



**F  
E  
F  
A**

**بنیاد انتخابات ازاد و عادلانه افغانستان**

Free & fair Election Foundation  
of Afghanistan

## **Observation Report from the Fourth Phase of the Voter Registration (VR) Process**

### **Summary:**

The Independent Electoral Commission commenced the fourth phase of the VR process in four provinces on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2009 and concluded it on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Based on the IEC plan, in this phase 80 centers covering 430 stations were established.

Based on its action plan for the fourth phase of voter registration, FEFA managed to observe 50% of the voter registration process in four provinces. Every FEFA observer has managed to observe at least 2 relevant stations of a VR center.

Prior to the commencement of the fourth phase, four provincial master trainers received extensive training at FEFA HQ in Kabul for two days and after receiving training they were deployed to their respective provinces where they conducted training using a special program for 90 observers, including 23 women.

The training provided the observers with the following skills: the importance of observation to the VR process, observation methodology, practical exercises for using the checklists, conducting interviews, reporting system and timeline, etc.

According to the reporting methodology, the observer teams reported to FEFA HQ on a weekly basis. Their important findings were verified by the monitoring team of FEFA upon visiting the field offices twice a month, and the findings were also shared with IEC on a weekly basis, with specific recommendations for improvement of the process.

### **Procedural Violations:**

#### **Underage (under 17) Registrations:**

FEFA has arranged a special plan in order to obtain a more accurate number of underage registrations in the fourth phase. Based on this plan, every observer for a set time of four hours daily recorded the total number of voters in the stations, and the number of underage voters was separated from the total. Later on this number was verified by the provincial officials and reported to the central office.

The number obtained by FEFA’s observers with consideration of coverage area and time limit, indicates the number of underage voters to be 19%, as indicated in the chart below.

Provinces	Number of stations registered with IEC	FEFA’s Observation coverage percentage	4 hour daily observation	Observed total number of registered applicants	Number of underage registered applicants	Percentage
Kandahar	199	45%	26Jan-3Feb	25880	5176	20%
Oruzgan	55	72%	4 - 18 Feb	31000	9300	30%
Helmand	120	45%	11 - 18 Feb	2738	575	21%
Nemroz	26	38%	20- 30 Feb	8899	445	5%

Underage (under 17 years of age) registration has been one of the violations that continued to occur in the fourth phase as it occurred in the previous phases. Main examples of this violation have been observed in the following centers: Kandahar province (Voter Registration Center 002 Zarghuna Ana High School, Center 016 Arghandab district, Center 027 Panjwaie district, Center 008 Haji Merwais Khan High School, Center 005 Mahmood Tarzi High School, Center 013, Karz High School); Oruzgan province (Center 04, Tarinkow district, Center 01, Dahrawod district, Center 02, Chora district, center 01, Chenarto district, center 01, Oruzgan Khas district and center 01, Charino district) Nemroz province (Center 01 Gul Mohammad High School, Center 02 Rodaba High School) and Helmand province ( Center 02, Boys’ High School, Center 01, Girls’ High School, Center 03 Teachers’ College, Gerishk Mechanical High School Center, Garmser Primary School Center and Angar district Torang Center).

**Other Procedural Violations:**

Other types of VR procedural violations have been the lack of attention to ID checking for identity and age; lack of IEC’s impartiality in the process; inaccessible stations; and list- based distribution of voting cards. FEFA’s standard for indentifying violation was repeated occurrence of such violations, and thus, isolated cases have not been included. The numbers of these violations are shown in the following chart.

Provinces	Total number of stations with IEC	FEFA's Observation based on stations	Lack of attention observed in ID checking	Lack of impartiality by IEC officials observed	In accessible stations	Distribution of cards based on the lists
Kandahar	199	90 stations	72	29	49	30
Oruzgan	55	45 stations	17	14	25	15
Helmand	120	54 stations	24	8	23	8
Nemroz	26	10 stations	2	3	5	5

### **Lack of Staff Impartiality**

Lack of impartiality has been another problem that has been observed in 27% of the stations covered by FEFA during the fourth phase of the process.

Some of the high ranked officials in VR centers have been accused by some people and active civil society groups, in some provinces, of having political affiliations. In Helmand province the principal of Lashkar Gah Girls' High School has interfered in VR affairs. She influenced the head of the relevant station (X) and lack of impartiality has been observed on many occasions in this center. Also, underage and multiple registrations have been repeatedly observed in eight stations located in this High School. Although the IEC provincial officials were notified about the incident, no action was taken to prevent such violations from reoccurring. Subsequently, FEFA raised the problems with the HQ authorities of the IEC; however, still it did not take any satisfactory corrective action.

Cases of staff impartiality have been also observed in Shah Walikot, Maiwand, Panjwaie and Zhere districts of Kandahar province. From FEFA's investigations it was clear that the officials of these VR centers were part of a group of powerful local people.

Also, in Oruzgan province local powerful people and former Jihadi commanders were appointed as head of some VR centers and stations. Such cases have been observed in Tarinkowt and **Khas** Oruzgan district of Oruzgan, and Chenarto district. People and civil society activists were accusing them of misusing their power and breaching impartiality.

In Nemroz province the heads of two stations of Rodaba High School and Shahid Mohammad Gul High School were accused of being linked to left wing groups functioning unofficially, and the most of the underage registration cases have been reported from these stations in Nemroz province. FEFA has repeatedly asked for the opinion of the IEC provincial officials in this regard, but have not received any satisfactory response.

## **Protection of Sensitive Materials during Night**

The lack of protection of sensitive materials during night has been one of the major concerns for the public and civil society groups in terms of transparency of the process. The lack of measures to safely store these materials during night have provided an opportunity for those opportunists who want to have more cards in order to affect the outcome of the coming elections by fraud and deception.

In 10% of the stations observed by FEFA, it has been witnessed that sensitive materials have not been sealed properly according to procedure. For example, in Helmand province it has been observed that the Head of a station located in the Girls' High School has taken sensitive materials to his home at night.

In Tarinkowt city of Oruzgan province, Tanali High School station and Dehrawod district it has been observed that after VR hours the cameras have been used for personal purposes for an hour after every registration day.

## **Lack of ID checking for identity and age**

FEFA's observation has indicated that in 58% of the stations under its coverage, IEC staff distributed cards without checking ID for identity and age. Lack of procedural awareness of IEC staff was the answer from the IEC provincial officials in all four provinces to FEFA observers when asked about the continuation of this type of violation.

## **Multiple Registrations**

The lack of a system to avoid multiple registrations was considered as a problem and a technical gap during all phases of the VR. In many cases applicants continued to make successful attempt to get more than one card taking advantage from this technical gap.

Interviews conducted by FEFA with people and active civil society groups suggest that in 30% of the stations covered by FEFA people have taken more than one card. Main examples of this violation have been observed in the following areas: Gerishk Girls' High School in Helmand province; Sayeedal Khan and Tanali High Schools in Tarinkowt; Rodaba and Gul Mohammad Shahid High Schools in Zarang, and in Kandahar province all of the stations located in Nahiya (district) four of Kandahar city.

## **Inaccessibility of the VR Stations**

Inaccessibility of the VR stations is another issue which has had a negative impact on people's participation, especially on women. This problem has been mainly felt in the rural areas.

Based on FEFA's observers' reports, 53% of the stations covered by FEFA people were complaining about stations being far away which has caused tens of thousands of eligible people, especially women, to be deprived of participating in the process.

Examples of stations being far away from residential areas:

Nemroz Province:

Minimum of 50 KM distance between Hele, Din Mohammad, and Kank villages, in Cheghansor district and VR station; 15 KM distance between Khawja, Sarjo and Awar villages and VR station; a minimum of 30 KM distance between Sarlaf, Sardasht and Kada villages and VR station and a 15 KM distance between Khowabgah Kolokhak, Khudy Nazar Khan and Dah Raees villages.

Oruzgan province:

13 KM distance between Safid Qand village, Chahar Chenon district and the VR station; a minimum of 10 KM distance between Sarab, Meyando, Paatan, Langar and Ghara villages and the closest station.

Kandahar province:

30 KM distance between Chenarto village, Shah Wali Kot district; 45 KM distance between Berak village, Spin Boldak district; 18 KM distance between Khogyani village, Marof district and 18 KM distance between Anjeran village, Arghandab district from the VR station.

### **Distribution of Cards Based on Lists**

Distribution of cards based on lists has been one of the main violations occurring in the fourth phase of VR process, and it has been observed in 29% of female stations observed by FEFA. The IEC officials have handed over the registration books to male members of families based on their request; the books have been taken to home to obtain women's finger prints and then cards have been issued based on the provided lists. This violation has continued to occur without following any procedure to verify the number of eligible women.

### **Women's Participation**

In the fourth phase of VR process security problems have been more serious compared to the previous phases and it has had a negative impact on women's participation. Beside the security problems, inaccessibility of VR stations, lack of female staff and employing male staff instead of female staff also impacted upon the low turnout of female participants. Also, 16% of the IEC's VR stations were located inside governmental buildings like district buildings and police stations, which in turn put adverse effects on women participation in the process.

### **Presence of Observers and Media**

In 99% of the stations covered by FEFA it has been observed that except for FEFA's observers there have been no other national or international observers and media. The exceptions are a few cases mainly the presence of few journalists from local radio stations in Kandahar, Oruzgan, and Helmand and Nemroz provinces.

## **Problems with stations for Kochis**

In regard to Kochis' participation in the VR process, FEFA's observers have noticed two main problems: First VR stations being far away; and the second is the lack of female staff. These problems have resulted in deprivation of many Kochis of getting voting cards.

## **Security**

The fourth phase of the VR process was carried out in four insecure provinces, and, contrary to concerns, security organizations at least could provide possibilities for people to participate. However, the security situation had a negative impact particularly in the rural areas on the implementation of the fourth phase of the VR process, as it had on the previous phases. Also, the security situation has resulted in the IEC not being able to establish VR stations in seven districts: Bagheran, Nowzad, Washer, Desho and Khanshin in Helmand province; and Ghorak and Meyanshin in Kandahar province and alternatively, the IEC decided to change the locations and establish VR centers for the above districts in other areas, but people's participation were not noticeable in these centers.

In addition, 16% of the IEC's VR stations were located inside governmental buildings like district buildings and police stations due to security reasons and this has resulted in a low turnout, especially of women.

Occurrence of single incidents during the process has had temporary negative impacts on stations close by. On the 28\01\2009 a police officer guarding a VR center was killed close to Zainab School in Kandahar city, and the killing of two police officers on the 17\02\2009 in Karz High School had temporary negative impacts on people participation.

The willful military operation by coalition forces on 08\02\2009 in Dand district, 100 KM from the Karz High School VR center, has killed two local commanders and had a negative impact on the process. Rumors about Taliban threats to avoid participation by the insurgents in the fourth phase in the following districts had a negative impact on participation, especially women's participation: Shahwali Kowt, Panjwaie and Maiwand in Kandahar province.

On 12\02\2009 a resident of Sangin district of Helmand province was arrested by Taliban on the way home from a VR station and they made him eat his card as punishment. This action has had a negative impact on the psychology of local people.

Also, in Chaharchino and Chenarto districts of Oruzgan province, Taliban were threatening people from the start to the end of the process not to participate and they did this via [messages from] Mullah Imams of local mosques.

## **Conclusion**

The assessment of FEFA's observers, by conducting interviews for identifying factors of such problems, indicates that the IEC staffs are not well-trained and familiar with the process, especially in female stations. Lack of a control and monitoring system for a fair and transparent process of IEC is the main cause of the procedural violations in the fourth phase of the VR process. FEFA's observers have not observed even one case where the provincial official of IEC monitored their field staff.

Another matter which needs to be discussed is the presence of staff with a tendency of tribalism and political agendas. Their presence has been a factor in two of the main violations (multiple registration and underage registration).

FEFA's observation has indicated that the bad security situation in the fourth phase has affected participation, especially women's participation, in rural areas. Locating VR stations inside governmental buildings and employing male staff instead of female staff are due to security reasons [but this detrimentally had impacts upon women participation].

Lack of effective public awareness prior to the commencement of the fourth phase in the region has been another factor for the low turnout especially that of the women.

## **Recommendations:**

FEFA's observation of the fourth phase of the VR process indicates that underage and multiple registrations had the highest number in this phase. Repetition of such violations that occurred in the previous phases, if not prevented by the mechanism the IEC previously mentioned, could undermine the fairness and transparency of the elections.

Considering that 29% of female registration in the fourth phase was based on lists and fingerprinting at homes, this has caused another problem that was not expected. As the IEC has announced, it will conduct a list correction at the end of the process to identify matching fingerprints. If the IEC will conduct such a procedure, in that case most of the women who were registered based on lists, will not be able to vote. FEFA believes that it is not the fault of these people, but it is the IEC that allowed them to register in such a way. FEFA believes that it is not the fault of this category of registered applicants but it is the IEC that caused these violations to occur.

So, it is necessary that when conducting list correction, they should consider the rights of those specially women who should not become deprived from voting.

FEFA's observation has indicated that the security situation like other problems directly impacted on the level of people's participation, especially women, and also affected the IEC work program.

FEFA observation indicates that security problems existing in the provinces similarly impacted the people particularly women participation in the process as well as on the proper performance of the IEC.

Considering the security threats in the provinces scheduled for the fourth phase, the IEC did not manage to properly implement the VR process at least in a considerable number of districts of the relevant provinces.

So, FEFA hopes that the IEC will run the VR process prior to the elections in the districts where the process has not been executed for various reasons, in order to have free and fair elections.