priorities. Instead, it should be distributed according to social and educational ones
- Poor and less instructed need more targeted information because they are also a more likely target of manipulation. More sensibilisation and educational campaigns, especially of low income, low instruction families to increase awareness of the importance of elections. More information is really needed in remote, rural areas
- Women, esp. less instructed and in rural areas, receive no to little information and no special training programmes

- Information tends to reach politically active women alone
- More training and workshops to a variety of women groups
- Meetings with small groups of women moderated by politically impartial people are preferred
- Special programs are necessary especially for youth
- Meetings to discuss youth perception and knowledge of the electoral process
- Specific education program for the youth
- Necessary to increase youth's interest in elections and political processes
- More information sessions with youth to learn about candidates and parties
- Increase electoral training of maturity students
- Important to have representatives from our community in the electoral process
- Information should attaint all members of a community
- More information in Greek/minority language: information should be bilingual
- National minorities feel excluded from information campaigns
- Information does not take into account the specific needs of Roma and Egyptian
- More electoral education for Roma
- More information meetings to fight/prevent vote buying and selling
- CEC should have a serious preoccupation and a clear structure with respect to minorities information and education activities
- Information on TV should be also given in Roma language
- More information activities for Montenegrins
  Provide voting ballots in minority language
- The format in which electoral information is presented is not adapted to the blind
- More information on how the blind can exercise their voting rights
- Currently, lack of training for the blind. Training on Braille is necessary as 98% of them do not yet read Braille (if such solutions are introduced)
- Lack of information, lack of voting solutions and the fact that PAK are distributed, currently means that a lot of them are not able to vote
- Sensibilize and inform people who accompany the blind so as to ensure a maximum of independent voting by the blind
- Introduce appropriate solutions for the blind to vote independently and in secrecy: Braille, audio format, increased size of text
- Participation of the disabled in elaborating appropriate solutions for them to vote
- PAK should also be able to observe the voting process
  Better accessibility for all voters
- Respect for specific needs of all groups; more meetings with vulnerable groups
- Greater involvement of vulnerable groups of voters
- Better training and sensibilisation of domestic observers

Conveying electoral information and education

- Activities to be conducted by politically independent, professionally competent persons, which follow recognised European standards
- Information is currently given only through television (critique)
- Youth could be more active in distributing electoral information
- More information could be given at the University on procedures and candidates
- Activities to be organised not only during the electoral campaign
- More workshops, training, information is needed
- More online information; greater use of social media to reach esp. the youth
- More information on the internet to reach voters outside Albania
- Setup specific offices at Municipalities to organise the distribution of information in rural areas; electoral information centres in any local administrative unit
- Greater commitment of civil society on election information and education of voters

- More information at the working place
- Meetings in social centres; meetings in local government units
- Meetings in smaller groups to discuss about voting rights
- Information in the language of the minority for better access to it, esp. in rural areas (Greek)
- Increased attention to Roma children in school education
- A special school discipline should deal with civic education
- Increase cooperation with foreigners to introduce good international practice
- Electoral education becomes part of the social culture

Other

- The electoral process should be truly compliant with the law
- Elections administration needs better training as there are a lot of insufficiencies
- More intellectuals in election administration with a good knowledge of the law; more civil society independent and competent people
- More investment in the electoral infrastructure
- Depolitized voting administration/commissions is a must
- More training of election observers
- More order around polling stations necessary
- More ordered voting procedure
- More sanctions for irregularities or insufficient work
- Introduce the electronic count of votes
- Reduce vote counting time
- More information, from media, that explain electoral procedures
- Voters should be able to held politicians to account
- No one will pay attention to such proposals for improvement. I have no trust this will change anything.
- No hope that anything will improve
- More of such surveys and need to translate suggestions into solutions and into reality.

6.4.8   Questions specific to candidates

Chapter F of the questionnaire were questions on the voter as a candidate, if this was the case. Some 50 to 96 respondents (out of 988) replied (depending on the question) that this was the case for them. Below we report their feedback. Percentages refer to the respondents with a "candidate" background (not to the 988 ones).

50 **women candidates evaluated the application of articles 67 and 175 of the electoral code** (**F1**) which introduce gender quotas and their application. They were asked to evaluate the application of the law (F11) and the application of sanctions (F12) in case the law is violated.

46% found the law is partially applied and 44% found that law on gender quotas is applied. 6% said it is not applied and 4% said it is very well applied.

51% said sanctions are partially applied in case of violations of gender quotas. 39% said they are applied. 4% said they are never applied and 6% held that they are always applied.

The next question was **whether candidates received support for their candidature (F2)** from parties (F21), electoral administration (F22), and other organizations (F23). 96 people (60 young, 28 women, 6 Montenegrin and Serb and 2 PAK/blind) replied to the question.

61% received no support by the parties, 12% little support and 25% did receive party support.

70% received no support by electoral administration, 9% received little support and 18% did receive support by electoral administration.

73% said they received no support from other bodies either; 11% received little support and 17% did receive support by other bodies.

It appears that candidates from vulnerable groups are not actively supported at any level (party, election administration or others). At the same time it's clear, also from the law, that their representation needs to be supported. Providing more and targeted information and education to them would be an important form of support (to be taken into account).

96 respondents replied to the next question on **whether they felt discriminated as candidates (F3)** because of gender, age, being minority, being disabled and this, again, from political parties (F31), from election administration (F32) and from other bodies (F33).

84% did not feel discriminated by political parties; only 7 and 8% felt respectively a little discriminated to discriminated by parties.

86% did not feel discriminated by election administration while 12% did feel so. The same results were 84 and 9% with respect to other bodies.

"Neither actively supported, nor discriminated as candidates from their group" could summarize the replies from candidates from vulnerable voters' groups (we only evaluate support or discrimination of them as, representatives of their group, not as active party members).

Quite a few replied on their **information and training needs as a candidate (F4)** in the information field (6 respondents to F41), in the training field (5 respondents to F42) and in other fields (1 respondent to F43)

6 respondents gave the following information needs:

- More informational activities. Need to know candidates when lists are still open so that we can decide who will represent us in elections
- More information on the functioning of the local councils: salary, working hours, etc.
- More information on every aspect of the "candidature"
- More information about the qualifications of each candidate
- Printed information in Braille would be very much welcomed.

5 respondents gave the following training needs:

- More frequent and more professional training sessions
- Specificities of training of PAK candidates to be taken into account
- Printed materials in Braille that we can continue to study later (after the training)
- Training on public presentations is needed

Only one respondent mentioned the following additional need

- Candidates should be selected on merits not on political grounds.

The last question to candidates asked whether **enough information about candidatures from their group was provided (F5)** by the following: CEC (F51), media (F52), political parties (F53), other sources (F54).

Among 836 respondents 31% considered CEC information on candidates from their group to be minimal while 52% said it was sufficient. Similar proportions also applied to media (resp. 25% minimal and 62% sufficient) and to political parties (25% minimal and 58% sufficient). As for other sources 39% considered their information minimal and 48% said it was sufficient.

6.5 Questions to elected officials

6.5.1 Preparation of elections

Elected officials were asked whether **information** they received from CEC as an institution on the preparation of elections was **sufficient for them to fulfil their mission in election organization (G1)**?

A majority of the 75 respondents (32% and 39%) found it respectively sufficient to very good. 20% and 9% considered it resp. minimal to inexistent.

The following question was whether the **training** they received from CEC as an institution on the preparation of elections was **sufficient for them to fulfil their mission in election organization (G2)**?

37% and 26% of the 74 respondents considered it sufficient to very good. 14% said it was minimal and 24% inexistent.

For both questions Fieri respondents were the most satisfied ones, those from Gjirokastra the least satisfied.

For the first questions respondents in Tirana and Shkodra were also split in almost two equal parts with a slight majority of satisfied.

For the second question respondents in Tirana were split almost in two equal parts. Those in Shkodra were also split with the least satisfied in a majority.

How do officials **evaluate the contribution of the following information sources** in their work of organizing elections, was the next question **(G4)**.

The 75 local elected officials who responded appear to be extremely satisfied with information received from the following sources: information received from **parties** and candidates is considered good to very good by 97%. It's followed by information provided by **media** (80% satisfaction), by **domestic observers** (72%), by **central government** (70%), by **international observers** (67%) and by **other** sources (55% satisfaction).

The most appreciated source of information appears thus to be the political party.

Asked about their **evaluation of the cooperation with the (G5)** bodies in charge of organising elections (CEAZ (G51), BCC (G52) and VCC (G53)), local elected replied as follows:

A majority of 43% and 29% considered cooperation with **CEAZ** as resp. very good and good. 16%: minimal and 12%: inexistent. Similar results also on cooperation with **BCC**: 40% (very good), 28% (good), 20% (minimal) and 12% (inexistent). Even higher satisfaction was registered for the cooperation with **VCC**: 45% (very good), 31% (good), 15% (minimal), and 9% (inexistent).

How clear they were about the **repartition of competences between them as local government and the other stakeholders (G6)**: central government, election administration bodies, namely CEC, CEAZ, BCC, VCC, was the next question. Results are very positive. A majority of respondents were clear to very clear (25% and 63% respectively).

They were then asked to evaluate the quality of **voter information by the local government body (G7)** in charge of informing voters about their registration and where to vote. A majority found the information provided by local government to voters as sufficient to very good (36% and 40% resp.).

According to a majority of the 75 respondents, the **organization of elections by the local government body in charge (G8)** is sufficient to very good (35% and 48% resp.).

Asked **how true are the following statements (G11)**, 65% of respondents said elections were characterized by **competing programs**, ideas and proposals; 67% said elections were **well administered**; 55% said elections took place in a **calm situation** and voting rights are respected; 60% said the **needs of vulnerable groups** are taken into account to a small extent.

This quite positive evaluation of the conduct of elections (competing programs, well administered, calm situation) contrasts with more nuanced replies on electoral irregularities.

6.5.2   Electoral irregularities

Asked whether they or colleagues faced **pressure when preparing elections (H1)**, 53% of the 75 respondents said yes and 20% said yes, on a regular basis. This contradicts to some extent their previous replies to question G11.

Asked whether, to their knowledge, **the following infractions already occurred in their constituency (H2)**, some 31% said that **obstruction** of a party/candidate never happened and 43% said it happened seldom.

Falsification of material and results never happened according to 44% or happened seldom (40%).

Intentional **deterioration** of material and polling station never happened (45%) or seldom (35%).

Breach of vote secrecy never happened (33%) or seldom (45%).

Multiple voting from the same person occurred either never (52%) or seldom (36%).

Vote selling/buying was inexistent according to 12%, occurred seldom (45%), occurred on a regular basis (27%) or always (16%).

Obliging voters to participate in political activities was considered inexistent by 36%, happening seldom (33%) and happening regularly (29%).

Coercion of political parties and candidates was inexistent according to 37%, happened seldom (49%) and regularly (13%).

Coercion of voters was inexistent (43%), happened seldom (40%) or regularly (17%).

Preventing voters from participating never happened (47%), or seldom (40%) or regularly (13%).

Electoral commissioners that **abandoned their duty** never happened (29%), or seldom (52%), or regularly (16%).

Manipulating voting registers (exclusion of persons with the right to vote and/or inclusion of persons without the right to vote) never occurred according to 49%, or seldom (34%), or regularly (17%).

Misuse of public funds for political interest never occurred either according to 36% of the 75 respondents, or seldom according to another 36%. Only 21% said it occurred regularly and 7% said it always happened.

Other irregularities were mentioned by 25 respondents (39% of respondents to this question).

Elected officials are thus less positive than vulnerable voters and admit the existence of certain phenomena, at least seldom. In particular breach of voter secrecy, vote selling/buying, obliging voters to take part in political activities, coercion of political parties and candidates, coercion of voters, preventing voters from participating, electoral commissioners that abandon their duty, manipulation of voters' registers and misuse of public funds occur seldom to regularly according to the majority of respondents (between 50 and 70% of them).

Asked about **local government's reaction to the above-mentioned infractions (H3),** 21% of respondents said it dealt with them a little. 59% said the local government responds to these violations.

Ardita Driza Maurer, March 2017

Whether voters would receive **sufficient support by local government in case they were faced with the above mentioned irregularities (H5)** was estimated impossible by 12%, and as being little probable by 33%. 53% said this is possible.

Again this shows good appreciation of local elected officials for the work of the local government in election organisation.

6.5.3 Suggestions for improvement

Question **G3** aimed at gathering suggestions for **improvement with respect to information and training** of local elected, in order to improve their own work in organising elections (G3 refers to G1 and G2). However suggestions received from 61 respondents refer also to other types of training. Here a summary:

- continuous training during the electoral campaign and after the election
- CEC should inform and train all candidates to local elections. their current knowledge is deplorable
- thematic training should be proposed to candidates before and after elections. especially to those who are new in this role
- criteria for selection of candidates with the necessary instruction and culture to undertake administrative and leading tasks should be introduced
- more independent information by media
- people who have emigrated need to be informed
- more information to and more inclusion of young, women, PAK, less instructed, minorities, rural areas
- detailed explanation of the electoral code and of electoral procedures is needed
- voting procedures should be simplified, for all voters
- oblige the CEC to do more and better work to inform and sensibilise voters (change the law for this)
- more information and education of voters to understand the importance of voting
- CEC should issue informative newsletters in the period in between elections
- local government should inform more on elections and without political bias
- better cooperation between CEC and local government units to distribute the information in a better way not only in towns but also in rural areas
- more training for electoral administration.

The proposed improvements of election organisation by local government bodies (G9) from 46 respondents range from:

- stricter respect for and application of the law and of the deadlines
- harden the law and qualify vote buying/selling as a crime
- choice of commissioners and other personnel in charge of organising elections (problems stem from their lack of seriousness and correctness)
- include competent persons in the working groups
- include more women commissioners and more people with expert knowledge
- better information should be provided by local government units; they should do more with respect to voter education
- more information, provided earlier, esp. to disadvantaged voters
- politically independent information is crucial
- people in charge of informing on elections should be themselves depolitized and competent
- party independent commissioners should be included in the different election commissions
- more professional information and training of voters on the Electoral Code and its modifications

- greater inclusion of government units in rural areas
- more balanced political representation (in election organisation) for better organized elections
- greater cooperation with international organisations to benefit from their experience and familiarity with European standards
- improve accessibility of voting stations, esp. for PAK
- improve voting infrastructure, esp. in most populous areas
- voters' registers contain errors and are manipulated. People are transferred from one voting centre to another without explanation
- publication in time of voters' lists and timely information of voters
- open lists are necessary
- depolitized commissioners
- electronic voting
- electronic counting

To the open question **who could help them** and how to improve local government's work to organize elections **(G10)**, 41 respondents suggested among others the following actors:

- government
- local government administration
- better cooperation between local government units
- voters, through more active control of voters' lists
- civil society, NGOs with experience in this field
- more meetings and consultations with institutions specialised in the field of elections
- election administration which should be depolitized
- CEC, CEAZs
- cooperation with the legislator and law enforcement entities
- media
- exchange of experiences with international organisations

On the open question of **what can be improved with respect to dealing with electoral irregularities (H4)** in the organisation of elections, 46 respondents provided suggestions for improvement. These range from:

- application of sanctions to any institution/individual who commits a violation or irregularity
- bring irregularities to light and investigate them
- greater transparency, control, denunciation
- seriously dealing with irregularities
- selection of professional (trained) commissioners and other staff
- more information on irregularities and sanctions as foreseen in the law
- creation of permanent commissions composed of professional people with specialised legal knowledge and not of party activists
- application of regulations
- increased electoral culture and more balance representation
- bring irregularities committed by commissioners (that abandon their task) to light, investigate them
- improved and accelerated counting. e-voting could be a solution
- increase training of all those involved in election administration
- votes are corrupted (manipulated) during counting. biometric and electronic voting could be a good solution
- election administration should be politically independent and impartial.

Other **suggestions (H7)** were provided by 4 respondents only, one per district by the way. They mentioned a more rigorous handling of complaints by voters (Shkodra), a depolitized,

young and competent election administration (Gjirokastra), introducing measures against pressure exercised on voters, businessman, or the administration by political forces (Fier) and acceptance of results by political parties, lowering tension during the campaign by focusing on programmes, introducing a new political behaviour so that candidates focus on what they can offer and not on fighting competing candidates (Tirana).

6.6 Questions to domestic observers

6.6.1 Information and training

Asked about their **knowledge of the Albanian electoral legislation (J5)**, the majority (49%) judged it to be very good; 42% considered it good; and 7% said they had little knowledge.

To the question on their ability to timely **update** themselves **on changes in electoral legislation, mainly in the electoral code (J6)**, 52% said they managed to update well; 37% very well and 9% and 3% referred to bad and inexistent updates.

Asked about their knowledge of their **rights as observers (J7)**, 69% said they were perfectly aware; 25% were clear; while 6% had little knowledge.

Their estimation of their **knowledge of their duties as observers**, and the related sanctions (**J8**), was as follows: 71% said very clear, 21% were clear, and 7% had little knowledge.

Their own **training by different institutions (J9)** was estimated as follows: 59% considered training by their own organisation as very good; 58% considered CEC training as sufficient; training by political parties was considered sufficient by 49% and training by other organisations was also considered sufficient by 60% of respondents.

Apparently a majority of observers has no urgent need for training and information from CEC. Information they receive from their organisation appears to be sufficient.

6.6.2 Evaluation

Asked to evaluate their **cooperation with local administration** and the respect of their rights by it (**J11**), 69% evaluated their cooperation with **CEAZ** (election administration of the zone) and with **BCC** (ballot counting centres) as being sufficient. 68% had the same evaluation of the cooperation with **VCC**.

Cooperation with the Government and the media was also surveyed (**J12**). 64% said cooperation with central government was sufficient. They were 78% to think so about local government and 66% of the same opinion, about media.

Evaluation of the **work of electoral administration (J13)** in the place of their last observation yielded following results: 76% said electoral administration by CEC was sufficient; 77% had the same opinion of the CEAZs' work. They were 74% to think so of VCC and 75% of BCC.

Sufficient (mjaftueshëm) may be considered as a good appreciation as it implies that the law was sufficiently respected.

Evaluation of the **work of the local governments** in the place where they last observed (**J14**) yielded the following result: 82% found it to mainly comply with the law.

Domestic observers' own work was considered to have an influence in **highlighting problems in elections (J15)** by 57% of respondents. 34% said it had a big impact.

This is a very high evaluation of the impact of their work which can be interpreted not only as "observers consider their contribution as important", but also as "thanks to their contribution, the greatest majority of problems are highlighted".

As to the question of what impact domestic observers findings and conclusions have in **initiating improvements in electoral legislation and practice (J16)**, this was considered to have an impact by 76% of respondents. This confirms their previous reply to J15.

6.6.3 Proposals for improvement

Some 108 respondents made proposals in reply to the question of what can be done to **improve information and training of domestic observers (J10)**. Proposals include:

- selection of professional and experienced people both as observers and as training personnel
- observers should receive priority information by CEC and political forces
- information to observers should extend throughout the electoral cycle and not be concentrate on the last moment
- training should be provided by legal experts
- training by international experts
- more numerous and more frequent trainings and related events
- more practice oriented training where we can discuss problems encountered
- trainings should take place also during the electoral campaign to allow discussion on actual issues
- training on managing conflicting situations and on preserving her/his life
- training more focused on the duties of the observer
- training on most recent changes in legislation
- party observers need more training
- improved and more modern training methods
- organise exchange of experiences between observers
- better knowledge of observation methodology
- more detailed information on the zone to be observed, incl. on political situation
- more detailed information from CEC and parties
- a database of trained observers.

19 respondents presented **other proposals for improvement (J17)**. These include:

- observer's status should protect the observer during the observation mission
- information should be explained in a user-friendly way, e.g. keywords and bullet points. otherwise it cannot be assimilated rapidly
- more independent (non party representatives) observers are needed
- more information about the electoral process
- CEC could train observers on good election administration process
- shorter observation hours
- improved access of observers to voting stations

7. CONCLUSIONS

VOTERS FROM VULNERABLE GROUPS

Participation

A majority of the vulnerable voters interviewed were young, with a university/high-school background. The greatest majority of the interviewed live in urban areas[15] and a majority are employed or retired or students. Although they are part of the vulnerable groups (women, young, minorities and the disabled), the mentioned characteristics imply that they are arguably less "vulnerable" than the other members of their group.

This should be taken into account when considering the results. For instance, it is a well known fact that the level of education has an important influence on a person's interest and participation in elections. Furthermore, problematic phenomena in Albania, such as vote buying or family voting, tend to happen more and more often in rural areas and with a population which is less instructed and poorer. This is largely acknowledged by the respondents themselves, who strongly recommend more information and education work with the more vulnerable, esp. those in rural areas (not necessarily themselves).

Participation in elections both effective participation in 2015 and the anticipated one in June 2017 confirms this. Almost 80% of respondents voted in 2015 and say will vote in June 2017.

Interestingly, a majority of respondents, starting with the Egyptians, disabled, youth, women, Greek, Roma and Vllah see voting as a right. Montenegrin considered it more as a duty, while Serbs say voting on a regular basis. Only 11% provided reasons for not voting, and lack of trust towards politicians was the main one.

Accessibility of polling stations and of the voting system was considered by the greatest majority of PAK interviewed as bad or inexistent, especially according to the blind. But when considering this issue, the other categories of voters and local elected thought that specific needs were already taken into account, at least in part. This indicates that it is necessary to increase local government awareness on the specific needs of PAK voters.

Evaluation of elections

When evaluating elections, half of respondents considered them to be based on competing programs. Elections are considered to be well administered, held in a calm atmosphere and that the specific needs of PAK are taken into account. This positive evaluation contrasts with previous findings that election campaigns focus more on personalities than on programmes. It also contradicts observers' findings that some irregularities such as family voting and vote buying or voter intimidation are recurring.

The rather optimistic evaluation of accessibility by other voters (as well as by local elected officials, below) contrasts with PAK's evaluation of the accessibility of the polling stations.

Despite their positive evaluation of elections, a majority of respondents hesitate as to the impact of their vote in determining the way Albania is governed. To the question: do you agree that your vote is key to determining how Albania is governed, a majority say that "more or less" and "yes and no". If electoral choices were truly based on programmes and if elections were so well administered, it is difficult to understand, in good logic, this hesitation.

One hypothesis is that it's difficult for vulnerable voters to admit having suffered or committed electoral irregularities themselves, or to do so in a survey. This interpretation is supported

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[15] In both Tirana and Shkodër less than 20 interviewed live in rural areas. 149 interviewed in Fier (almost 60% of all interviewed in the district) live in the town of Fier alone. They are 158 interviewed (82% of all interviewed in the district) to live in the town of Gjirokastra (chapter 6.3.1).

by their hesitation as to the importance of their vote in determining the way the country is governed. Other contradictory replies (see below) will tend to confirm this hypothesis.

In all cases, more information and education work to explain voting rights, voting irregularities, how and where to denounce them, how they will be handled, what sanctions apply to those who commit irregularities and the transparency of procedures and decisions in case of irregularities are very much necessary to foster voters' understanding of their rights and to build trust in the role of elections in a democracy.

Information, education

Information about elections is sent in time by the local government according to a large majority of respondents. They are mostly satisfied with this local government service.

Interestingly however, 50% of vulnerable voters do not know what to do if there is a problem/irregularity with their registration. Those who do know, have also more or less an idea where to address themselves, within which deadlines and at which cost in order to correct the irregularity. However, clarification of how to handle such irregularities should be included in future information and education campaigns. Deadlines and competent bodies for correcting information should be made clear. This is even more necessary given the fact (see below) that in case of irregularities – be they procedural or be they more violation of voting rights – some 47% of the vulnerable voters say that they do/would not react.

Most voters have a good idea as to what documents are necessary for voting.

Information provided by CEC on elections is appreciated by more than 75% of vulnerable voter respondents. The current duration of the information campaign of CEC is considered mostly sufficient. However a strong minority suggests information and education activities should continue between two elections.

Well appreciated is also information provided by media (press, radio, TV). However media is perceived as mostly partial and politically dependent. At the same time the quality of the information it provides is considered to be good.

The greatest majority of respondents consider media to be partial and politically dependent, at least partly. Given the great reliance of the public on media to obtain electoral information (see below), a greater informative effort is needed to clarify media's role in the electoral debate.

Empowering voters (media consumers) to understand the importance of media and to sharpen their critical mind towards it, will hopefully have a positive impact on media's work. This seems even more necessary if we consider the following contradiction. While media is held to be partial and politically dependent, at least in part, a majority of respondents also said that information provided by the media is of good quality. How can information be of "good quality" while the media that issues it is considered partial and politically dependent? This is puzzling and provides more reason to undertake a pedagogic effort to explain media's role in democratic elections.

The most used platforms for obtaining electoral information are, in decreasing order: TV, written press, Internet, electoral meetings. Strangely, school was not considered a good source of information, even by youth. Neither was radio, which contrasts with a previous CEC evaluation. TV is considered to be the main media for electoral information. Again, given the fact that media are also perceived to be partial and politically dependent, it seems very necessary to raise public awareness and critical thinking on the role of media.

It also seems necessary to strengthen school's role in providing civic education. In a preparatory discussion with some civil society organisations, the author was told that it is absolutely necessary to harmonize civic education curricula in schools and indicate a minimum level of

basic civic information to be delivered by all schools. Existing curricula are extremely varied, from a content and quality perspective.

A majority of respondents are satisfied with information in Albanian language. The Egyptian community noted that they only speak Albanian. Vllah-Arëmen said information in Albanian was sufficient and given the very small number of people of this community they did not expect bilingual information.

Among those who were satisfied with the language as it is, many said that improving user-friendliness, for instance by increasing the size of letters, would be welcomed. Several said they had eventually got used to the current system but initially had had difficulties.

Bi-lingual information (mostly in Greek and in Roma language, and, for a few, in Montenegrin) would be welcomed by some 165 respondents. They see information in their own language as a possibility to improve understanding, especially for poorer and less instructed voters. A few said that electoral information is already translated. Others said that having their own representatives would contribute to increase interest and participation more than having bilingual information. A few voters said that they do not understand what's at stake in an election and need assistance.

PAK would need appropriate solutions elaborated in cooperation with them. A majority of the blind allegedly do not read Braille, yet 49 respondents (blind) indicated that they need Braille and/or audio formats.

When deciding on whom to vote for, the following elements play a role: electoral programmes come first and are crucial to 65% of respondents; voting for candidates issued by their group comes second and voting as the rest of the family comes third. "Loyalty" to the family seems stronger than loyalty to the social circle or to parties (which score lower).

Such reported reliance on political programmes is very wishful but still needs to be introduced in Albania. And, in their suggestions, many respondents say that it is necessary to publish programmes, both of parties and candidates, and to have issue-based discussions during electoral campaigns. Once more, respondents seem to have reported a desired situation rather than the reality. Local elected are much more nuanced in their replies.

A majority of vulnerable voters respondents are sympathisers of a political party and slightly more than one fourth are active participants in political activities.

Irregularities

Almost half of the interviewed said they did/would not react if they experienced irregularities, be they procedural or other. This confirms their previous hesitations as to the importance of their vote in determining how Albania is governed and testifies of lack of trust in the role of elections. Those who said they would react said that they would inform electoral commissioners or observers. Electoral complaints were not suggested as a possible reply and only 3% of respondents said they would inform someone else.

No specific complaining rights for voters are foreseen in the Electoral Code. Only parties and candidates (or candidates whose registration was refused) have a specific right to issue complaints (administrative and judiciary). The fact that the Electoral Code does not clarify the rights of voters for an effective remedy in case of violation of their political rights is not optimal (such rights are foreseen by ICCPR art. 2.3 and General Comment 25 as well as other international and regional instruments).

However, based on several international treaties and commitments, Albanian citizens do have a right to free elections and do have the legal possibility to make election-related complaints and to obtain effective remedies in case of irregularities. The right to effective remedies means that complaints should be "accessible" by individuals and groups. Effective remedies

include "reparation, which can involve restitution, rehabilitation and measures of satisfaction", "guarantees of non-repetition" and "bringing to justice the perpetrators".

In the current situation, due to the fact that the Electoral Code does not provide for voters' right to effective remedies, a voter can certainly exercise these rights based on the Constitution or the Penal Code. What is the form of such complaint, what are the modalities, the deadlines, the authorities, the sanctions foreseen, etc.? It is very important that CEC informs citizens clearly and precisely on their possibility to complain against violations and obtain effective remedies. CEC should even encourage voters to report irregularities and perpetrators, given the fact that political parties and candidates do not seem to make use of their right to do so, according to last observations. This would be a very important step to build trust in elections.

Vulnerable voters consider that electoral irregularities are minimal to nonexistent. This is the most surprising finding of the survey. It suggests no to little vote buying, coercion of voters to vote for a candidate, voters prevented from voting, voter obligation to participate in political activities, illegal multiple voting, and breach of vote secrecy. The main problems are reported by Roma. This finding contrasts with much more nuanced replies to the same questions by local elected officials. It contrasts with the numerous suggestions given by the same respondents on how to remedy to such irregularities and violations. It also contrasts with election observers' reports and with CEC evaluations.

The vulnerable voters interviewed did not feel discriminated either, due to their belonging to a vulnerable group. The greatest number of those who felt discriminated were Roma, physically disabled, mentally disabled and Egyptian.

A few respondents referred to other kinds of discrimination or pressure, mentioning the accessibility of voting centres and voting systems for the disabled, tensions with their reference countries which are reflected in the position towards them (some minorities), the fact of being a negligible size of voters and thus neglected (both disabled and minorities), political tensions at the voting station, irregularities with their registration, lack of instruction and electoral knowledge, the fact that they do not feel free to vote, that votes are photographed, etc.

Respondents' appreciation of the work, knowledge and application of the legislation by election administration bodies and by local government was quite positive. Scores are slightly higher for local government. A majority also states that they are confident they will receive support from the authorities (help, information, etc.) in case of irregularities.

Despite the positive evaluations, the list of proposals for improvement is long (for a summary, see chapter 6.4.7). The list of suggestions can inform future work on information and education.

A majority of respondents considers domestic observers to be professional to very professional.

Candidates from vulnerable groups

Questions specific to vulnerable group candidates were answered by 50 to 96 respondents, depending on the question. A majority of women candidates found that the law on gender quotas is to a certain extent applied and so are the sanctions in case of infringement.

Candidates from vulnerable groups say that they were not actively supported at any level (party, election administration or others). In their great majority they did not feel discriminated either (we only evaluate support or discrimination of them as representatives of their group, not as active party members).

A majority found that information on candidates from their group is sufficient. Scores were similar but information provided by media came first, followed by information by political parties and by CEC.

"Neither actively supported, nor discriminated" could summarize the replies from candidates of vulnerable voters' groups. At the same time it's clear, also from the law, that their representation needs to be supported. Suggestions were made by respondents on improving information and training of candidates from vulnerable voters. Providing more and targeted information and education to them would be an important form of support to be taken into account in future information and education activities.

LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

75 local elected officials were interviewed, the bigger number in Fier.[16] The party affiliation of all locally elected officials interviewed was the following: 37% from PS, 21% PD, 17% LSI, 15% did not provide information, 4% PDIU, 0.75% PBDNJ. A majority were aged 60+ and 40-50.

Information and training that local government units receive from CEC, and whether it allows them to fulfil their mission in election organisation, are evaluated positively by a majority of local elected officials. Fieri respondents are the most satisfied ones, those from Gjirokastra the least satisfied. Tirana and Shkodra are split in two almost equal parts.

The 75 local elected officials who responded appear to be extremely satisfied with information (in relation to their tasks of organizing the elections) received from parties and candidates, by media, by domestic observers, by central government, by international observers and by other sources. Political parties and candidates are the privileged source of information on the organisation of elections. Given the preponderant role of CEC in election organisation, it appears necessary that CEC informs more the local government units on issues of its competence.

Cooperation with local bodies in charge of organizing elections (CEAZ, BCC and VCC) is estimated as very good and good by the majority of respondents. Cooperation with VCCs scores slightly higher than CEAZ and BCC.

A majority of respondents are clear to very clear regarding the repartition of election administration competences between their local government unit and other stakeholders (central government, CEC/CEAZ/BCC/VCC).

They are quite positive when evaluating the work of their own local government unit in elections. A majority consider the work of local government to inform voters as sufficient to very good. The same is true for the work of organising elections.

Similar to vulnerable voters, a majority of local elected (although in slightly lower proportions) consider elections to be based on competing programs, to be well administered and held in a calm atmosphere. The specific needs of PAK are taken into account, according to them.

This quite positive evaluation of the conduct of elections contrasts their more nuanced position on electoral irregularities. The overestimation of voting stations' compatibility with PAK needs shows that local government units need to be informed more specifically on measures to ensure such compatibility and required to implement them.

A majority of local elected officials admit they face pressure, often on a regular basis, when preparing elections. This contradicts their evaluation of well run elections.

When asked about electoral irregularities, elected officials are less positive than vulnerable voters and admit that certain negative phenomena do occur, at least seldom. In particular, they admit breach of voter secrecy, vote selling/buying, obliging voters to take part in political activities, coercion of political parties and candidates, coercion of voters, preventing voters from participating, electoral commissioners that abandon their duty, manipulation of voters'

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[16] Due to the boycott of the PD it was not possible to interview more locally elected in Tirana.

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registers and misuse of public funds do occur seldom to regularly according to the majority of respondents. For instance, 88% consider vote selling/buying to happen seldom to regularly to always (sum of all three replies).

A majority say that local government responds to these violations. A majority also estimates it possible that voters will receive sufficient support by local government in case they are faced with the above mentioned irregularities. Again this shows good appreciation of local elected officials for the work of their unit in election organisation.

Suggestions for improvement in information and training of local elected were made by 61 of them. 46 respondents made proposals for improvements of election organisation by local government bodies. 41 suggested who could help more to improve local government's election organisation work and 46 made a number of proposals for improvement in dealing with electoral irregularities. 4 respondents made other, election-related, suggestions. A summary of such proposals is presented in chapter 6.5.3.

DOMESTIC OBSERVERS

Some 152 domestic observers were interviewed, a majority in Tirana, followed by Fier, Gjirokastra and Shkodra. They observe mainly with CFFE and CDO. Some 23% are with other organisations. Half of them are young (18-29) and a majority had observed in 2015 elections. The majority of respondents did not know whether they would observe in June 2017.

Domestic observers consider their own knowledge of electoral legislation, of amendments to electoral legislation, of their rights and duties and the training they receive on such issues as quite good. Training received by their own organisation is the most appreciated, followed by training from other organisations, from CEC and from political parties.

It appears that a majority of observers has no urgent need to be informed and trained by CEC.

Cooperation with local election administration and respect of observers' rights by them is evaluated by a majority as being sufficient. The greater majority consider cooperation with local government, central government and the media as being sufficient.

The work of election administration bodies (CEC, CEAZ, VCC, and BCC) in the place where they last observed is evaluated as sufficient by an important majority of observers. The same is true for the work of the local government in the place where they last observed: they think local government mainly complied with law.

Sufficient (mjaftueshëm) can be considered as a good appreciation as it implies that the law was sufficiently respected.

The greatest majority of domestic observers consider that their own work has an impact, even a big one, in highlighting problems in elections. The quite high scores of this evaluation can be interpreted not only as self-estimated importance of their contribution but also in another way: observers estimate that, thanks to their work, the greatest majority of election-related problems are brought to light.

An important majority of observers also think that their findings and conclusions play a role in initiating improvements in electoral legislation and practice.

Some 108 respondents out of 152 made proposals to improve information and training of domestic observers and 19 of them had also other kinds of proposals for improvement (for a summary, see chapter 6.6.3).

7.1 Summary of conclusions

The following table summarizes the main information and education measures that appear necessary, based on the results of the survey and its conclusions. Certain measures appear necessary to all target groups interviewed, others are group specific. Some measures refer to information coming from CEC,[17] others suggest that CEC informs in order to make up for the absence of information by other bodies.[18]

CEC can draw from these suggestions when envisaging future information and education activities. The measures proposed rely on CEC's mandate to inform and educate voters. No changes in the legislation are required. What could be necessary are additional resources. This is commented in the next chapter (chap.8).

Public	Objective	Information Measures
All groups	- Raise electoral awareness of vulnerable voters	- Information and education efforts, as well as future inquiries, should target population in rural areas and in poor economic conditions.
	- Voters know the content of their political rights. - Voters know what they can do in case of violation of their political rights - Voters do react through legal means to violations of their political rights - Violations of political rights are sanctioned - Voters trust the importance of their vote in democracy	- CEC informs on the content of political rights - CEC informs voters on their possibility to make election-related complaints: what kind of complaint for what kind of violation, where to complain, how, what are the deadlines, remedies and sanctions, etc. - CEC is transparent on the follow-up it gives to complaints that are adressed to CEC - In case of violations, voters have access to the judiciary to complain and obtain effective remedies, including restitution, rehabilitation and measures of satisfaction, guarantees of non-repetition, bringing to justice the perpetrators.
	- Voters know what they can do in case of irregularities in voter registration	- CEC informs voters on the competent bodies, deadlines, etc. for correcting any irregularity with the voter registration
	- Voters are informed on programmes of parties and candidates that stand for election	- CEC publishes information on candidates that stand for election - CEC publishes information on programmes of parties/candidates.

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[17] E.g. CEC informs the local government on issues of election organisation which are of its competence

[18] For instance, information on candidates is considered important by a majority of the interviewed in order to decide who to vote for. It should be published by the parties but the fact is that such information is often missing. One measure suggests that CEC facilitates publication of such information by asking parties and candidates to provide it (e.g. by giving them a form to fill-in). Parties and candidates are not obliged by law to provide such information to CEC, but have the possibility to do so. They are reminded of the necessity to publish such information themselves. In this case CEC would act as a facilitator in the interest of the public to receive basic information on candidates to form its opinion. At the presentation of this study the author learned that, in the context of decriminalisation, publication of detailed information on candidates is foreseen. This would be sufficient to inform the public on the candidates.

	- Voters are aware of what is an objective and impartial media information that they have the right to expect during an electoral campaign. - Voters receive objective and impartial media information	- CEC informs voters on the role of an independent media during the electoral campaign - CEC informs the media on the main requirements for an objective and impartial coverage of the electoral campaign
Women	- Women in rural areas receive electoral information and training	- CEC information and training activities for women should focus on those who live and work in rural areas
Minorities	- Minorities can understand electoral information	- CEC efforts to inform in the language of the minorities focus on Greek, Roma and Montenegrin minorities, and in particular in those living in rural areas.
PAK	- Local government satisfies, to the extent possible, the accessibility needs of PAK - PAK take part in elections (in particular the physically disabled and the blind)	- CEC informs local government on the accessibility needs of PAK and the measures to be taken in polling stations to satisfy them.[19]
Young	- Youth receive qualitative civic education at school	- CEC informs on minimum civic education information to be included in school curricula
Candidates from vulnerable groups	- Representation of vulnerable groups is supported	- CEC informs and trains candidates from target groups, esp. first time candidates
Local elected officials	- CEC becomes main source of information on elections for the local government. - Local government relays electoral information in all parts, incl. remote ones, of its jurisdiction - Local government informs in objective and impartial way on elections	- CEC informs local government on issues of election organisation which are of its competence (suggestion: CEC informs on a regular basis, incl. in between two elections, e.g. through newsletters, on updates in electoral legislation and practice) - CEC coordinates with the local government to ensure distribution of electoral information in the entire district
Domestic observers	- Increase professionalism of domestic observers	- There is interest in more practice-oriented training: e.g. discussion of actual problems and issues, discussion of latest changes in legislation, etc. This kind of training could be delivered also by CEC.

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[19] The author was informed that the situation has improved notably. The negative perception of accessibility of polling stations and voting systems by the PAK interviewed may translate a need for more information of PAK on the accessibility possibilities provided. Associations could play a role to disseminate such information.

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Part III: Proposals

8. INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Voter information and civic education are important for consolidating democracy. Education efforts are often targeted at groups that are less likely to vote or face hurdles. They help raise awareness among voters which are confronted with violations of their right to free elections. By informing voters, they contribute to fighting negative phenomena such as vote buying, voter coercion, etc.

Past experience in Albania and results of the present study offer hints on how to organise electoral information and education. The following elements appear necessary:

- have an information and education strategy
- clarify the role of other stakeholders through codes of conduct, guidelines, etc.
- be transparent on violations of electoral rights and respective remedies and
- clarify the financial aspects.

CEC experience shows that it is important to start by defining a strategy on information and education. Information and training should not be released through ad-hoc projects alone. Projects should be part of (and aimed at implementing) a clear strategy.

CEC's 2015 strategy is a good step in the right direction. It has a general – strategic – part and a detailed one which explains the implementation measures (projects) that were conducted in view of June 2015 municipal elections.[20]

The general part of CEC's 2015 strategy can be further developed and transformed into a fully-fledged mid to long term strategy on voter information and education. It should include clear objectives: priority, intermediary and longer term ones. The ultimate objective is trust in elections. Measures that help achieve the objectives should be listed. Stakeholders should be identified and involved. Analysis of risks and opportunities would complete the strategy. The conclusions of the present study (e.g. chapter 7) could inspire the new strategy of CEC on information and education, namely with respect to objectives and implementing measures.

CEC has no exclusive information and education powers. A number of other players do intervene: media, political parties, school, to name only a few. They are important conveyors of electoral information and civic education. It is important that CEC, the body that supervises the organisation of elections, coordinates with these other bodies. In addition to strengthening the legislation and its application (for instance on media), CEC could use other instruments to clarify the minimum conditions to be respected in electoral information and education. Instruments such as codes of conduct, or guidelines, or other, need to be signed by the interested stakeholders. They are published and used by all players (media, parties, school) as guiding documents in information and education activities.

An important step that CEC must take to build trust in elections is transparency. More should be done to inform on irregularities, on possibilities to complain against breaches of the freedom to vote, on sanctions and on their implementation, etc. Transparency is crucial to building trust in elections.

Another aspect is the financial one. It is important for the legal framework to empower the body in charge of elections to conduct voter information and education, in order for the Government to fund such effort. CEC has already a broad legal mandate to inform and educate citizens. However funds allocated to its information and education activities are quite small

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[20] The author was informed that the 2017 strategy had in the meanwhile been published. It is similar in its structure to the 2015 strategy, so that conclusions mentioned here apply the same.

compared to the work needed to be done. They are furthermore dedicated in priority to the training of commissioners.

It is possible for CEC to partially delegate information and education responsibilities to other institutions. CEC has submitted to parliament a proposal for the setting-up of an autonomous training Centre under CEC supervision. The Centre would have better resources for information and education activities thanks also to financial support from international donors. Another proposal is to strengthen the existing capacities of CEC to enable it to fulfil the information and education legal mandate.

Finally, having an information and education strategy is even more important if, in addition to elections, more direct democracy rights (referendums, initiatives), already foreseen in the Albanian Constitution, are to be effectively implemented.

9. EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Evaluation of activities is necessary and should be reflected in the new strategy. The strategy should indicate how such evaluation can be conducted. There exist different quantitative and qualitative criteria which can be applied, depending on the measure in question.

Questionnaires could be a possible way of measuring the effect of information and education activities. By conducting the same survey (same or similar questionnaires) in the future in the same area and with the same type of population, one can see how replies evolve over time. By referring to the different activities that took place in that area in between two surveys, it is possible to extrapolate what effect these activities did have.

The same or similar surveys can be conducted with other populations in other areas. The results will inform on the information and education needs of these populations. If repeated over time the surveys will inform on the effect of the activities conducted to address such needs.

The present questionnaires, and related database, can be used in the future as a tool to identify needs and to measure the efficiency of information and education programmes.

Appendixes

- Questionnaire "vulnerable voters"
- Questionnaire "local elected officials"
- Questionnaire "domestic observers"

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