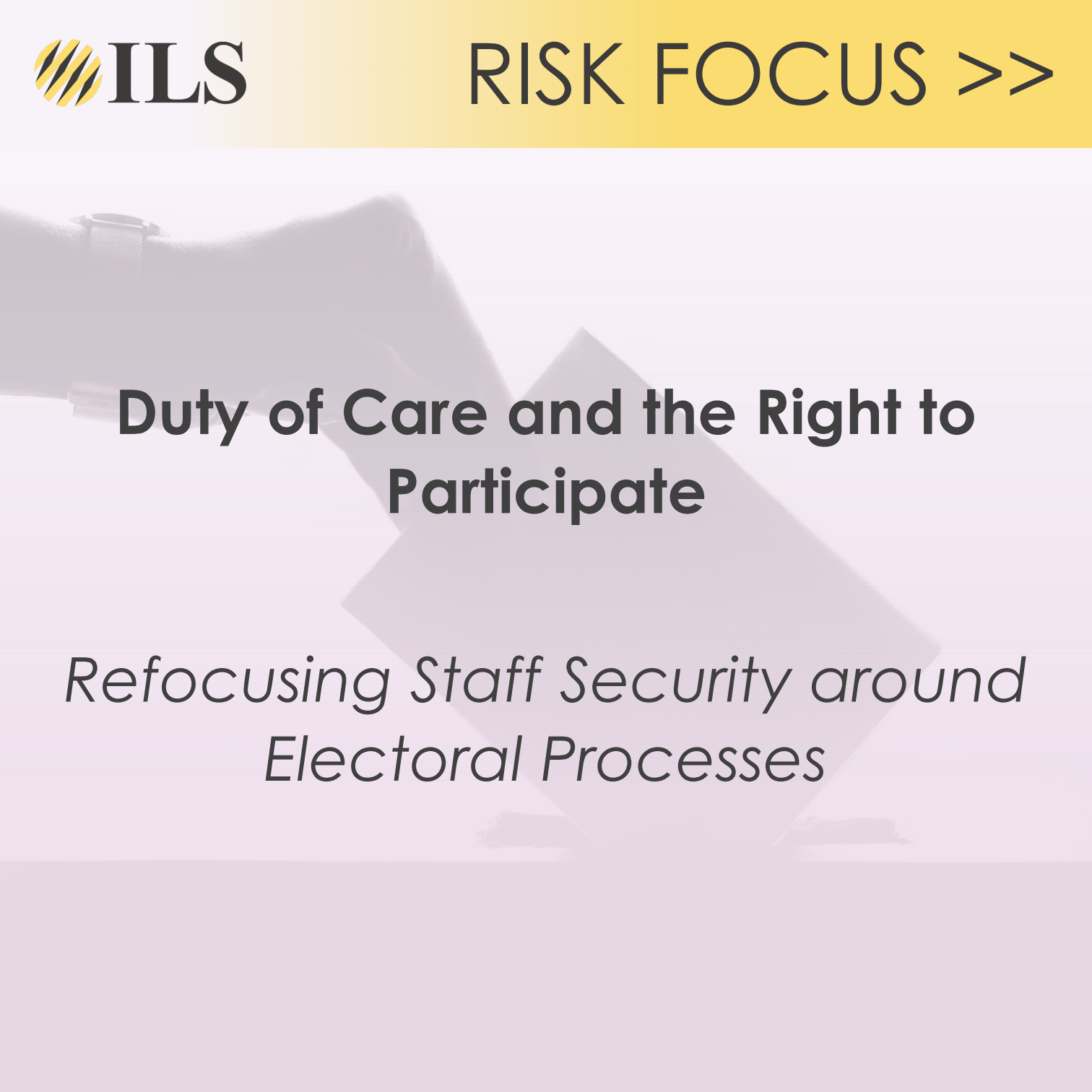




Duty of Care and the Right to Participate

Refocusing Staff Security around Electoral Processes

Considered a peaceful and legitimate means of resolving political competition, elections are often seen by organisations *exclusively* as a period of heightened risk – sometimes rightly, sometimes not.

National civil society and human rights organisations may genuinely face greater risk. But it's worth reflecting on how **all** organisations approach risk around these processes.

International staff can often insulate themselves. National staff can't – they are voters, and direct stakeholders in the outcome.

Balancing their safety, security and wellbeing with their right to fully participate is difficult, but necessary.

Why the concern?

Electoral periods can expose staff to significant changes in the threat and risk context:

- Heightened political competition and public discourse.
- Tensions building throughout the electoral cycle.
- Incidents that (purposefully or not) undermine trust in the processes.
- Security forces diverted from their “normal” duties.
- Security - and the *perception* of security - is critical to the legitimacy of the whole process.

What are the specific concerns?

- Interpersonal violence, intimidation & harassment – and the mental health toll
- Injury at demonstrations, rallies, protests and crowd-related incidents
- Increased arrests and detentions
- Spikes in criminality exploiting unrest and diverted security resources
- Attacks on offices, facilities, infrastructure
- Online abuse and disinformation
- Disrupted movements and communications – road-blocks, curfews, outages

Anticipate and Mitigate

- Review the *actual* risks, not assumed ones
- Address the specific realities of national staff – they are entitled to fully participate in the process
- Consider individual vulnerabilities, including where staff live
- Recognise the extra stress and tension national staff may carry during these periods
- Where needed, provide additional support and be mindful of workloads and deadlines

- Emphasise the need for staff to separate personal views and affiliations from the organisation – maintaining political neutrality when representing it
- Foster a respectful environment where different opinions and choices are allowed, within pre-established, ideally consensual limits – avoiding any perception of organisational political preference
- Maintain, triangulate and share up-to-date, impartial information – particularly around potential unrest
- Minimise non-essential movements around key dates – make sure national staff can register and vote

Share election-day security guidance:

- Vote early or use alternative options where possible
- Favour daylight movements
- Recognise higher risks in large gatherings
- Confirm personal and organizational communication plans
- Keep phones charged
- Avoid confrontation
- Report incidents to authorities and the organisation

Prepare for uncertainty!

- Develop and review contingency plans – including the possibility of working from home
- Discuss the realities of relocation and evacuation with all staff
- Enhance, test and share communication systems and plans – aim to reach and be reached by all staff at all times, including back-ups and low-tech options
- Strengthen office, residential, and digital security in recognition of the heightened increased

Elections are not one-day events.

They are complex processes that follow a full electoral cycle, built on a specific context and touching every part of a nation's infrastructure and fabric.

Risk management must address that entire cycle, not just poll day, while balancing Duty of Care with staff's ability to exercise their civic and political rights.

The goal: a secure, health, respectful, trusted working environment, that respects the right to participate *and* reduces personal risk for all!



At **ILS**, we support individuals and organisations to manage risk based on who they are, where they are and what they are doing through Risk Advisory support and our capacity-sharing work .



As electoral processes all around the world grow more polarised and tense, are you considering the personal and organisational risks, while respecting everyone's right to participate?