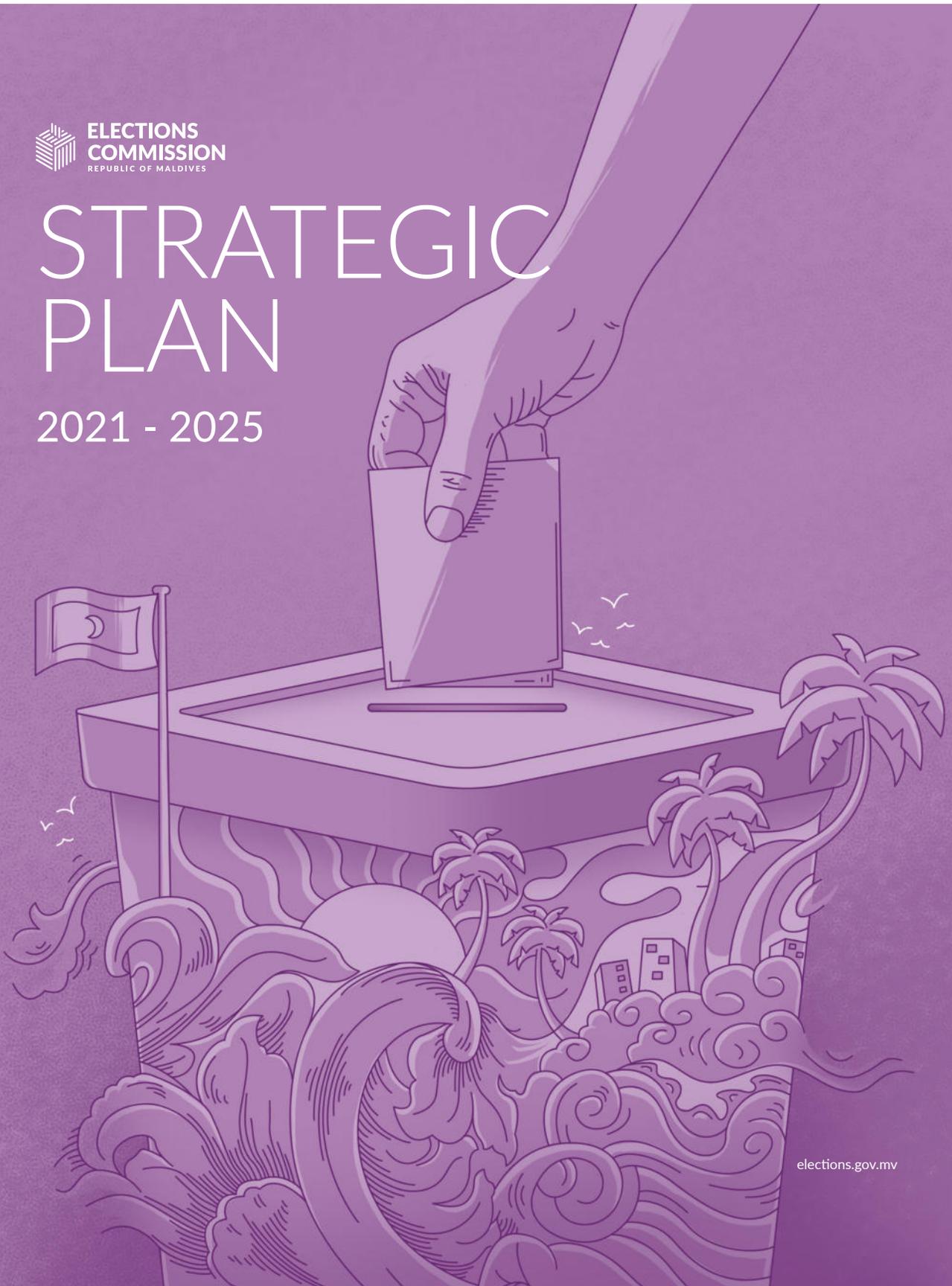




ELECTIONS
COMMISSION
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

STRATEGIC PLAN

2021 - 2025





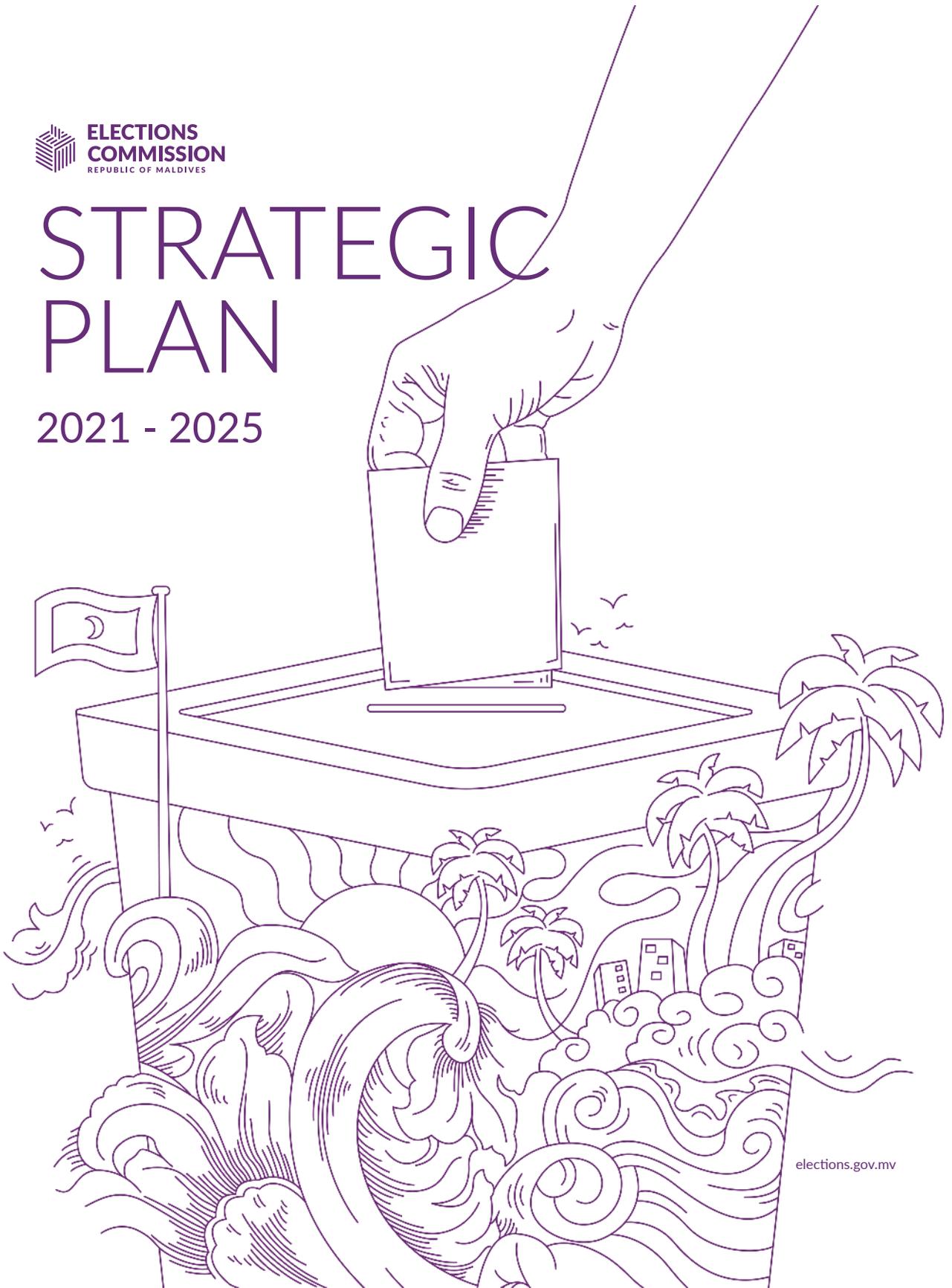
ECM



**ELECTIONS
COMMISSION**
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

STRATEGIC PLAN

2021 - 2025



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Foreword



We are pleased to present here the third five-year Strategic Plan of the Election Commission of Maldives. The development of this Strategic Plan represents reflection on learning from the earlier two Strategic Plans as well as findings from extensive stakeholder consultations.

The ECM has achieved notable progress in implementing the strategies and principles included in the past two Strategic Plans, and in this regard, I would humbly like to thank all who made this possible.

The focus of this Strategic Plan is the fulfilling of the Commission's legal mandates and the provision of swift, accessible and quality assistance to enable all stakeholders to fully participate in the Maldives' electoral process, including voters, candidates, and observers. Furthermore, through this Plan the Commission aims to use multiple avenues to ensure enhanced public awareness on electoral processes, political party activities, and transparency around the work that is conducted by the Commission. It also focuses on strengthening institutional systems, enhancing staff competencies, and increasing public trust in the Commission. Additionally, we aspire to strengthen the Maldives' electoral system so that it best protects electoral participation, serving as a strong model for other states.

I would like to highlight the valued participation and input of government agencies, political parties, NGOs and CSO, and other related stakeholders, especially that of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) team and the hardworking and skilled staff and Members of the Commission.

While thanking IFES and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for their technical and financial assistance in this process, I also hope to receive their continued support in achieving the goals addressed in this Plan. Our aim is that this Strategic Plan will increase the Commission's capacity, enhance its credibility, strengthen stakeholder trust in the Commission's work, and raise its profile as a model for best practices on an international level. I pray to Allah that we achieve this objective. Aameen!

15 September 2021

Ismail Habeeb Abdul Raheem
Vice Chairman, ECM

The Strategic Plan 2021-2025

The Elections Commission of the Maldives (ECM) is central to delivering democracy with integrity and fairness in the Maldives. The ECM's work combines planning and running elections, within its legal and regulatory framework. It strives to maintain the integrity of the political landscape while implementing laws, regulations and policies in a neutral manner. This work needs to be supported by ongoing policy, research, communications and engagement activities.

Since its establishment in 2008 as a constitutional body, this is the third Strategic Plan of the commission. The Plan defines the strategic agenda and roadmap of ECM for the next five years and sets out the major changes ECM aims to achieve to make the best contribution to fulfilling the vision of establishing itself as a trusted institution that upholds the principles of democracy through electoral integrity, credibility and inclusivity.

The plan's four strategic pillars focus on becoming a more mature, flexible, sustainable organisation guided through a well aligned legislative framework; developing a competent and professional workforce; improving the efficiency and effectiveness of election management and services delivery through an accessible and data driven system; and facilitating greater engagement and participation of all stakeholders to maintain trust and promote

ethical democratic engagement of the society.

Underlying those major goals is an ambition to keep improving the organization's agility. The ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances and to design and deploy new policies, solutions and services for emerging and rapidly changing circumstances will be a necessity now and into the future

The ECM believes that democracy doesn't just happen. It relies on systems and processes of representation, regulation and engagement without which we can't enjoy the practical, day-to-day benefits of free and fair elections in an open and effective democracy.

This strategic plan is the next step in ECM's organisational maturity. It informs the annual work programs of the Commission and will help maintain focus on the bigger picture as ECM delivers on its day-to-day mandates with integrity, commitment and excellence.

Elections Commission of Maldives

The ECM was established on 7 August 2008 as an independent and impartial institution under Article 167 of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives (2008).

Through Article 170, the ECM is mandated to conduct, manage, supervise, and facilitate all elections and public referendums, to ensure the proper exercise of the right to vote, and to ensure that all elections and public referendums are conducted freely and fairly, without intimidation, aggression, undue influence or corruption, among other functions.

Under Article 168 and as further specified in the Elections Commission Act (8/2008), five members are to be appointed by the president with approval by People's Majlis for every five-year term.

The Elections Commission's responsibilities and powers, as per the Constitution and the Elections Commission Act, include the following:

Constitutional Mandates

- To conduct, manage, supervise, and facilitate all elections and public referendums, to ensure the proper exercise of the right to vote, and to ensure that all elections and public referendums are conducted freely and fairly, without intimidation, aggression, undue influence or corruption.
- To prepare, maintain, and update electoral rolls, and to make all arrangements for holding elections and public referendums.
- To hold and declare the results of those elections and public referendums within periods prescribed by law.
- To compile the register of voters in each constituency, to revise it at such periods as shall be determined by law and to provide for publication of the register in the Government Gazette.
- To fix, vary, demarcate and continuously review the boundaries and names of constituencies or voting units in all elections in accordance with principles specified by law and to provide for publication of any amendments in the Government Gazette.

- To register political parties, and to perform those actions relating to political parties as specified by law.
- To educate and create awareness among the general public on the electoral process and its purpose.

Mandates set by Elections Commission Act

- To formulate electoral policies for all elections, public referendums and those elections assigned to the Elections Commission by the Constitution and law.
 - To conduct training for employees and delegates.
 - To plan and implement electoral logistics and delivery of equipment.
 - To accredit domestic and international observers.
 - To make all arrangements for Maldivian people residing abroad to cast their vote.
 - To determine polling stations for elections and public referendums; and give timely notice to the landlord or person in charge in case of failure to cooperate with the Elections Commission, and discharge its duties.
-



An election official verifies the identity of a voter ◀



A voter casts her vote in the 2019 Parliamentary Elections, assisted by a polling officer ◀

The Strategic Planning Process

Setting the Stage and Challenges Faced Due to the COVID-19 Crisis

The strategic planning process for the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan was initiated in April 2021. The process was initiated with an inception meeting with the Commission's President and members to set the stage, agree on timelines and methodology for the development of the plan, and commit to ensuring that the strategic planning process was incorporated into management culture of the Elections Commission. Also, at the inception phase Members of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee (SPSC) were identified and the SPSC was established. Senior leadership, including the Secretary General and a Commission Member, commit to overseeing and supporting the work of the SPSC. The process however did not go at the pace envisaged due to the recurring COVID-19 health emergency situation in the country.

At the time, Maldives, like the rest of the world was struggling with the COVID-19 crisis, with the 2nd wave hitting the country around the time. The situation forced a complete lock down of the capital city, Male and other regions of Maldives resulting in the enforcement of strict curfews which prevented physical face to face contacts. All public institutions were closed and work from home arrangements were made until August 2021.

In addition to COVID related challenges, during the strategic planning period, the ECM was also preparing for the Local Council Election, which has been postponed from 2020 due to the ongoing pandemic. The Local Council Election and simultaneous election for Women Development Committees (WDC) is the largest and most complex election administered by ECM. After the election was held in May 2021, ECM members and staff were able to devote greater attention to the strategic plan development.

Desk Review

Following the approval of the concept note and strategic planning methodology by the Commission and with the advice of the SPSC, a desk review of available key documents and legal frameworks was completed to inform the formulation of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

Key documents reviewed included all applicable legislations, post-election reports, observations and recommendations of domestic and international observer groups and annual reports of ECM. Special attention was given to review and evaluation of the progress made in terms of implementation of ECM's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan.



An election official assists in the packaging of voting materials and logistical coordination ◀



Elections Commission staff conduct a mock poll, demonstrating appropriate use of COVID-19 safety procedures in the 2021 Local Council Elections" ◀

Internal and External Consultations

The strategic planning process adopted a participatory approach to ensure that the Plan is reflective of both the internal and external stakeholders' needs and expectations.

Although the COVID-19 lockdown prevented direct face to face engagements, extensive consultations took place with secretariat staff including section and unit heads and a wide range of external stakeholders through online conferencing platforms. The online modality has its advantages as it facilitated connection, enabling the ECM to gain input from a wider group of stakeholders in the outer islands. The online meetings were organized with a few members in each focus group, to give ample time for discussions and inputs. A separate discussion meeting was held with the members of the Commission to gain insights on current practices, the challenges and their vision for the future of the ECM. The internal engagements helped to understand practitioners' perspectives and identify positive experiences and problems faced by staff members.

External stakeholders reached included a broad range of key stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), related government institutions, media, election observer groups, law enforcement agencies, youth groups, gender and disability advocacy groups, local councils and independent institutions in the Maldives.

The wide-ranging input by different stakeholders provided strong legitimacy to the strategic planning process and will support the ECM in making key decisions required to achieve its vision. Perspectives of external stakeholders allow the ECM to take a step back and see itself from the outside, become more innovative and go beyond the

ordinary way of addressing issues that may affect its performance.

Staff & Commission-Led Participatory Planning

The strategic plan development process was led and owned by commission members and all staff, as the draft of the plan was formulated involving the whole of the ECM in a series of facilitated workshops.

The first of these workshops was held in mid-July. The first workshop focused on introducing staff and commission members to the strategic planning process; sharing preliminary findings from external stakeholder consultations were shared; reviewing progress and achievements of the last strategic plan; and conducting a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis to enable a systematic assessment of the internal status of the ECM and the external environment in which it operates. The participants also reviewed the mandates of ECM. The workshop was concluded with an introduction to the importance of setting a vision, mission and guiding principles.

The second workshop was held in August 2021 after a break to give room for Local Council re-elections. The workshop offered an opportunity for the Commissioners and Secretariat to reflect, discuss and fine-tune the institution's strategic foundations, namely the mission, vision and guiding principles. Priority strategic areas for the new Strategic Plan were identified at this workshop, with an initial outline of the key pillars, the strategic goals and objectives formulated. The Core Team tasked with drafting the Strategic Foundation document and the development of the subsequent operational plan was identified at the end of the workshop.

Drawing on the feedback from the two previous workshops, in July and August, the Core Team held working meetings to finalize language of the goals and objectives and identify strategic objectives and related actions to be included in the Plan. During the process key staff from respective sections were invited to participate and contribute in the discussion. These sessions were moderated and guided by the external consultant.

The resulting draft plan was then presented to a validation workshop which involved all Commission Members and the secretariat staff. After further deliberations, the first draft of the plan was put together and later endorsed by the Commission.

The endorsed draft was then sent out for comments and feedback from stakeholders, with a final validation workshop held with key stakeholders to gather input on

the draft strategic pillars, strategic goals, and associated objectives for the next five-year period. Through the stakeholder consultations, the ECM gained a better understanding of stakeholder expectations, while stakeholders gained a greater awareness of the mandate of the ECM and challenges it faced. This collaboration in the strategic planning process ensures effective partnerships in the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

After incorporation of the stakeholder feedback, the department heads were then tasked to incorporate details such as the key actions, timelines, responsible actors and performance indicators. This task was also led by the Core Team. Following these final deliberations and incorporation of the operational plan matrix, an initial draft Strategic Action Plan was presented to the Commission in early September 2021 for their final endorsement and approval.

Review of the Previous Strategic Plan and Issues to Take Forward

The work of ECM in the past five years was guided by its second Strategic Plan (2016- 2020). The plan clarified realistic, measurable and achievable outcomes, focusing on areas that were identified as deserving special strategic prioritization six years ago. The identified key challenges that included:

- How to restore the confidence of electoral stakeholders in the electoral process and election administration?
- How to deliver its mandate, given the challenging political context?
- How to ensure a focus on long term institutional strengthening while administering the conduct of its mandated elections?

The overriding strategic priority was enhancing the institutional and human resource capacity of ECM to deliver its mandate more effectively and efficiently, while also working to promote the full participation of stakeholders throughout the electoral cycle and ensuring their trust and confidence in the electoral process and election administration. In the plan key strategies for the successful implementation

were identified as improving communication, cooperation and transparency.

The strategic plan was organized into 26 strategic objectives, grouped under eight strategic pillars, each of which is defined by a specific goal. Detailed actions to achieve each objective were included in the operation plan.

During the life of the second Strategic Plan, four major elections were conducted successfully including the 2017 Local Council Election, 2018 Presidential Election, 2019 Parliamentary (People's Majlis) Election and the 2021 Local Councils elections (this was the 2020 Local Council election that had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis). In addition, the Bar Council's initial election, the two Local Government Authority (LGA) board member elections and several by-elections for local councils were held.

Legal Framework

One of the biggest legal challenges faced by the ECM in independently fulfilling its constitutional mandate was the 16-point Supreme Court Guideline issued during the 2013 Presidential Election.



An election official marks a voter's fingernail with indelible ink ◀



A polling center on elections day for the 2021 Local Council Elections ◀

After the Supreme Courts 2020 verdict to clarify that the guideline was only specific to the said election, the issues concerning the guidelines have now been resolved eliminating the need to bring further revisions to the existing legislations. With regard to legal reform required, amendments were proposed and made to key election acts, including Election Commission Act. However, with so many elections related acts there is further streamlining and alignment required to address some of the mismatches that still exists among these related legislations.

Institutional Structure and Processes

During the past five years efforts have been made to strengthen the institutional framework by having clearly set roles and terms of references for staff, and the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for carrying out different responsibilities. However, the target to integrate such individual SOPs into a properly categorized system of operational manuals was not achieved during the plan period. It still remains a priority for such manuals or hand books to be developed as an institutional reference tool and to ensure institutional memory is not lost with staff turnover.

The issue of addressing the office space constraints is also a matter yet to seek a more realistic solution. The difficulty of staff having to work in two separate sites and not having enough space to accommodate the large number of temporary staff hired during elections remains to be addressed.

Work towards establishing a transparent and secure data-management system that facilitates analysis and use of data for evidence based policy-making and tracking of progress needs to still continue. This includes the improvements to ECMs website to make it a more user-friendly and

accessible. Furthermore, being prepared and aware of the potential risks and unforeseen emergencies such as pandemics or natural disasters need to remain in the agenda for the next 5 years.

Human Resources & Professional Development

Developing a competent and professional workforce is the prerequisite for achieving the goals of any strategic plan. Thus, a high priority has always been given to human capacity development. The Commission already has an experienced, skilled and motivated work force. However, staff retention at technical and senior posts have remained a challenge, and with high staff turnover there is always the risk of institutional memory loss. As was identified in the previous plan a human resources or skills audit is still required to identify gaps and to design a targeted skill development program. There is also the need for providing core skills in election administration, coordination and management for all key staff and also provide context specific training to staff in specialized carrier paths. The ECM planned to develop a modular based skills program that would lead to accreditation in specialized fields with core components in election management skills. This task has to continue in the new planning period. Similarly, the development of an accredited certificate level training program for voting official and training facilitators also need to be implemented. It was also planned to implement a transparent system of merit-based staff recruitment and a systematically monitored staff appraisal system into the current HR management system. This task too will have to be carried forward to the new plan.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Some notable progresses has been made towards the establishment of an integrated election management system (EMS) but it still remains at the developing stage. To make the EMS system a fully functional one, there is the need for further upgrading of the application with modules to be developed and integrated into it. The planned expansion of e-services for stakeholders needs to be completed during the next 5-year period. It is expected that e-services will cover online candidate registration, online voter re-registration and other such services. E-voting was seen as a more long-term project which required further assessment on its pros and cons, thus the commission decided not to proceed with the planned piloting of the technology. Exploring e-voting technology is also not made a priority for the new plan period, either.

Stakeholder Engagement & Public Outreach

ECM recognizes that the electoral stakeholders play a key role in creating public confidence in the institution and the electoral process. Thus, the need to institutionalise stakeholder engagement was proposed in the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan and planned measures were taken in this regard. While the Election Advisory Committees constituted for each election event represented by all key stakeholders proves to be a very effective platform for every election, the need for a more sustained engagement with smaller groups of relevant stakeholders for specific mandates can be an effective model.

The potential use of social media as a tool for civic and voter education, as well as stakeholder engagement was highlighted

in the plan. ECM will continue its work on the development of a social media strategy and management plan, combined with a risk management strategy that takes into account the challenges presented by social media.

Political Parties

While competition between political parties is a necessary component of competitive elections, it is important that political parties trust each other and the process, and are able to govern together. The previous plan proposed that the ECM to play a significant convening role, providing a forum to address issues that may arise on an ongoing basis.

The ECM can also take the opportunity to collaborate with political parties to promote long-term democratization processes such as the promotion of women's and youth participation in politics.

Lack of a consistent procedures for political parties to register party members, the verification process and delays in sharing the updated membership registry remain a challenge. There is also the need for ECM to establish an effective mechanism to monitor campaign finance, with clear penalties for non-compliance.

Gender & Inclusivity

Gender issues were given a specific focus in the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, identifying "Gender" as the 6th Strategic Pillar. A key milestone achievement on gender inclusion that ensured women's participation in politics have been the 2019 revisions made to the Decentralization Act to include a minimum one-third legal quota for women in Local Councils. To see an impactful change, further advocacy for gender balance measures need to continue to have a similar quota in the parliamentary elections and to push for "special measures"

requiring political parties to nominate a set percentage of women candidates.

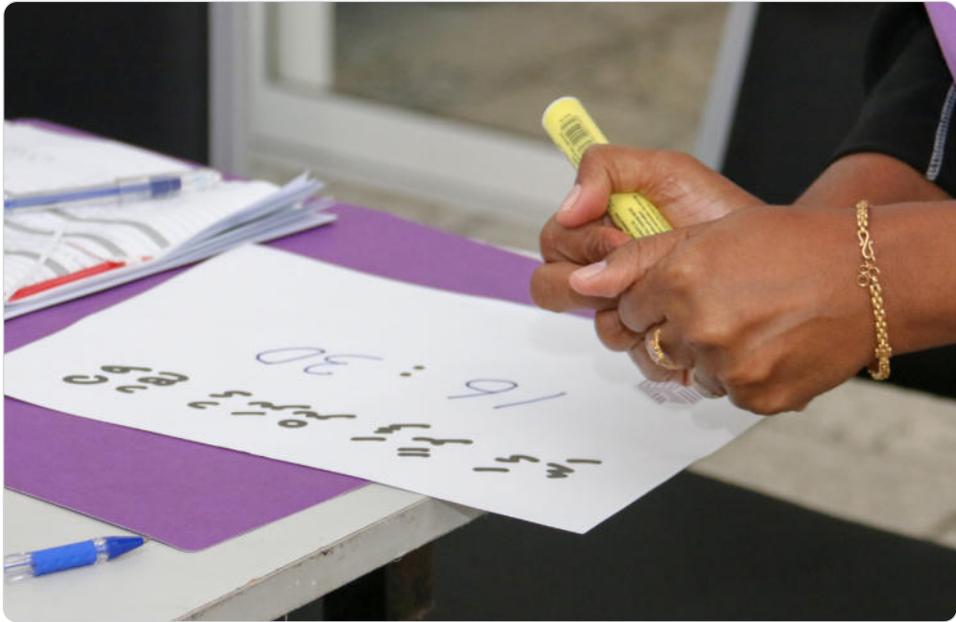
The objective for mainstreaming gender in election management was not seen to have been given appropriate attention as only one out of the seven activities identified under this strategic objective was implemented in the previous plan. The ECM will ensure electoral policies and practices are mainstreamed to pro-actively promote the participation of women in the electoral process, with an increased gender balance at all levels of the ECM.

An aspect that was not addressed in the previous plan was the issues of inclusivity with regard to people with disabilities. It's important that appropriate awareness is carried out for voting officials to facilitate special arrangements prescribed by law for people with disabilities to participate in the voting process with dignity. For ensuring inclusivity, it is also important that specially tailored voter education and civic education activities are conducted to reach the people with disabilities.

Monitoring & Evaluation

In the second Strategic Plan the need to institutionalise a systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system was identified through establishing M&E as a stand-alone pillar. However, the objective for ensuring that strategic planning processes are incorporated into management culture of the ECM is yet to be achieved. The work on establishing an internal mechanism to actively review and monitor the progress towards the objectives listed in the Strategic Plan should be continued and further strengthened. The Plan should be subject to regular reviews to adapt to the evolving political circumstances.

Although M&E is not included as a specific pillar of the new plan, for proper implementation and monitoring of performance, the plan prescribes adoption of a standardized and systematic M&E framework that will better enable measuring of strategic planning progress. The SPSC will be responsible for monitoring the ECM's performance in implementing the new five-year plan. To facilitate this process, the SPSC will work closely with the different divisions and units in taking the Strategic Action Plan forward.



An election official prepares a display sign to indicate the start of the vote counting process ◀



Two poll workers seal the ballot box after after polling concludes ◀

Situation Analysis

Through a rigorous self-assessment by the Elections Commission of its internal strengths and weaknesses, and also a forward-looking assessment of the external environment, identifying potential threats and opportunities that the institution may face in the future, the current situation was analyzed. The analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of ECM showed the following:

Strengths

- Constitutional mandate as an independent institution under the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of Maldives.
- Institutional experience in effectively conducting Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council elections, as well as numerous by-elections.
- Credibility and recognition gained both locally as well as at the international level, in the technical administration of elections.
- Close working relations with other national independent institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Human Rights Commission, and law enforcement agencies and the judiciary.
- Effective and close cooperation with international partners.
- Established website containing relevant information and social media presence to

share information with stakeholders.

- Availability of a systematic training program for the electoral workforce.
- Relations with international practitioner and partners involved in election management and continued support and goodwill from development partner organizations has been achieved.
- Increasing use of information technology in election management,
- Capable in playing a leading role and in effective coordination of all the political parties and other stakeholder organizations and agencies for election-related work.

Weaknesses

- Insufficient coherence between the strategic plan and annual program budget formulation and implementation.
- Lacking appropriate monitoring and evaluation approach objective and result-oriented.
- Inability to sufficiently use information and communication technology (ICT) in election management.
- Failing to conduct detailed studies on topics related to various aspects of elections, such as campaign finance.

- Stakeholder engagement has not been institutionalized.
- Weak internal management practices such as poor internal communication, lack of a knowledge management, systems, weak integrated election management planning etc.
- Limited budgetary autonomy
- No data management system is in place to ensure consistent data tracking and enhance consistency of information delivered.
- Lack of adequate workspace.
- Lack of a comprehensive and functional human resource management system.
- A number of divisions/sections are understaffed, putting stress on the Elections Commission's capacity for service delivery
- Weak complaints management mechanism
- Lack of a sound Public Outreach Policy and no Media Communications Strategy, both of which negatively impacts on the quality and consistency of information that the public receives.

Opportunities

- Openness to a shared democratic culture with high levels of political participation and turnout for elections.
- Support and coordination received in elections from the Government, development partner organizations and all other stakeholders.

- Positive outlook of all the stakeholders including political parties the general public, media, national and international election observation organizations and civil society on election management related functions.
- Environment to use innovative technologies of ICT in election management.
- Professionalism enhancement through cooperation and experience sharing with international election management bodies and organizations.

Threats

- Misalignment and lack of harmony among the various election related laws and legislations.
- Parliaments simple majority vote can remove members from the Commission.
- Political volatility in carrying out political dialogue among opposing parties.
- Delays in the timeframe for promulgation of the laws resulting from the electoral legal reform process not passed in time for next election cycle.
- Rising narratives of disinformation that circulate on social media.
- Concerns of election related corruption-vote buying/selling.
- Dependence on international donor support for administration of elections creates expectations and calls into question long-term sustainability.



► Elections officials verify reports submitted by liaison officers.



22 ► Election officials display voter awareness materials at a voting center

Strategic Foundations

Vision

A trusted institution that upholds the principles of democracy through electoral integrity, credibility and inclusivity.

Mission

Provide effective and efficient services through trusted and credible systems, processes, and oversight, and to ensure an engagement that supports and promotes democracy and inclusive participation.

Guiding Principles

- **Accountability** - take full responsibility for actions and be answerable to public
- **Integrity** - demonstrate honesty and professionalism in all functions and processes
- **Transparency** - ensure open communication with stakeholders and public and be accessible to all
- **Impartiality** - be non-partisan and fair in decisions and functions
- **Independence** - be a service-orientated, self-governing institution free from undue influence
- **Credibility** - engender trust through consistency, competence and professionalism
- **Inclusiveness** – empower people and facilitate wider participation of all stakeholders
- **Innovative** – emphasise research, development and innovation and be established as a learning organisation

Strategic Pillars, Goals & Objectives

Strategic Pillar 1: Strengthening institutional & legal framework

Goal 1.1 Establish an effective institution through strengthened policies and guidelines that aim to improve service standards

Objective 1.1.1 Review and revise operational procedures that reflect changing circumstances

Objective 1.1.2 Strengthen governance and management processes with a risk management culture

Goal 1.2 Harmonize all Election related legislations and regulations

Objective 1.2.1 Harmonize and align all applicable election-related laws

Objective 1.2.2 Ensure election related regulations are aligned well to the relevant legislations

Strategic Pillar 2: Establishing Professional Competency

Goal 2.1 Build a competent EC workforce and strengthen the professional development and ensure retention of staff

Objective 2.1.1 Identify skills gaps within the organisation and appropriately address these gaps

Objective 2.1.2 Strengthen and develop a robust HR Management system

Objective 2.1.3 Institutionalise election officials training program to deliver on a continuous sustainable model

Objective 2.1.4 Ensure all staff have core skills in election administration, coordination and management with opportunities to gain specialized skills in identified career paths

Objective 2.1.5 Strengthen and implement performance-based staff appraisal system

Strategic Pillar 3: Efficient and effective electoral management

Goal 3.1 Improve efficiency of election management and enhance easier access to election related services and data through effective internal and external communication mechanisms

Objective 3.1.1 Establish an integrated electoral management system that facilitates for easier coordination, management and data sharing

Objective 3.1.2	Establish an accessible online platform for the election related services and information retrieval
Objective 3.1.3	Optimize election related processes with clear set of guidelines and tools on carryout all electoral procedures
Objective 3.1.4	Ensure that electoral services are easily accessible for all including people with disabilities
Strategic Pillar 4:	Building a democratically empowered society
Goal 4.1	Enhance electoral participation and ethical democratic engagement of the society
Objective 4.1.1	Create an aware citizenry who respects and practices ethical democratic principles and are cognizant of their civic responsibilities
Objective 4.1.2	Improve stakeholders' participation and engagement in promoting democratic principle and values
Objective 4.1.3	Enhance ECM's capacities in media relations to improve information flow between ECM and public
Goal 4.2	Facilitate engagement with political parties to promote their sustained participation
Objective 4.2.1	Facilitate and support political parties to promote, youth and woman representation in the internal party leadership and in competing in state elections
Objective 4.2.2	Strengthen the Political party monitoring and support mechanism
Goal 4.3	Establish a mechanism to implement and monitor an effective campaign financing system
Objective 4.3.1	Facilitate the establishment of a legislation on regulating campaign financing to prevent negative role of unaccounted money in elections

Operational Plan 2021-2025

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
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Strategic Pillar 1: Strengthening Institutional & legal framework

Strategic Goal 1.1:

Establish an effective institution through strengthened policies and guidelines that aim to improve service standards.

1.1.1 Review and revise operational procedures that reflect changing circumstances.	1.1.1.1 Develop a properly categorized system of operational hand books from the already developed SOP as an institutional reference tool	HRS All Sections	I. Compiled and versioned SOP with detailed activities and responsible sections II. HR manual (staff rotation, international exposure trips); Monitoring Manual; IT manual	2021-2022
	1.1.1.2 Establish procedures to revise and update regulations and internal policies which reflects the decisions of the Commission and proper dissemination of those decisions	PPDS All Sections	I. Timely updated, compiled and disseminate policies	2022-2025
1.1.2 Strengthen governance and management processes with a risk management culture	1.1.2.1 Assess risks of current environment that might hinder delivery of election commission mandated works (ICT Security, Pandemic, Natural Disaster, Establishment of a Business Continuity Plan)	EMCS All Sections	I. Election risk analysis report	2022-2023
	1.1.2.2 Develop step-by-step risk management and business continuity plan for identified emergencies	EMCS All Sections	I. Commission approved risk management and business continuity plan	2022-2023

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
Strategic Goal 1.2: Harmonize all Election related legislations and regulations				
1.2.1 Harmonize and align all applicable election-related laws	1.2.1.1 Review and identify overlap and conflict among legislations applicable to elections and propose necessary amendments	LPPRS EMCS	I. Draft of proposed changes to align legislations	2022-2023
	1.2.1.2 Coordinate with relevant state institutions to bring identified changes to the laws	LPPRS EMCS	I. Amendments passed by the legislature II. Implementation of changes to the relevant legislations	2022-2023
1.2.2 Ensure election related regulations are aligned well to the relevant laws	1.2.2.1 Review and align all election regulations according to the new law	PPRS EMCS	I. Approved amended election regulations	2022-2023

Strategic Pillar 2: Establishing Professional Competency

Strategic Goal 2.1:

Build a competent EC workforce and strengthen the professional development and ensure retention of staff

2.1.1 Identify skills gaps within the organisation and appropriately address these gaps	2.1.1.1 Conduct an HR Audit	CETRS HRS	I. HR audit report	2022 Q2
	2.1.1.2 Conduct a Staff Training Need analysis	CETRS HRS	I. Staff training need analysis report	2022 Q3
	2.1.1.3 Develop capacity development plan based on Staff Training Need Analysis	CETRS HRS	I. Commission approved staff training plan	2023 Q1-Q4

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
2.1.2 Strengthen and develop a robust HR Management system.	2.1.2.1 Revise the existing HR Policies and SOP in the light of findings of the HR Audit	HRS	I. Existing HR policies and SOPs revised	2022 Q3
	2.1.2.2 Identify and revise existing HR software functionalities to optimise HR management	IT HRS	I. Fully functional HR software adapted to the identified issues	2022 Q3-Q4
2.1.3 Institutionalise election officials training program to deliver on a continuous sustainable model	2.1.3.1 Develop a Maldives Qualification Authority (MQA) accredited certificate course for conducting TOT programs for Polling Station Officials Training facilitators	CETRS HRS	I. Course module and outline developed and endorsed by MQA	2022 Q1-Q3
	2.1.3.2 Develop a short-course training module to train Polling Station Officials	CETRS HRS	I. Course module and developed	2022 Q1-Q2
	2.1.3.3 Deliver the election officials training program in partnership with registered and accredited higher education institutions	CETRS HRS	I. Accredited election officers training program and officials trained through the program	2023-2025
2.1.4 Ensure all staff have core skills in election administration, coordination and management with opportunities to gain specialized skills in identified career paths	2.1.4.1 Develop a modular based skills program that would lead to accreditation in specialized fields with core components in election administration & management	CETRS HRS	I. Course module and outline developed and endorse by Maldives Qualification Authority (MQA)	2022 Q2-Q4
	2.1.4.2 Systematically offer the training to staff based on training need analysis	CETRS HRS	I. Staff trained on core skills and specialized pathways	2023-2025

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
2.1.5 Strengthen and implement performance-based staff appraisal system	2.1.5.1 Revise existing appraisal System on the basis of relevant findings of HR audit to reflect on task base work assignments, workflows and responsibilities.	HRS	I. Policy on appraisal revised	2022 Q1-Q2
	2.1.5.2 Conduct appraisal of the staff based on the revised appraisal policy	HRS All sections	I. Regular appraisal of staff conducted	2022-2025

Strategic Pillar 3: Efficient and effective electoral management

Strategic Goal 3.1:

Improve efficiency of election management and enhance easier access to election related services and data through effective internal and external communication mechanisms

3.1.1 Establish an integrated electoral management system that facilitates for easier coordination, management and data sharing	3.1.1.1 Develop an ICT requirement plan to automate and integrate existing co-functions of different internal election management processes	EMCS All sections	I. Endorsed EMS development plan	2022 Q1
	3.1.1.2 Develop and Deploy ICT based integrated electoral management system	ISSAS EMCS	I. Integrated electoral management system deployed	2022 Q2-2025
3.1.2 Establish an accessible online platform for the election related services and information retrieval	3.1.2.1 Extend ECM services to public through accessible online platforms	ISSAS EMCS	I. The public information portal of EMS made accessible to public and stake holders	2022-2025
	3.1.2.2 The ECM website is made accessible to all and updated to provide timely data and information to public	ISSAS EMCS	I. New web site with required features launched	2022-2025

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
	3.1.2.3 Expand online e-services to voter re-registry, candidate applications, political party membership registry	ISSAS EMCS	I. E-services expanded to voter re-registry, candidate applications, political party membership registry	2022 Q2-2025
3.1.3 Optimize election related processes with clear set of guidelines and tools on carryout all electoral procedures	3.1.3.1 Revise existing SOP's and develop detailed manual on election management	EMCS All sectors	I. Revised Complete election management manual and SOP's	2022-2023
	3.1.3.2 Develop relevant sections on the website i.e. (in the light of revised election management manual) an integrated Election Management Plan, outlining clear milestones; the interlinked activities, time frames and division and section responsibilities.	ISSAS EMCS	I. New website with required features/sections	2022-2025
	3.1.3.3 Develop and introduce an efficient complain management system integrated into a case management system	LPPRS ISSAS EMCS	I. A case management system developed with an integrated complains management mechanism	2022-2023
	3.1.3.4 Develop a case management portal to facilitate ease of submitting complains and queries by the public and to monitor progress on the cases.	LPPRS ISSAS EMCS	I. Case management portal for internal and external use for managing disputes is established and functional	2023
3.1.4 Ensure that electoral services are easily accessible for all including people with disabilities	3.1.4.1 Study and develop plan to improve accessibility for voting and other electoral process for people with disabilities	EMCS LPPRS	I. Plan developed identifying requirements and modifications to existing procedures to make election related services more accessible for people with disabilities	2022

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
			II. Identified barriers for accessibility to people with disabilities removed or reduced	2022
	3.1.4.2 Undertake a study on tactile ballot for persons with visual impairment	EMCS ISSAS	I. Study report on the use of tactile ballots for people with visual impairments	2022-2023

Strategic Pillar 4: Building a democratically empowered society

Strategic Goal 4.1:

Enhance electoral participation and ethical democratic engagement of the society

4.1.1 Create an aware-citizenry who respects and practices ethical democratic principles and are cognizant of their civic responsibilities and rights	4.1.1.1 Deliver multi-channel communication including, social media and face to face workshop sessions that promotes principles of democracy and raise awareness on citizens' civic responsibility.	CETRS	I. Training and awareness programs are delivered through multiple channels including social media	2022-2025
	4.1.1.2 Deliver multi-channel communication including, social media and face to face workshop sessions that promotes principles of democracy and raise awareness on citizens' civic responsibility.	CETRS	I. A mechanism to work with schools and institutions to deliver civic education programs agreed and programs delivered.	2022-2025
	4.1.1.3 Deliver multi-channel online education and information campaigns that promote understanding of electoral matters and raise awareness of the conduct and voting procedures for major election events.	CETRS	I. Infographics, posters, social media posts and videos developed and broadcasted and published on voter education.	2022-2025

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
4.1.2 Improve stakeholders' participation and engagement in promoting democratic principles and values	4.1.2.1 Cooperate with Local Council and NGO's to run awareness workshop at the island level	CETRS	I. Civic education workshops conducted at the island level	2022-2025
	4.1.2.2 Develop partnership with Local Councils and NGOs working with people with disabilities to develop a strategy to offer civic education programs for people with disabilities.	CETRS ISSAS	I. Strategy to offer civic education programs for people with disabilities developed and programs delivered	2022-2025
	4.1.2.3 Develop training manual and training programme on civic and voter education for political parties and engage them in civic and voter education programs for their party members	CETRS	I. Civic and Voter education training manual for political parties developed, and training programme implemented II. Civic and Voter education materials shared with political parties	2022-2025
	4.1.2.4 Develop a closer working relationship with media to use both broadcasting and online media to run awareness campaigns and programs	CETRS	I. MoU's with media companies established to conduct awareness sessions	2022-2025
4.1.3 Enhance ECMs capacities in media relations to improve information flow between ECM and public	4.1.3.1 Develop a PR plan to improve public perception and organisation credibility	ETRS	I. Mechanisms are identified to communicate timely and efficiently to related media and public II. Mechanism to address misinformation/ disinformation is identified	2022-2023
	4.1.3.2 Conduct a training program to develop relevant staff skills in media and publications	CETRS ISSAS	I. Staffs trained in media and publications skills	2022-2025

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
<p>Strategic Goal 4.2: Facilitate engagement with political parties to promote their sustained participation</p>				
<p>4.2.1 Facilitate and support political parties to promote, youth and women's representation in the internal party leadership and in competing in state elections</p>	<p>4.2.1.1 Advocate for the promotion of women's and youth participation in political life through voluntary party quotas, thereby committing Political Parties to a specific percentage of women and youth among the candidates they nominate.</p>	<p>CETRS</p>	<p>I. Voluntary party quotas - committing to at least %25 of women candidates and %25 for Youth candidates adopted by all political parties</p>	<p>2022-2023</p>
	<p>4.2.1.2 Annual workshops on leadership and management for political parties organized in partnership with political parties</p>	<p>CETRS LPPRS</p>	<p>I. Leadership workshops for political parties held</p>	<p>2022-2025</p>
	<p>4.2.1.3 Training workshops and seminars on women in leadership and political involvement is organised for political parties</p>	<p>CETRS LPPRS</p>	<p>I. Women's leadership workshops for political parties held</p>	<p>2022-2025</p>
<p>4.2.2 Strengthen the Political party monitoring and support mechanism</p>	<p>4.2.2.1 Develop detailed procedures in carrying out registration and monitoring of political parties</p>	<p>ISSAS LPPRS</p>	<p>I. Detailed procedures compiled</p>	<p>2022 Q1</p>
	<p>4.2.2.2 Develop and implement an online political party registration and information system</p>	<p>ISSAS LPPRS</p>	<p>I. A functional online political party registration and monitoring system available for use</p>	<p>2022</p>

Strategic Objective	Strategic Action	Responsible Actors	Performance Indicators	Timeline
	4.2.2.3 Establishing a Political Party Consultative Forum (PPCF) as a mechanism for consultation on a quarterly basis.	LPPRS EMCS	I. PPCF established II. Joint quarterly meetings conducted with all political parties to share information, build a base for cooperation and work on political reform	2022-2025

Strategic Goal 4.3:
Establish a mechanism to implement and monitor an effective campaign financing system

4.3.1 Facilitate the establishment of a legislation on regulating campaign financing to prevent negative role of unaccounted money in elections	4.3.1.1 Review existing legislation and through a consultative process draft a legislation on regulating and monitoring campaign financing	LPPRS	I. A draft legislation II. A legislation on campaign financing enacted	2022-2023
	4.3.1.2 Develop a monitoring system to report on violation of campaign finance regulation	LPPRS	I. An agreed monitoring mechanism established based on the legal requirements	2022-2023
	4.3.1.3 Review existing anti-corruption legislations and election related legislations to propose a means to stop state resources from being used for campaign activities	LPPRS	I. Amendments to existing legislations brought to prevent state resources from being used for campaign activities	2022-2023

Using the Strategic Plan

This strategic plan is the foundation for ECM's larger planning environment. Together with our legal mandates and set through legislations and regulations the strategic plan guides our work. It is a tool to help make decisions, plan activities and projects, align our work with our commitments in being accountable to the citizens and the People's Majlis, evaluate performance, and remain accountable through sound management practices.

The Strategic Plan explains what we want to achieve over the next five years and why, in a number of specific areas, to make the biggest contribution to achieving our mission and vision given the context and conditions we face.

While an overall operational plan is included in this document, the ECM notes that the operational plan will continue to be further detailed out in the coming months to include responsible units, as well as regularly revisited throughout the Strategic Plan period to ensure activities remain relevant to achieving the ECM's vision and mission

A decision-making tool

The staff of ECM are expected to take steps to integrate strategic thinking into actions, policies, processes, and systems. The Commission members and the executive

leaderships will use the plan to prioritize activities, guide decision-making, and focus resources. It will encourage them to innovate and be proactive in keeping up with ever-changing trends.

Communications tool

The strategic plan will be made available on the public domain for the public and also shared with the Majlis' Independent Commissions Committee as well as with other stakeholders through which they can use the strategic plan to understand where ECM is focusing its efforts in order to hold the organization to account.

Priorities, expected results of programs, and resource requirements will be communicated in the Operational Plan and the annual departmental action plans. Progress against these commitments will be published in the ECMS annual report.

Planning and evaluation tool

The department and section heads will use the plan as a guide when planning and implementing projects and programs as well as in the formulation of the annual budgets. When evaluating programs, services, and projects, the plan will be a point of reference to assess improvements and ensure accountability.

Monitoring & Evaluation of the Plan

The ECM has constituted the Strategic Plan Steering Committee (SPSC) responsible for monitoring the implementation of the plan during its 5-year cycle. The SPSC will ensure regular monitoring, implementation and reporting against the performance indicators of the Plan.

The SPSC consists of ECM's senior staff and with an overseeing member designated from among the commission members. The SPSC will meet once every month to monitor, plan, review, supervise and make recommendations about progress on the implementation of the plan; and will prepare a quarterly report to brief the Commission every 4 months.

Heads of sections will be responsible for preparing a quarterly progress report describing activities, difficulties and overall progress against their respective Activity Plan. The planning section will consolidate quarterly reports from all sections, create the quarterly progress reports for the consideration of the SPSC, as well as prepare the annual progress report to be included in the ECMs annual report.

As ECM accounts for its activities to the People's Majlis, the Commission members will be reporting to the Majlis' Committee on Independent Institutions annually on the progress of the Strategic Plan.

List of Abbreviations

ECM	Elections Commission of Maldives
IA	Internal Audit
CETRS	Civic Education and Training and Research Section
CB	Commissioner bureau
PPDS	Planning and Policy Development Section
ISSAS	Information Services and System Administration Section
TSA	Technical Support and archives
AS	Administration and Support Service Section
FS	Finance Section
HRS	Human Resource Section
PS	Procurement Section
EMCS	Electoral Management and Coordination Section
LPPRS	Legal and political party Regulation Section
SPSC	Strategic Plan Steering Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
LGA	Local Government Authority (LGA)
SOP	Standard Operation Procedure



ECM



**ELECTIONS
COMMISSION**
REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES



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STRATEGIC PLAN

2021 - 2025