Continuous Voter Registration Concept for Nepal

1. Overview

In 2011 the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) will complete a new digital Voter List with biometric data including photograph and fingerprint. The Voter List will be compiled through a combination of door-to-door enumeration covering every household in Nepal, and the establishment of Registration Centers in all localities to capture the photograph, fingerprint, and digital data of all eligible citizens. Efforts have been made by the ECN to include additional information in the registration forms and system designs to facilitate the development of a multipurpose National ID (NID) card for Nepal.

One of the justifications for the development of the new voter registration system is the institutionalization of a permanent or continuous voter registration system. The continuous voter registration system would remove the requirement for ECN to continue undertaking the costly and logistically difficult annual voter register update exercise.

This concept for continuous voter registration is based on the current status of government administration and plans for civil registration and national identity. The Constitutional Assembly are currently considering models for the establishment of federal structures which may impact the grass root administrative structures such as district, municipality, or VDC administration models. In the event that the structure of grass root administration changes the ECN continuous voter registration strategy will need to adapt to fit with the adopted requirements and structures.

The field level administration of ECN currently only extends to the District Election Office (DEO) which is the most local entity purely under the control and administration of ECN. To improve accessibility for ongoing voter registration the ECN will be required to work closely with other ministries such as the Ministry of Local Development to provide access to registration at the most local level. The ECN continuous voter registration strategy therefore relies on effective coordination and cooperation with other agencies and the potential training and utilization of staff not directly under the supervision and management of ECN.

It is recognized that at this time detailed planning and discussions are yet to be undertaken between Ministry of Home, Ministry of Local Development, and ECN, including discussions regarding resource allocations and cost sharing. Detailed planning exercises and a comprehensive cost benefit analysis must be undertaken before confirmation and implementation of the proposed strategy.

2. Continuous Voter Registration

A permanent or continuous register is a list of all currently eligible voters, adjusted to take account of voter registration changes between electoral events. The permanent or continuous voter register is maintained by electoral administrators unlike a civil register which is maintained by government authorities.

Continuous registration provides several potential benefits including the continued availability of the list for public inspection or election events, the rapid finalization of lists for

general elections, the spacing of staffing and budgetary requirements across the election cycle, and the opportunity for data sharing and linkages across government agencies.

International experience tends to indicate that one of the major challenges facing countries implementing continuous voter registration is the motivation and mobilization of voters to maintain their registration details between election events. Voters are typically only motivated to update their voting information when elections are imminent, therefore largely negating the budgetary and work volume benefits of implementing the process. The ECN may need to consider additional incentives and motivational campaigns between elections to alleviate this issue.

The ECN concept for the continuous voter registration process in Nepal will allow voters to update their registration details at any time by visiting the DEO, or in some cases VDC office. As many voters may not be sufficiently motivated to update their registration details until an election event is imminent, the simple reliance on standard continuous registration may not be sufficient. To be successful the continuous registration process may therefore require a level of periodic campaign based registration accompanied by well designed voter awareness and education activities.

3. Phase 1 - Voter Registration Period

The voter registration project will not only undertake and complete the process of data collection for the voter list, but will concurrently establish permanent ICT infrastructure at each of 75 District Election Offices (DEO). The permanent ICT infrastructure will be used for the continuous updating of the Voter List and to facilitate other election administration and communication requirements. Each DEO will be provided with a computer workstation, camera, fingerprint scanner, and secure network connection linked to the central office. Each DEO office will also retain a number of registration units to support mobile registration activities.

The initial process of voter registration will be conducted in a phased manner. The phasing of registration across geographic zones and polling locations opens the possibility that some voters may miss registration due to being absent from their location during registration, or not attaining the required documents in time for registration.

ECN will implement processes during the initial voter registration period that will allow missed voters to add their details to the voter register through visiting the DEO or VDC offices. It should be noted that voters with missing documentation such as Citizenship Certificate or Migration Certificate must also complete processes at the district (CDO) and VDC offices making it possible to complete both civil and voter processes simultaneously.

Activities and facilities established during the initial voter registration phase will provide the basis for the later expansion to full continuous registration including the processing of transfers and other voter related transactions.
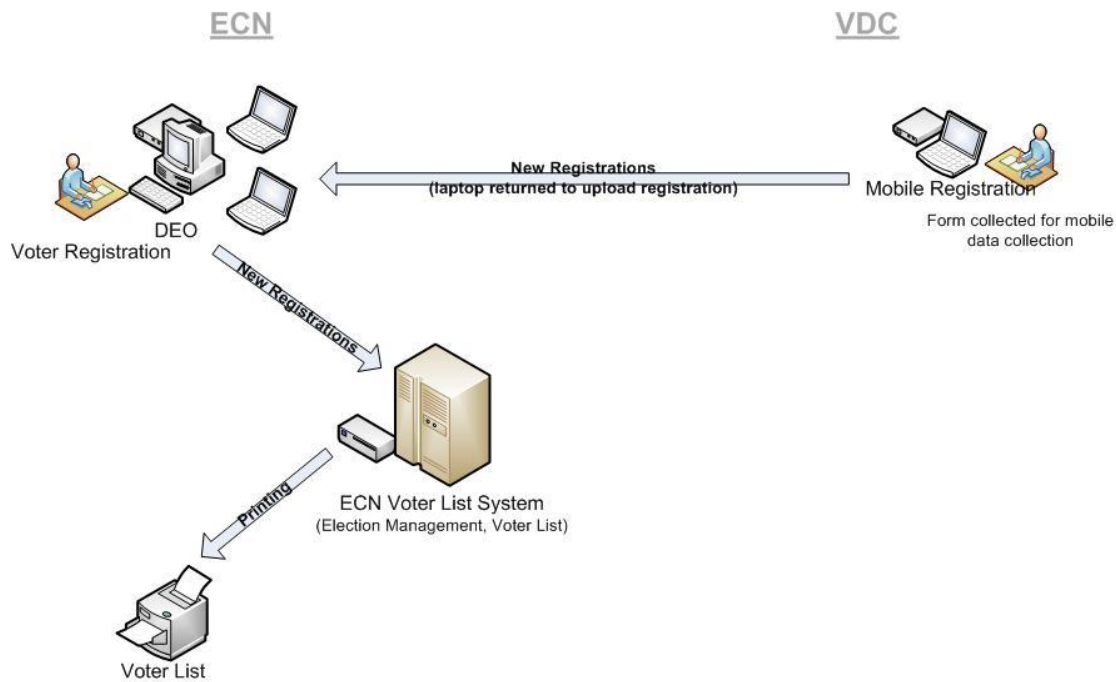
3.1. DEO Registration

At the commencement of voter registration in each district permanent ICT structure will be established at the DEO office including a computer workstation, camera, fingerprint scanner, and a secure network connection linked to the central office. The computer workstation will have software installed to accommodate the consolidation of all voter information collected within the district, in addition to the direct capture of voter information through direct data entry on the workstation or attached laptop computer.

Staff will be trained in every DEO office to operate and maintain the equipment and software. Additional staffing resources have been included in the voter registration project to support the continuous voter registration process.

During this initial registration period only additions will be made to the list, no transfers or other voter transactions will be possible. Voter data will be stored and managed on the DEO database for later transfer and consolidation to the central VR system.

The work process will be as follows:

1. Eligible voters attend the DEO at any time of their convenience to add their name to the voter list.
2. The voter must present their Citizenship Certificate, and if required Migration Certificate. These documents will be the basis for the voter registration.
3. DEO staff will enter the details from the registration form into the computer or attached laptop, and digitally capture the photograph and fingerprint of the voter.
4. Biometric (fingerprint) information will be used to identify potential duplicate registrations within the DEO database.
5. Voter information is stored on the DEO workstation for later processing and update to the Central voter register for progressive nationwide duplicate registration checking.

3.2.   VDC Processes

The DEO location may not be accessible and convenient for many voters in rural or remote locations. Therefore, at completion of the initial registration process voter registration forms will be made available at VDC offices.

Voters who did not have the opportunity to register during the designated registration period will have the opportunity to go to the VDC office to complete their registration form. The VDC Secretary (Registration Officer) will periodically report the number of outstanding registrations to the DEO.

Mobile registration units will be deployed from the DEO to VDC offices on an agreed schedule to complete the registration of missed voters through the data entry and biometric capture of voter details. Local voter education will be used to notify voters of the time to come to the VDC to complete registration.

The work process will therefore be as follows:

1. Missed voters report to the Registration Officer at the VDC to complete registration forms. The voter must present their Citizenship Certificate, and if required Migration Certificate. The voter is issued a tear-off receipt from the registration form.
2. The Registration Officer informs the DEO of the number of outstanding registrations.
3. The DEO will schedule mobile registration activities and conduct voter education in the target area in advance of mobile registration.
4. The DEO staff will travel to VDC to capture the details from the registration form into a registration unit and digitally capture the photograph and fingerprint of the voters.
5. The DEO staff will return to the DEO and upload the information from the registration unit to the DEO workstation.
6. Biometric (fingerprint) information will be used to identify potential duplicate registrations within the DEO database.
7. Voter information is stored on the DEO workstation for later processing and update to the Central voter register for progressive nationwide duplicate registration checking.

4. Phase 2 - Post Election Period

Following the completion and consolidation of the new biometric voter register ECN will establish a full continuous voter registration system. The system will be a fully integrated process including the continuous matching and processing of additions, transfers, removals, and other transactions.

Some of the features of the full continuous voter registration will be:

- Ability to process all voter register additions, transfers, and removals.
- Capture of voter information including biometric data.
- Central matching, processing, and updating of all transactions.
- Reporting of duplicate registrations with follow-up at the local (field) level.
- All offices processing continuous registrations connected to ECN through a secure VPN network.
- Network to also be used to support basic election management and other communication requirements.
- For data protection and security reasons field offices will have a non-updateable (read only) voter register for their district that can be used for inquiry purposes. This register will be replaced with an updated list periodically or on request.

- Continuous registration will be available in all DEO offices and VDC offices that meet specific readiness criteria.
- DEO offices will receive all registration forms processed by VDC offices within their district and will be able to generate reports on all registrations conducted within their district.

To alleviate the anticipated surge of voter registration updates prior to electoral events the continuous voter registration process may need to be supplemented by periodic campaign based registration including well designed voter awareness and education activities.

To implement the continuous voter registration system within 2011 ECN must:

- Upgrade registration software including the central voter register system, DEO workstations, and all required registration units to process and manage transfer, removal, and other continuous voter registration transactions.
- Recondition registration equipment returning from data collection activities in readiness for redeployment to support continuous registration.
- Test, pilot, and deploy continuous voter registration, procedures, training, voter education, software, and hardware systems.
- Train all operational field staff in the new processes and systems.
- Establish storage and maintenance facilities to ensure the continued operational readiness of all registration equipment not in current service.
- Conduct an assessment of all VDC offices to determine which offices meet the criteria for continuous voter registration. To meet the requirements for continuous voter registration VDC offices must:
  - Provide security for both the staff and equipment required to process and manage voter registration.
  - Be fully staffed with trained and computer literate staff.
  - Have reliable electricity and communications including the ability to be connected to the ECN network.
  - Be accountable and responsible for the maintenance and care of the equipment.
  - Be accountable and responsible for registration activities.

See *ANNEX A* and *ANNEX B* for indicative process flows for new voter registrations and voter transfers.
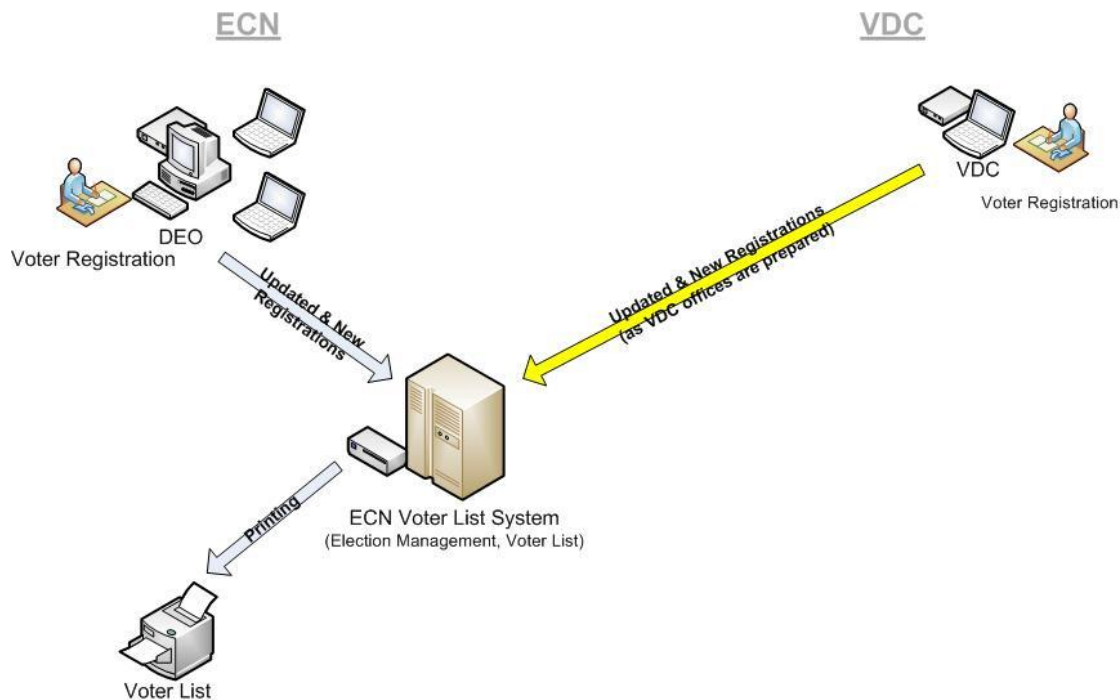
4.1. DEO Registration

All DEO offices will be established with a secure network link to the ECN central server room facilities. DEO staff will be trained in the use of the upgraded software to perform continuous registration including the transfer and removal of voters.

Cooperation must be pursued with the corresponding CDO office to encourage citizens attending the CDO office to collect citizenship certificates to also attend the DEO to complete voter registration at the same time. The DEO may consider making voter registration forms available for collection and to be issued with the citizenship certificates and other civil documents.

The work process will be as follows:

1. Eligible voters attend the DEO at any time of their convenience to add their name to the voter list, or to update their registration details.
2. The voter must present their Citizenship Certificate, and if required Migration Certificate. These documents will be the basis for the voter registration.
3. DEO staff will enter the details from the registration form into the computer and digitally capture the photograph and fingerprint of the voter.
4. The voter details will be electronically transferred through the secure ECN network and updated on the ECN central database.
5. Citizenship Certificate and biometric (fingerprint) information will be used to identify potential duplicate registrations within the ECN central voter registration database.
6. Potential duplicate registrations will be referred back to the relevant field offices for follow-up.
7. The Voter List can be printed at any time from the central database.

4.2. VDC Registration

ECN will conduct an assessment of the readiness of VDC office to conduct continuous voter registration. It is currently estimated that approximately 50% of VDC offices will be able to conduct continuous voter registration. Initially a two pronged approach to voter registration at

the VDC level will be required with some offices offering permanent registration facilities, and others relying on form based and mobile registration supported by the DEO. It is anticipated that over a period of time all VDC offices will be able to provide a permanent facility for continuous voter registration.

The ICT equipment deployed to VDC offices will not only meet the requirements of voter registration, but will provide the basis for VDC offices to commence digital processing of birth and death registration and other civil processes. VDC offices will be encouraged to request voters to update their voter registration details at the same time as updating civil registration information.

The work process for VDC offices able to provide permanent continuous voter registration facilities will be as follows:

1. Eligible voters attend the VDC at any time of their convenience to add their name to the voter list, or to update their registration details.
2. The voter must present their Citizenship Certificate, and if required Migration Certificate. These documents will be the basis for the voter registration.
3. VDC staff will enter the details from the registration form into the computer and digitally capture the photograph and fingerprint of the voter.
4. The details will be electronically transferred through the secure ECN network and updated on the ECN central database.
5. Citizenship Certificate and biometric (fingerprint) information will be used to identify potential duplicate registrations within the ECN central voter registration database.
6. Potential duplicate registrations will be referred back to the relevant field offices for follow-up.
7. Processed registration forms are forwarded to the DEO.
8. The DEO office will be able to generate a report of all registrations conducted with their district.
9. The Voter List can be printed at any time from the central database.

The work process for VDC offices not able to provide permanent continuous voter registration facilities will be as follows:

1. Voters report to the Registration Officer at the VDC to complete registration forms. The voter must present their Citizenship Certificate, and if required Migration Certificate.
2. The Registration Officer informs the DEO of the number of outstanding registrations.
3. The DEO will schedule mobile registration activities and conduct voter education in the target area in advance of the registration.
4. The DEO staff will travel to VDC to capture the details from the registration form into the registration unit and digitally capture the photograph and fingerprint of the voters.
5. The DEO staff will return to the DEO and upload the information from the registration unit to the DEO workstation.
6. The details will be electronically transferred through the secure ECN network and updated on the ECN central database.
7. Citizenship Certificate and biometric (fingerprint) information will be used to identify potential duplicate registrations within the ECN voter registration database.
8. Potential duplicate registrations will be referred back to the relevant field offices for follow-up.
9. The Voter List can be printed at any time from the central database.

5. Phase 3 - Civil and Voter Registration

The implementation of an integrated Civil Register must proceed in a logical, modular, and phased approach to accommodate the varied schedules and capacities of all stakeholders including central and field level staffing, infrastructure, and technology development.

In many developed countries it is customary for the Voter List to be extracted as required from the Civil Register. This is currently the ambition of Nepal, but this can only be achieved with sufficient technical preparations and procedural safeguards to ensure the integrity of the shared data to meet both civil and electoral purposes. Nepal has a long way to go in terms of establishing the required infrastructure and capacity to implement a full civil register, and it is anticipated that this process may take a substantial period of time, likely to be a minimum of five to eight years.
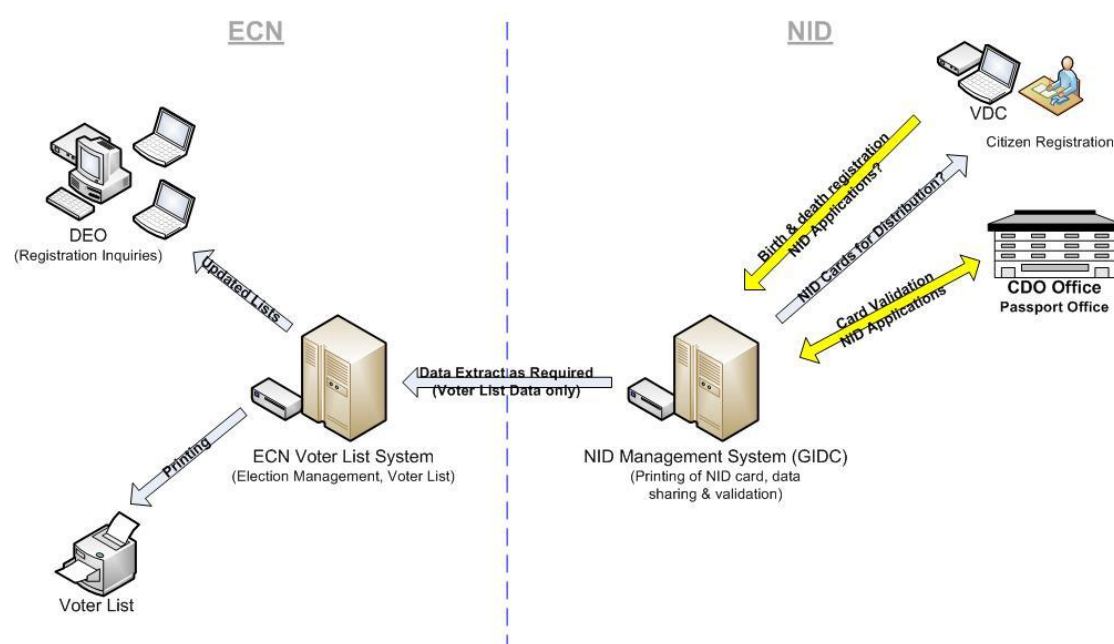
Fundamental change must be made in the update process to implement this modality. No longer will the DEO be directly involved in the processing of voter registrations, as all registration will be performed on the basis or Civil/NID registrations and be conducted through CDO and VDC offices.

> *Prior to implementation, agreement must be reached between the ECN and NID authority regarding the finalization of mechanisms to protect both the NID process, and the ECN constitutional requirement of ensuring the integrity of the Voter List.*

Some of the mechanisms and processes that should be in place prior to the implementation of all registration through the CDO and VDC offices are:

- All CDO offices and sufficient VDC offices must be prepared including ICT equipment, secure network connection, registration software, and trained personnel.
- Mechanisms must be available for the validation of citizen's identity and residency at point of initial registration. This may be through appropriate documentation or endorsement from local officials, and/or other locally respected citizens.
- The DEO must have the opportunity for periodic review of local registrations.

- Electronic audit trails must be maintained of updates applied to the database including operator, date, and time of registration processing.
- Ongoing analysis of registration trends must be performed including time based analysis.
- Ongoing biometric matching and follow-up must be processed by NID/GIDC to ensure a continuous de-duplication process.
- Citizen/voter awareness and education campaigns must be conducted prior to registration cut-over to ensure that voters understand the new NID registration and Voter List processes.
- It must be ensured that all appropriate legal amendments are in place to ensure that sufficient political, process, and constitutional safeguards are in place.

The work process will therefore be as follows:

1. Eligible citizens will attend the CDO or VDC at any time of their convenience to apply for an NID card or to update their civil registration details.
2. New registration must present appropriate identification documents. For citizens with insufficient documentation other forms of local identification and endorsement may be considered.
3. CDO/VDC staff will enter the details from the registration form into the computer and digitally capture the photograph and fingerprint of the voter.
4. The details will be electronically transferred through a secure NID/GIDC network and updated on the NID central database. An additional step may be required for the respective CDO to authorize VDC entered NID registrations.
5. NID and biometric (fingerprint) information will be used to identify potential duplicate registrations existing within the national database.
6. NID cards may be centrally printed by NID and distributed though CDO and/or VDC offices.
7. The ECN may extract and review data relating to eligible voters (18 years and above) from the NID/GIDC database periodically and/or as required to meet election management requirements including printing of the Voter List.

6. Challenges

The challenges to ECN in implementing an integrated and effective continuous voter registration process are manifold. The process as outlined above is designed to reduce technical complexity, and to facilitate modular and progressive implementation as facilities and trained staff become available.

Some of the major challenges to be faced by the ECN in implementing continuous voter registration are expected to be:

- To raise and maintain voters awareness of the new continuous process including to the motivation of voters to keep their registrations details updated between electoral events.
- Accessibility of offices including the VDC office for voters in remote areas.
- The availability and maintenance of infrastructure including electrical, structural, and communications at DEO and VDC office locations.
- The preparation of VDC offices to ensure that the maximum number of offices are available to participate in the continuous registration process.
- The training and support of staff at the DEO and VDC level to participate in the process.

- The maintenance, support, and servicing of software, hardware, and peripheral equipment throughout the country.
- Continuation of momentum for the implementation of new processes and systems beyond the election period.
- The establishment of working relationships with the Ministry of Home and Ministry of Local Development at central and field levels to meet the mutual requirements of all organizations. This must include the mutual promotion and awareness of civil and voter registration processes.
- Potential compensation plans must be discussed and agreed between Ministry of Home, Ministry of Local Development, and ECN to ensure equitable cost sharing and compensation at the central and field levels.
- The qualitative monitoring of registration activities undertaken at the field level throughout the country. ECN must establish a tiered structure of qualitative assurance to monitor all registration activities.
- The potential adoption of new federal state structures may require adaptation of the strategy to work with new or revised field level structures and administration.

ANNEX A – Indicative Process Flow for New Registrations
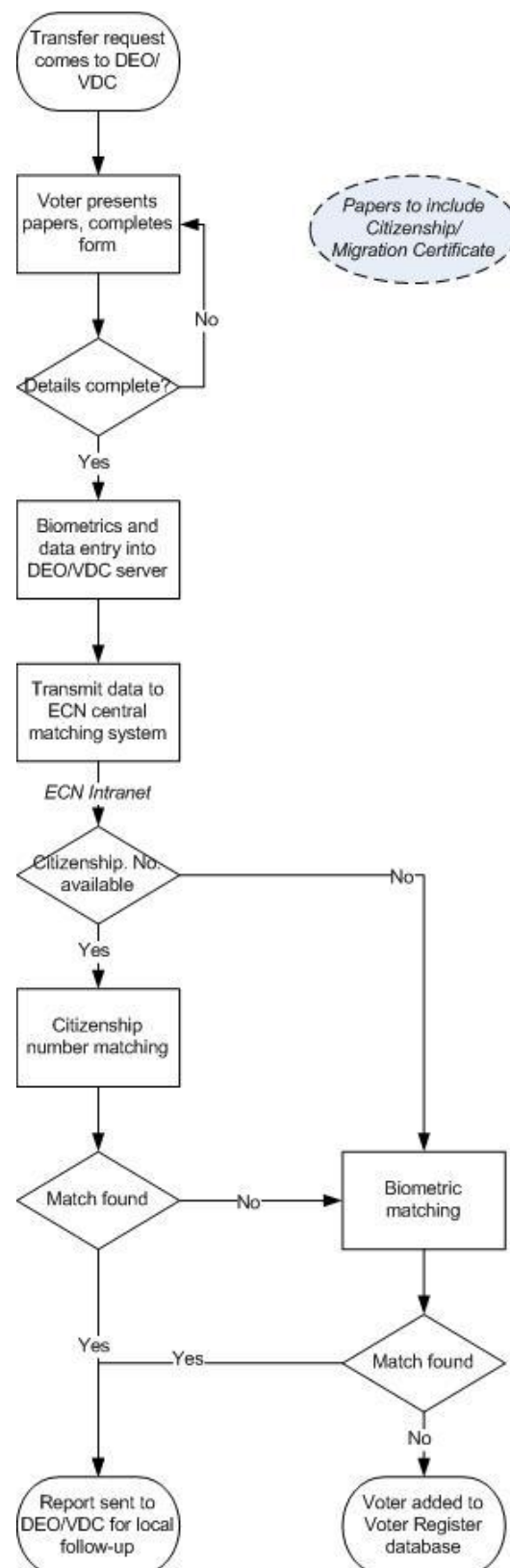
ANNEX B – Indicative Process Flow for Voter Transfer

```
                    ┌──────────────┐
                   (Transfer request )
                   ( comes to DEO/   )
                   (     VDC         )
                    └──────┬───────┘
                           │
                           ▼
                  ┌─────────────────┐
                  │  Voter presents  │◄──────┐        ╭ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ╮
                  │  papers, completes│       │       ( Papers to include )
                  │       form        │       │       ( Citizenship/      )
                  └────────┬──────────┘       │       ( Migration Certificate)
                           │                  │        ╰ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ╯
                           ▼              No  │
                      ◇ Details complete? ◇───┘
                           │
                          Yes
                           ▼
                  ┌─────────────────┐
                  │  Biometrics and  │
                  │  data entry into │
                  │  DEO/VDC server  │
                  └────────┬─────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
                  ┌─────────────────┐
                  │  Transmit data to│
                  │  ECN central     │
                  │  matching system │
                  └────────┬─────────┘
                        ECN Intranet
                           │
                           ▼
                 ◇ VIN/Citizenship          No
                   No. available ◇──────────────────┐
                           │                         │
                          Yes                        │
                           ▼                         │
                  ┌─────────────────┐                │
                  │ VIN/Citizenship  │                │
                  │ number matching  │                │
                  └────────┬─────────┘                │
                           │                          ▼
                           ▼                 ┌──────────────┐
                      ◇ Match found ◇──No──► │  Biometric    │
                           │                 │  matching     │
                           │                 └──────┬────────┘
                          Yes                       │
                           │                        ▼
                           │             ──Yes──◇ Match found ◇
                           │                             │
                           ▼                            No
                  ┌─────────────────┐                   ▼
                 ( Voter record      )         ( Voter added to )
                 ( transferred to new)         ( Voter Register )
                 ( voting location   )         ( database       )
                  └─────────────────┘           └──────────────┘
```

ANNEX C – Timeline for Implementation of Continuous Voter Registration

Task Name	Sep '10	Oct '10	Nov '10	Dec '10	Jan '11	Feb '11	Mar '11	Apr '11	May '11	Jun '11	Jul '11	Aug '11	Sep '11	Oct '11	Nov '11	Dec '11	Jan '12	Feb '12	Mar '12
Phase 1 - Continuous Voter Registration (new reg.)																			
District Level Continuous Registration & Awareness																			
Software Preparation/Modification																			
Finalize technical designs for CVR systems & processes																			
Development CVR systems for District/VDC Office																			
Development & Testing of Central CVR Software																			
Claims & Objections for 2010/11 Register																			
Claims & Objections Period																			
Hearing Process																			
Potential Election Timeframe																			
Notice Period																			
Election													6/10						
Assessment of VDC																			
Assessment of VDC preparadeness																			
Develop deployment plan																			
Phase 2 - Deployment of full CVR																			
Reconditioing of equipment for CVR																			
Training in CVR process																			
Roll out of CVR Software																			
Voter Education/Awareness																			