

## **Recommendations for deciding the location of polling places**

### **Definition of polling place**

A polling place is a temporary installation in Estonia's public space that is only open during the voting week. A polling place is a clearly defined area within a building where the voters exercise their right to vote. A polling place has stations for distributing ballot papers, voting booths, and one or several ballot boxes. Order in the polling place is maintained by the voting district committee, whose oral orders are mandatory for all persons in the polling place. Election campaigning at polling places is prohibited and the voter may not take the ballot paper out of the polling place. The route to the polling place is marked with signs.

### **Principles for deciding on location**

A location is suitable for a polling place if it meets four conditions: accessibility, proximity, familiarity, and recognisability. In addition to these, technical requirements also need to be considered to allow voting by using the electronic list of voters.

#### Accessibility

The polling place must be accessible for all the voters, including people with disabilities or special needs. This means that there must be parking spaces close to the building, and the access routes to the polling place must be free of obstacles and marked with signs. The building must be accessible by wheelchair or with a baby stroller. In the absence of a lift, the polling place must be on the same floor as the main entrance of the building, and must have enough space to move around with a wheelchair or a stroller. Sufficient lighting of the access route and the premises must be ensured. If the doors of the building do not open automatically, the voters must be able to secure the assistance of the voting organisers to enter the building.

#### Proximity

The polling place must be sufficiently close to the residences of the voters. On the territories of rural municipalities and cities, polling places should be located in buildings that are in the centre or in more densely populated areas. Preference should be given to locations that are on the common trajectory for the voters. For polling places open during the election week, the trajectory to keep in mind is: home-work-shopping-kindergarten/school. For polling places open during weekends, the trajectory to keep in mind is: home-recreational facility-cultural institution-shopping. When deciding the location of a polling place, access by public transport or car is a factor to consider.

#### Familiarity

The polling place must be located in a building that is familiar to the voters. When deciding the location of a polling place, consideration should be given to the places the voters have become accustomed to when using public services or congregating for recreational purposes on the territory of the rural municipality or city. The locations of polling places used during earlier elections have proved adequate if their actual service load has been not less than 400 voters per polling place during the whole election week. The voters are accustomed to polling places that are located in cultural centres, rural municipality government buildings, schoolhouses, libraries, and community centres. In Tallinn, Tartu, and Pärnu, polling places can also be found in large shopping centres.

#### Recognisability

The polling place must be set up in a place in the building where the voters' right to vote in secrecy is guaranteed. This means that it must be possible to set up the voting booths in such a way that the act of filling in the ballot paper cannot be observed from the outside. Polling places must be strictly free of advertising. This means that political advertising must not be visible or audible in the polling place. Voting in peace is best ensured when the polling place is a room that has been closed off from the other parts of the building with doors. If this is not possible, the polling place must be set apart from the rest of the building by sufficiently high separating walls. The information regarding the boundaries of the polling place must be expressed clearly. This also helps the political parties and citizens' associations to clearly understand where they are not allowed to hand out campaign materials or canvass voters.

#### Technical requirements

To allow the use of the electronic list of voters, the polling place must have enough room and the technical conditions to install work stations with computers; this includes technical infrastructure and a functioning internet connection.

#### Public health

The polling place must be sufficiently large to ensure physical distancing of voters in the room. The requirement of distancing implies that, if possible, the voting booths, the stations for issuing ballot papers and the ballot box(es) are located at least 2 metres apart.

State Electoral Office of Estonia  
Tallinn 2022