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**ADVOCACY BRIEF ON ENSURING EQUAL ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION
FOR LGBTQI+ PEOPLE IN ARMENIA
REMOVING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS**

1. Introduction

Inclusive Elections as the Foundation of Democratic Governance

Democratic elections are the cornerstone of representative governance. They provide citizens with the opportunity to shape public policy, hold elected officials accountable, and influence decisions that affect their lives. The legitimacy of democratic institutions depends not only on the conduct of free and fair elections but also on the ability of all citizens to participate in electoral processes on an equal basis, without discrimination, intimidation, or unnecessary barriers.

Inclusive elections are therefore more than a procedural requirement—they are a fundamental expression of democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law. They require that every eligible voter can access accurate information, register and vote without obstacles, express political opinions freely, and engage in public life with dignity and safety. When any group is excluded from these processes, whether through structural barriers, social stigma, or institutional shortcomings, democratic representation is weakened, and public trust in electoral institutions may decline.

Armenia has made important progress in strengthening democratic governance and improving the integrity of its electoral processes over the past decade. Electoral reforms, increased transparency, and enhanced public oversight have contributed to more competitive elections and greater public confidence in democratic institutions. At the same time, ensuring that democratic processes are genuinely inclusive remains an ongoing challenge. Certain groups continue to experience disproportionate barriers to participation, including persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, internally displaced persons, women, young people, and members of the LGBTQI+ community.

For many LGBTQI+ people in Armenia, participation in elections extends beyond the simple act of casting a ballot. It is closely connected to broader experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, limited access to public services, and concerns about personal safety. Transgender people may experience additional anxiety when identity documents do not reflect their gender expression, increasing concerns about privacy and respectful treatment during voter identification procedures. LGBTQI+ individuals living in rural areas often have fewer opportunities to access reliable civic information, participate in public dialogue, or engage with community support networks. Young LGBTQI+ people and those displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh may face additional social, economic, and psychological barriers that affect their confidence in participating in democratic processes.

These challenges should not be understood as barriers created by electoral legislation alone. Rather, they emerge from the interaction of legal, institutional, social, and cultural factors that collectively influence whether individuals feel able to exercise their political rights. Equal suffrage, while guaranteed in law, does not automatically result in equal participation in practice. Meaningful electoral inclusion requires that voting procedures are accessible, election officials apply principles of equality and non-discrimination consistently, voter education reaches marginalized communities, and effective mechanisms exist to address complaints related to discrimination or intimidation.

International human rights standards recognize political participation as a universal right that must be guaranteed without discrimination. Instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and commitments undertaken within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) emphasize that every citizen has the right and opportunity to participate in public affairs and to vote in genuine periodic elections. These commitments extend beyond formal legal equality and require states to take reasonable measures to ensure that all groups can participate effectively in democratic life.

Against this background, understanding the lived experiences of marginalized communities becomes essential for developing evidence-based electoral policies. Community perspectives help identify practical barriers that may not be visible through election statistics alone and provide valuable insight into how electoral processes can become more accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

This advocacy brief contributes to that objective by presenting evidence gathered through the National Trans Coalition's project, Empowering LGBTQI+ Communities for Inclusive Electoral Participation in Armenia. Through regional workshops, community-led voter education, digital storytelling, public dialogue, and policy engagement, the project sought not only to strengthen electoral participation among marginalized LGBTQI+ communities but also to document their experiences and translate them into practical recommendations for policymakers, electoral authorities, civil society organizations, and international partners.

Ultimately, strengthening democratic participation requires ensuring that no citizen is discouraged from exercising their electoral rights because of their identity, place of residence, or lived experience. By addressing the barriers identified in this brief, Armenia has an opportunity to further reinforce public trust, democratic resilience, and the principle that elections should be accessible, inclusive, and representative of all members of society.

1. Executive Summary

Ensuring Equal Electoral Participation for LGBTQI+ People in Armenia: Removing Structural Barriers to Inclusive Elections

Free and fair elections depend on the meaningful participation of all citizens. While Armenia's legal framework guarantees universal suffrage and equal voting rights, many LGBTQI+ people continue to encounter practical barriers that limit their ability to participate safely, confidently, and equally in electoral processes. These barriers are often compounded for transgender people, LGBTQI+ youth, internally displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh, and individuals living in rural communities, who may experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

This advocacy brief presents evidence and recommendations developed through the project "Empowering LGBTQI+ Communities for Inclusive Electoral Participation in Armenia." The project aimed to strengthen civic engagement among marginalized LGBTQI+ communities while generating evidence to inform more inclusive electoral policies and practices.

The findings presented in this brief draw on community engagement activities conducted across Armenia, that demonstrate that legal guarantees alone are insufficient to ensure equal electoral participation. Participants consistently identified barriers including limited access to inclusive voter education, concerns about discrimination at polling stations, anxiety related to identity verification procedures, unequal access to information in rural communities, and low confidence in complaint and accountability mechanisms. At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of community-led civic education, peer support, safe dialogue, and positive representation in strengthening confidence to participate in democratic processes

Based on these findings, the brief proposes practical recommendations for the Central Electoral Commission, government institutions, the Human Rights Defender, political parties, local authorities, civil society organizations, media actors, and international partners. These recommendations focus on improving inclusive voter education, strengthening non-discrimination safeguards, increasing accessibility of electoral information, promoting respectful treatment of marginalized voters, enhancing reporting mechanisms, and fostering meaningful collaboration with community-led organizations.

Ensuring that LGBTQI+ people can participate in elections without fear, discrimination, or exclusion is not only a matter of protecting individual rights—it is fundamental to strengthening democratic governance, public trust, and inclusive participation in Armenia. By addressing the barriers identified by community members, electoral stakeholders can contribute to a more accessible, representative, and resilient democratic process for all citizens.

3. Legal and Policy Framework

Equal Participation as a Legal and Democratic Obligation

The right to participate in public affairs and to vote in free and fair elections is a fundamental human right recognized under Armenia's Constitution and numerous international human rights instruments to which Armenia is a party. Together, these legal frameworks establish not only the right to vote, but also the obligation of public institutions to ensure that electoral processes are accessible, inclusive, and free from discrimination.

While Armenian legislation provides universal suffrage for citizens who have reached the legal voting age, equal participation in practice depends on whether all voters—including those from marginalized communities—can exercise their rights safely, independently, and with dignity. This requires attention not only to the legal framework but also to the practical implementation of electoral procedures, voter education, accessibility, and institutional accountability.

The following legal and policy instruments provide the foundation for the recommendations presented in this brief.

3.1 National Legal Framework

Constitution of the Republic of Armenia

The Constitution establishes Armenia as a democratic state governed by the rule of law and guarantees equality before the law without discrimination. It recognizes citizens' right to participate in the governance of public affairs, including through free elections.

These constitutional principles require public authorities to ensure that electoral processes are administered fairly and that all eligible citizens can exercise their political rights without unjustified barriers.

For marginalized communities, constitutional equality means more than formal recognition of voting rights. It requires that institutions actively safeguard equal access to democratic participation and address barriers that disproportionately affect certain groups.

Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia

The Electoral Code regulates the organization and conduct of elections, voter registration, polling procedures, and the responsibilities of electoral commissions.

The Code is based on principles of universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage.

While the Electoral Code establishes equal procedures for all voters, practical implementation should ensure that these procedures are applied consistently and respectfully, particularly for individuals who may face discrimination or heightened vulnerability during electoral processes.

Continuous training of election officials, accessible voter information, and effective complaint mechanisms contribute to achieving these objectives.

Human Rights Defender of Armenia

The Human Rights Defender plays an important role in promoting equality, investigating complaints related to human rights violations, and monitoring public institutions.

During election periods, the institution contributes to protecting citizens' rights by monitoring electoral processes, receiving complaints, and issuing recommendations aimed at improving respect for human rights and democratic standards.

The experiences documented in this brief demonstrate the value of continued engagement by the Human Rights Defender in identifying and addressing barriers affecting marginalized communities.

3.2 International Human Rights Framework

Armenia has voluntarily accepted a number of international commitments that reinforce equal participation in democratic life.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

The Declaration also emphasizes that the will of the people should be expressed through genuine periodic elections held by universal and equal suffrage.

Although adopted in 1948, these principles continue to serve as the foundation of democratic governance worldwide.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Article 25 of the ICCPR guarantees every citizen the right and opportunity, without unreasonable restrictions, to:

- take part in the conduct of public affairs;
- vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections;
- have access to public service on general terms of equality.

The UN Human Rights Committee has clarified that States should remove unreasonable barriers that prevent individuals or groups from effectively exercising these rights.

This includes ensuring that electoral processes are genuinely accessible to all eligible voters.

European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

As a member of the Council of Europe, Armenia is bound by the European Convention on Human Rights.

Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 requires States to hold free elections that ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in choosing the legislature.

In addition, Article 14 prohibits discrimination in the enjoyment of Convention rights.

Together, these provisions reinforce the principle that democratic participation should be available to all citizens on an equal basis.

OSCE Commitments

As a participating State of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Armenia has committed itself to conducting democratic elections that respect political rights, equality, and non-discrimination.

The 1990 Copenhagen Document emphasizes that participating States should guarantee universal and equal suffrage and ensure that citizens can participate in political life without discrimination.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) further encourages States to identify and remove barriers that may discourage participation by marginalized groups, while promoting transparency, accountability, and public confidence in electoral administration.

These commitments highlight that election quality should be assessed not only by technical administration but also by the extent to which all citizens are able to participate equally and effectively.

3.3 Sustainable Development Goals

The recommendations presented in this brief also contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly:

SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities

Reducing inequalities requires promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all people, regardless of personal characteristics or social status.

Inclusive electoral participation is an important component of political inclusion.

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

SDG 16 calls for responsive, accountable, and inclusive institutions, equal access to justice, and participatory decision-making at all levels.

Strengthening equal participation in elections contributes directly to these objectives.

3.4 From Legal Commitments to Practical Implementation

Armenia has established a strong legal foundation for democratic participation through its Constitution, national legislation, and international obligations. However, legal guarantees alone do not automatically ensure equal participation for all citizens.

The experiences documented through this project indicate that barriers such as limited access to information, fear of discrimination, social stigma, and insufficient confidence in complaint mechanisms continue to affect the participation of some LGBTQI+ individuals in electoral processes.

Addressing these challenges does not require creating new rights. Rather, it requires ensuring that existing rights can be exercised fully, safely, and equally by every eligible voter. Community-informed policies, inclusive voter education, respectful implementation of electoral procedures, and meaningful collaboration with civil society organizations are practical measures that can help translate legal commitments into lived realities.

4. Evidence Base and Methodology

This policy brief presents evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the inclusiveness of electoral participation for LGBTQI+ communities in Armenia ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections. It is informed by community engagement conducted through the National Trans Coalition (NTC) as part of the project Empowering LGBTQI+ Communities for Inclusive Electoral Participation in Armenia.

The project sought to better understand the opportunities and barriers affecting the participation of LGBTQI+ people in democratic processes, with particular attention to communities experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization, including transgender people, LGBTQI+ youth, internally displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh, and individuals living in rural regions.

Recognizing that the experiences of marginalized communities are often underrepresented in electoral policy discussions, the project adopted a community-led approach to document lived experiences and identify practical solutions that can support more inclusive electoral processes. Rather than focusing solely on civic education, the initiative aimed to generate evidence that could inform policymakers, electoral institutions, and other stakeholders responsible for safeguarding democratic participation.

The recommendations presented in this brief are grounded in the experiences shared by community members and are intended to complement ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic governance, electoral integrity, and equal participation in Armenia.

Methodology

This policy brief is based on qualitative evidence collected through a community-led participatory approach between January and July 2026. The methodology combined civic engagement, facilitated dialogue, and confidential documentation of lived experiences to better understand the barriers affecting electoral participation among LGBTQI+ communities.

Evidence was gathered through three regional community consultations conducted in Lori, Shirak, and Syunik regions, engaging more than 60 participants.

A secure Digital Storytelling Hub enabled participants to anonymously or openly share their experiences related to voting, political participation, discrimination, accessibility, and interactions with public institutions. More than 50 community members contributed testimonies that formed the primary qualitative evidence for this brief. Additional insights were drawn from a series of online public discussions on democracy and civic participation, as well as feedback collected through community outreach activities.

All contributions were collected voluntarily and analyzed in accordance with ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and anonymity. Personal identifiers were removed prior to analysis, and quotations included in this publication have been anonymized to protect participants' privacy.

The evidence was analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing recurring patterns to emerge across different regions and participant groups. Rather than measuring the prevalence of individual experiences, the methodology sought to identify common barriers, systemic challenges, and community priorities relevant to electoral participation.

The findings presented in this brief should be understood as qualitative evidence reflecting the lived experiences of participating community members. While they are not statistically representative of all LGBTQI+ people in Armenia, they provide valuable insights into issues that may otherwise remain invisible in traditional electoral assessments and contribute to more inclusive, evidence-informed policymaking.

5. Key Findings

Understanding Barriers to Inclusive Electoral Participation

The evidence collected through community consultations, the Digital Storytelling Hub, and facilitated discussions demonstrates that LGBTQI+ people in Armenia remain committed to participating in democratic processes and recognize the importance of voting as a means of influencing public life. Participants consistently described voting as both a civic responsibility and an opportunity to contribute to shaping the country's future.

At the same time, participants identified a range of interconnected barriers that influence their ability and willingness to participate in elections. These barriers are not solely the result of electoral legislation or voting procedures. Rather, they emerge from the interaction of social stigma, discrimination, unequal access to information, administrative challenges, and limited confidence in institutional responses to rights violations.

The findings also highlight that these challenges are not experienced equally across the LGBTQI+ community. Individuals facing multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization—including transgender people, LGBTQI+ youth, internally displaced persons from Nagorno-Karabakh, and residents of rural communities—reported additional obstacles that further restrict their opportunities for safe and meaningful participation in electoral processes.

Six recurring themes emerged from the analysis:

Limited access to inclusive voter education and electoral information.

Fear of discrimination and unequal treatment during electoral processes.

Administrative and identity-related barriers affecting transgender voters.

Geographic inequalities limiting access to civic participation.

Low confidence in reporting mechanisms and institutional accountability.

The importance of community-led initiatives in strengthening electoral participation.

While these findings reflect the experiences of participants engaged in this project, they are consistent with broader evidence demonstrating that formal equality does not always translate into equal participation in practice. Addressing these barriers requires practical measures that strengthen the accessibility, inclusiveness, and responsiveness of electoral institutions while ensuring that marginalized communities can exercise their political rights on an equal basis.

The following sections examine each of these themes in greater detail and present recommendations informed by participants' experiences.

5.1 Limited Access to Inclusive Voter Education and Electoral Information

Access to Information as a Prerequisite for Meaningful Participation

Access to accurate, accessible, and impartial information is fundamental to democratic participation. Understanding electoral procedures, voter rights, polling processes, and available complaint mechanisms enables citizens to make informed decisions and exercise their right to vote with confidence. When voter education does not adequately reach marginalized communities, formal voting rights may not translate into meaningful participation.

The community consultations conducted for this brief indicate that access to electoral information remains uneven among LGBTQI+ people, particularly for those living outside Yerevan and individuals experiencing multiple forms of social exclusion. While participants generally understood the importance of voting, many described limited opportunities to receive reliable information that addressed their specific concerns or reflected their lived realities.

Participants noted that existing voter education initiatives are often designed for the general public and rarely consider the experiences of communities that may face discrimination, social isolation, or reduced access to public information channels. As a result, many community members rely primarily on informal networks, social media, or peers to obtain information about elections.

For participants living in Lori, Shirak, and Syunik, geographic location was frequently identified as an additional challenge. Compared with Yerevan, opportunities to engage in civic education activities, public discussions, and dialogue with electoral stakeholders were described as more limited. Several participants also emphasized that local social environments may discourage open participation in public events, particularly for individuals who are not openly LGBTQI+.

Young LGBTQI+ participants and first-time voters highlighted uncertainty regarding practical aspects of the electoral process, including voter registration procedures, identification requirements, available safeguards for voters experiencing discrimination, and mechanisms for reporting electoral violations. Participants emphasized that while this information is publicly available, it is not always presented in formats or through channels that effectively reach marginalized communities.

Another recurring theme was the lack of trusted sources of information. Participants reported greater confidence in information received through community organizations, peer educators, and trusted local activists than through general public communication channels. This finding highlights the important role that community-led organizations can play in complementing official voter education efforts and ensuring that information reaches populations that may otherwise remain underserved.

The consultations also demonstrated that accessible civic education can significantly strengthen confidence in electoral participation. Participants who took part in facilitated discussions reported feeling better informed about voting procedures and more confident in their ability to participate in elections after having the opportunity to ask questions, discuss concerns, and exchange experiences in a safe and supportive environment.

"I always knew that voting was important, but I wasn't sure what would happen if I faced discrimination at a polling station. No one had explained what my rights were or where I could turn for help."

"Most of what I know about elections comes from friends or community organizations. I don't remember seeing information that spoke to people like me."

Why This Matters

Inclusive voter education is not about developing separate electoral systems for different groups. Rather, it is about ensuring that all citizens can access the information they need to participate on an equal basis.

When marginalized communities lack access to trusted and relevant electoral information, they may be less confident in participating, less aware of available protections, and less likely to report violations of their rights. Conversely, accessible, community-informed voter education can strengthen political participation, improve confidence in democratic institutions, and contribute to more representative electoral processes.

Improving the accessibility and inclusiveness of voter education therefore represents an important opportunity to strengthen electoral participation while reinforcing the broader principles of equality, transparency, and democratic inclusion.

Policy Considerations

The evidence suggests several practical measures that could improve access to electoral information for marginalized communities:

- Expand outreach strategies to ensure voter education reaches rural and underserved communities.
- Develop voter information materials in partnership with civil society organizations representing marginalized groups to ensure they address practical concerns and are disseminated through trusted channels.
- Integrate information on voters' rights, complaint mechanisms, and available support into public voter education campaigns.
- Encourage community-based civic education initiatives that complement official efforts and help build trust among populations that may be less likely to engage with traditional information sources.

5.2 Confidence in the Voting Process:

Perceived Risks of Discrimination and Unequal Treatment

Equal Treatment Is Essential to Electoral Integrity

The legitimacy of democratic elections depends not only on the existence of legal voting rights but also on public confidence that every voter will be treated fairly, respectfully, and without discrimination throughout the electoral process. A positive voting experience strengthens trust in democratic institutions, while concerns about unequal treatment may discourage participation, particularly among communities that have experienced discrimination in other areas of public life.

Across the consultations conducted for this brief, participants consistently described concerns about how they might be treated while exercising their right to vote. These concerns were not necessarily linked to previous experiences during elections themselves. Rather, many participants explained that their expectations of the electoral process were influenced by broader experiences of discrimination encountered when accessing public services, healthcare, education, employment, or administrative institutions.

As a result, some participants expressed uncertainty about whether polling stations would provide an environment in which they could vote comfortably, confidentially, and without unnecessary attention.

For many transgender participants, these concerns were particularly significant. Participants explained that they worried about interactions during voter identification procedures, especially where their appearance or gender expression differed from the information contained in official identity documents. Although voter identification procedures are an essential component of election administration, participants emphasized that uncertainty about how these procedures would be implemented contributed to feelings of anxiety before voting.

Several contributors also expressed concern that comments from other voters or polling station staff could compromise their privacy or discourage them from participating. Even where no direct discrimination had occurred, the anticipation of potentially uncomfortable interactions was itself identified as a barrier to participation.

Participants from rural communities described additional challenges. In smaller communities, where individuals are more likely to know one another personally, concerns about privacy, confidentiality, and unwanted disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity were reported as influencing decisions about civic participation. Some participants explained that fear of being recognized or discussed within their communities contributed to discomfort when considering whether to vote.

Importantly, participants did not question the importance of elections or express a lack of interest in democratic participation. On the contrary, many emphasized that they wished to participate actively but wanted reassurance that they would be treated with dignity and respect throughout the process.

The consultations therefore suggest that confidence in electoral participation depends not only on legal safeguards but also on the way electoral procedures are experienced in practice.

"Voting should be an ordinary experience, but I worry that my appearance will attract attention before I even receive my ballot."

"I want to vote like everyone else. I don't want to feel that I have to explain who I am just to exercise a basic right."

"In a small town, privacy is difficult. Sometimes the fear isn't the polling station itself—it's who might see you there and what people might say afterwards."

Why This Matters

Public confidence is a cornerstone of democratic participation. When voters anticipate discrimination, embarrassment, or unequal treatment, they may become less willing to engage in electoral processes—even when legal protections are in place.

For marginalized communities, perceptions of safety and respectful treatment can be just as important as formal guarantees of voting rights. Electoral institutions therefore have an important role in fostering confidence by ensuring that voting procedures are implemented consistently, professionally, and with respect for every voter's dignity.

Strengthening confidence in the voting experience benefits not only LGBTQI+ communities but also contributes to broader public trust in electoral administration and democratic institutions.

Policy Considerations

The findings highlight several opportunities to strengthen confidence in the electoral process:

- Reinforce guidance for polling station officials on respectful, impartial, and non-discriminatory interactions with all voters.
- Promote awareness of the confidentiality principles that govern voter identification and polling procedures.
- Strengthen communication about the rights of voters and the mechanisms available to report concerns or discriminatory treatment.
- Encourage regular engagement between electoral institutions and civil society organizations to better understand the experiences of marginalized communities and identify practical improvements to electoral administration.

5.3 Administrative and Identity-Related Barriers Affecting Transgender Voters

Ensuring Equal Access Through Respectful Electoral Administration

An inclusive electoral process requires that all eligible voters are able to verify their identity and cast their ballot in a manner that protects their dignity, privacy, and equal treatment. Identity verification is an essential safeguard for maintaining the integrity of elections. At the same time, the implementation of these procedures should minimize unnecessary barriers that may discourage eligible voters from participating.

Among the themes emerging from the consultations, transgender participants consistently described concerns related to identity verification during the voting process. These concerns were not directed at the principle of identity verification itself, which participants generally recognized as a necessary component of electoral administration. Rather, they related to how identity verification procedures may be experienced by individuals whose appearance, name, or gender expression differs from the information contained in their official identity documents.

Participants explained that these situations may create uncertainty prior to election day. Some described anxiety about whether they would be required to answer personal questions, explain differences between their appearance and identity documents, or experience unnecessary attention during the verification process. Others expressed concern that interactions occurring in the presence of other voters could compromise their privacy or inadvertently disclose personal information.

For transgender participants who have not been able to update their identity documents, these concerns were described as contributing to emotional stress associated with voting. While participants generally acknowledged that election officials are required to verify voter identity in accordance with the Electoral Code, they emphasized the importance of ensuring that these procedures are implemented consistently, respectfully, and with due regard for personal dignity.

Participants also highlighted the importance of maintaining confidentiality throughout the voting process. Several contributors indicated that confidence in electoral participation would be strengthened if they were assured that identity verification would be conducted professionally, discreetly, and without unnecessary commentary or attention.

Importantly, the consultations did not identify identity verification as an obstacle for all transgender voters. Experiences varied considerably depending on individual circumstances, local context, and previous interactions with public institutions. Nevertheless, recurring concerns across different regions suggest that greater clarity regarding respectful implementation of existing procedures could contribute to increased confidence among some voters.

These findings demonstrate that the accessibility of elections depends not only on legal provisions but also on the manner in which administrative procedures are experienced in practice. Small improvements in communication, confidentiality, and staff awareness may have a significant impact on voters' confidence without affecting the integrity or security of electoral processes.

"I understand why my identity has to be checked. My concern is whether the process will be handled respectfully and without drawing unnecessary attention."

"Sometimes the stress begins before election day because I don't know how the verification process will unfold."

"I want to be treated like any other voter. Respect and privacy make a difference."

Why This Matters

Public confidence in elections is strengthened when all voters feel that administrative procedures are implemented fairly, consistently, and respectfully.

For transgender voters whose identity documents may not fully correspond to their gender expression, uncertainty about how verification procedures will be carried out can discourage participation, even where no discrimination ultimately occurs. Addressing these concerns does not require changing the fundamental principles of voter identification. Rather, it involves ensuring that existing procedures are applied in a manner that safeguards privacy, professionalism, and equal treatment.

By reinforcing respectful administrative practices and clear communication, electoral authorities can help ensure that all eligible voters are able to exercise their democratic rights with confidence while maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

Policy Considerations

The findings suggest several practical measures that could strengthen confidence among voters while preserving the integrity of electoral procedures:

- Include guidance on respectful, impartial, and confidential identity verification in training programmes for polling station officials.
- Reinforce the importance of protecting voters' privacy during interactions related to identity verification.
- Ensure that election officials receive practical guidance on handling situations where a voter's appearance differs from their identity documents, while applying the Electoral Code consistently and respectfully.
- Communicate clearly to the public that all eligible voters have the right to cast their ballot without discrimination and that concerns regarding the conduct of electoral procedures may be reported through established complaint mechanisms.

5.4 Geographic and Social Inequalities Affecting Electoral Participation

Ensuring Inclusive Participation Across All Regions

The principle of equal suffrage extends beyond the legal right to vote. It also requires that all citizens, regardless of where they live or their personal circumstances, have equitable opportunities to access electoral information, participate in civic life, and engage confidently in democratic processes.

The evidence gathered for this brief suggests that geographic location and social circumstances can significantly influence electoral participation among LGBTQI+ people in Armenia. Participants from Lori, Shirak, and Syunik consistently described different experiences from those living in Yerevan, highlighting the impact of unequal access to information, support services, and safe civic spaces.

For many participants, rural communities offered fewer opportunities to engage with civic education initiatives, public discussions, or community-led activities related to elections. Limited availability of LGBTQI+-affirming organizations and safe spaces outside the capital further reduced opportunities to discuss electoral issues, seek advice, or participate in awareness-raising initiatives.

Participants also described the influence of close-knit social environments, where concerns about confidentiality and social visibility may affect decisions regarding civic participation. In smaller communities, individuals often reported feeling more visible in public settings and expressed greater concern about potential stigma or unwanted disclosure of their identity.

Thesedynamics were particularly evident among participants who were not openly LGBTQI+ within their local communities. Several contributors explained that concerns about privacy influenced not only their willingness to participate in community events but also their confidence in engaging with broader public institutions.

Participants displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh described additional challenges related to displacement, social integration, and access to information. Many explained that displacement had disrupted established social networks and community support systems, making it more difficult to access trusted sources of civic information or engage consistently in local democratic processes.

Young LGBTQI+ participants also highlighted barriers linked to limited civic experience and lower levels of engagement with formal political processes. While many expressed a strong interest in participating in elections, they emphasized the importance of accessible information, peer support, and opportunities to discuss electoral issues in environments where they felt safe and respected.

Despite these challenges, participants consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to civic participation when opportunities were made available. Community consultations showed that localized, peer-led initiatives created spaces where participants felt comfortable discussing electoral issues, asking questions, and developing greater confidence in exercising their political rights.

These findings suggest that inclusive electoral participation depends not only on national policies but also on ensuring that outreach, information, and civic engagement opportunities are accessible to communities across all regions of Armenia.

"Most election events happen in Yerevan. In our region, we rarely have the chance to discuss these issues in a safe environment."

"In a small community, everyone knows each other. Sometimes the biggest challenge is simply feeling comfortable participating publicly."

"After displacement, I had to rebuild my life from the beginning. Elections were important to me, but finding reliable information and support was not always easy."

Why This Matters

Democratic participation should not depend on a person's place of residence, access to community networks, or social circumstances.

When civic education, public dialogue, and electoral outreach are concentrated in larger urban centres, marginalized communities living elsewhere may face additional obstacles to informed participation. These disparities can contribute to lower confidence in electoral processes and reduce opportunities for meaningful civic engagement.

Strengthening inclusive democracy therefore requires sustained efforts to ensure that voter education, public information, and community engagement initiatives reach all regions of the country, particularly communities that have historically experienced limited access to such opportunities.

Community-based organizations and regional leaders can play an important complementary role in extending the reach of electoral information and fostering trust between institutions and local communities.

Policy Considerations

The findings highlight several opportunities to strengthen regional inclusion in electoral participation:

- Expand community-based voter education initiatives beyond Yerevan, with particular attention to underserved regions.
- Strengthen partnerships between electoral institutions and local civil society organizations to improve outreach to marginalized communities.
- Ensure that public information campaigns are accessible through channels commonly used in rural communities.
- Consider the needs of internally displaced persons and other socially vulnerable groups when designing civic education and voter outreach initiatives.
- Support peer-led civic engagement initiatives that build local trust and encourage informed participation in democratic processes.

5.5 Trust in Institutions, Reporting Mechanisms and Electoral Accountability

Confidence in Electoral Institutions Supports Democratic Participation

Public confidence in electoral institutions is essential for democratic governance. Citizens are more likely to participate in elections when they believe that electoral authorities will administer the process impartially, protect their rights, and respond effectively to concerns or complaints.

For marginalized communities, trust in institutions is particularly important. The willingness to participate in elections depends not only on confidence that voting procedures will be administered fairly, but also on the belief that concerns related to discrimination, intimidation, or procedural irregularities will be addressed appropriately if they occur.

Across the consultations conducted for this brief, participants generally expressed support for democratic institutions and recognized the importance of electoral oversight. At the same time, many described uncertainty regarding the mechanisms available for reporting concerns encountered during electoral processes.

Participants frequently indicated that they were unfamiliar with the roles and responsibilities of different institutions involved in protecting electoral rights, including the Central Electoral Commission, electoral commissions, law enforcement bodies, and the Human Rights Defender. This lack of clarity contributed to uncertainty about where concerns should be reported and what outcomes could reasonably be expected.

Several participants explained that, even where formal reporting mechanisms exist, they were unsure whether their concerns would be taken seriously or addressed effectively. These perceptions were often shaped by previous experiences outside the electoral context, including interactions with other public institutions where participants felt their concerns had not been adequately understood or resolved.

Some contributors also emphasized that uncertainty about complaint procedures could discourage individuals from reporting incidents, particularly where concerns involved sensitive personal information or fears of unwanted disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Importantly, participants did not identify the absence of reporting mechanisms as the primary challenge. Rather, they emphasized the need for greater awareness, accessibility, and confidence in the mechanisms that already exist. Participants suggested that clear information about available safeguards, complaint procedures, and institutional responsibilities would contribute to greater confidence in electoral participation.

The consultations also highlighted the importance of communication between public institutions and community organizations. Participants expressed greater confidence in reporting concerns when supported by trusted civil society organizations that could provide information, guidance, or referrals where appropriate.

These findings suggest that strengthening institutional trust requires not only effective accountability mechanisms but also greater public awareness of how these mechanisms function and how citizens can access them.

"I know there must be somewhere to report a problem, but I honestly wouldn't know where to start."

"If something happened during voting, I would probably tell my community organization before approaching a public institution."

"Knowing that there is a clear process for reporting concerns would make me feel more confident about participating."

Why This Matters

Electoral accountability depends not only on the existence of institutions but also on public confidence that those institutions are accessible, impartial, and responsive.

When voters are uncertain about how to seek assistance or report concerns, incidents may remain undocumented, opportunities for institutional learning may be lost, and confidence in democratic processes may decline.

Increasing awareness of existing safeguards and strengthening communication between electoral institutions and communities can help reinforce public trust while improving the overall quality and credibility of elections.

For electoral authorities, enhancing transparency around complaint procedures is not simply an administrative improvement—it is an important measure for strengthening democratic participation and ensuring that every voter feels protected throughout the electoral process.

Policy Considerations

The evidence suggests several opportunities to strengthen confidence in electoral accountability:

- Increase public awareness of existing electoral complaint and appeals mechanisms through accessible voter education materials.
- Clearly communicate the roles and responsibilities of institutions responsible for protecting electoral rights.
- Ensure that information on reporting procedures is available in formats that are easy to understand and widely disseminated before election day.
- Strengthen collaboration between electoral institutions, the Human Rights Defender, and civil society organizations to improve outreach and referrals.
- Encourage periodic dialogue between electoral authorities and representatives of marginalized communities to identify barriers and improve public confidence in electoral processes.

5.6 Community-Led Approaches Strengthen Democratic Participation

Building Inclusive Elections Through Partnership and Community Engagement

While this brief identifies a number of barriers affecting electoral participation, the evidence also demonstrates that community-led initiatives can play an important role in strengthening democratic engagement and building confidence in electoral processes.

Throughout the consultations, participants consistently emphasized that they were more likely to engage with electoral information, participate in discussions, and seek guidance when activities were facilitated by trusted community organizations or peer educators. Familiar and inclusive environments enabled participants to discuss sensitive issues openly, ask practical questions, and exchange experiences that they might not feel comfortable sharing in more formal settings.

The project demonstrated that community organizations can serve as effective partners in extending the reach of voter education, particularly among populations that may have limited contact with traditional civic education initiatives. Through regional consultations, peer-led outreach, digital engagement, and interactive learning approaches, the project reached community members who may otherwise have remained outside broader electoral awareness efforts.

Participants also highlighted the value of peer-to-peer learning. Discussions facilitated by individuals with shared lived experience were perceived as accessible, relevant, and trustworthy. Rather than replacing official voter information, community-based initiatives complemented existing public information by translating electoral procedures into practical guidance that reflected participants' everyday realities and concerns.

The consultations further demonstrated the potential of innovative civic education tools to increase engagement with democratic processes. Interactive learning methods encouraged participants to explore electoral rights, voting procedures, and civic responsibilities in a collaborative and accessible way. Participants described these approaches as more engaging than traditional information materials and noted that they created opportunities for continued discussions within local communities.

Another important finding was the value of structured dialogue between public institutions and marginalized communities. Participants expressed appreciation for opportunities to share their experiences and contribute to discussions on electoral participation. Many emphasized that meaningful consultation not only improves the quality of public policy but also strengthens confidence that institutions are responsive to the needs of all citizens.

Collectively, these findings suggest that strengthening inclusive elections is not solely the responsibility of electoral authorities. Sustainable progress depends on collaboration between public institutions, civil society organizations, community leaders, and citizens themselves. Community organizations possess valuable knowledge of the barriers experienced by marginalized populations and can support institutions in designing outreach, voter education, and participation initiatives that are more inclusive and responsive.

The experiences documented through this project demonstrate that when marginalized communities are engaged as partners rather than solely as beneficiaries, they contribute actively to strengthening democratic participation and promoting more inclusive governance.

"The workshop was the first time I felt comfortable asking questions about voting without worrying about being judged."

"Hearing other people's experiences helped me realise that my concerns were shared by others and that participation is still important."

"Community organizations understand how to reach people who often do not participate in public events. That makes a real difference."

Why This Matters

Inclusive democracy depends on meaningful participation by all citizens, including those whose voices are often underrepresented in public decision-making.

Community organizations are well positioned to complement the work of electoral institutions by facilitating dialogue, disseminating accessible information, building trust, and identifying barriers that may otherwise remain invisible. Their role should be viewed as strengthening—not replacing—official electoral processes.

Partnerships between public institutions and community-led organizations can contribute to more accessible voter education, improved public confidence, and more responsive electoral policies. These partnerships are particularly valuable when seeking to engage communities that have historically experienced social exclusion or limited access to civic participation initiatives.

Strengthening these collaborative approaches can help ensure that electoral processes are not only legally accessible but also practically inclusive for all citizens.

Policy Considerations

The evidence suggests that electoral stakeholders could benefit from:

- Establishing regular dialogue with civil society organizations representing marginalized communities throughout the electoral cycle, not only during election periods.
- Supporting community-led voter education initiatives that complement official public information campaigns.
- Encouraging participatory approaches that allow community members to contribute to the design and evaluation of electoral outreach activities.
- Recognizing civil society organizations as partners in identifying barriers to participation and developing practical, community-informed solutions.
- Creating opportunities for ongoing consultation with underrepresented communities as part of broader efforts to strengthen democratic governance and public trust.

6. Policy Recommendations

Strengthening Inclusive Electoral Participation in Armenia

The evidence presented in this brief demonstrates that improving electoral participation among LGBTQI+ communities does not require the creation of separate electoral procedures or special voting arrangements. Instead, it requires ensuring that existing democratic processes are implemented in ways that are accessible, inclusive, respectful, and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

The following recommendations are intended to support electoral stakeholders in strengthening public confidence, reducing barriers to participation, and promoting equal access to democratic processes.

6.1 Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia

As the institution responsible for the administration of elections, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) plays a central role in ensuring that electoral processes are implemented in a manner that inspires public confidence and protects the rights of all voters.

The CEC should consider:

Strengthening inclusive voter education

- Develop voter education materials that address the practical questions and concerns commonly raised by marginalized communities.
- Expand outreach efforts in cooperation with regional civil society organizations to improve access to electoral information in underserved communities.
- Ensure that information on voting procedures, voter rights, and complaint mechanisms is available in accessible formats and disseminated well in advance of election day.

Supporting respectful electoral administration

- Integrate principles of equality, non-discrimination, confidentiality, and respectful communication into the training of polling station officials.
- Reinforce guidance on professional implementation of voter identification procedures while safeguarding the dignity and privacy of all voters.
- Promote consistent application of electoral procedures across polling stations.

Increasing transparency and confidence

- Improve public awareness of available complaint and appeals mechanisms.
 - Publish practical guidance explaining how voters can seek assistance or report concerns related to electoral procedures.
 - Continue dialogue with civil society organizations to identify opportunities for improving electoral accessibility.
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6.2 Government of the Republic of Armenia

Government institutions play an important role in creating an enabling environment for inclusive democratic participation.

Relevant ministries and public institutions should:

- Support nationwide civic education initiatives that reach marginalized and underserved communities.
- Encourage inter-institutional cooperation on inclusive electoral participation.
- Promote public awareness campaigns that reinforce democratic participation, equality, and respect for diversity.
- Strengthen cooperation with civil society organizations working with marginalized populations.
- Integrate inclusive participation principles into broader democratic governance and public administration reforms.

6.3 Human Rights Defender of Armenia

The Human Rights Defender has an important role in promoting equality, monitoring human rights, and strengthening public confidence in democratic institutions.

The Office of the Human Rights Defender could:

- Continue monitoring the accessibility and inclusiveness of electoral processes.
 - Raise public awareness about available human rights protection mechanisms during election periods.
 - Publish thematic observations and recommendations on barriers affecting marginalized communities.
 - Strengthen cooperation with community organizations to improve referral pathways and communication with affected groups.
 - Encourage confidential reporting of concerns related to discrimination or unequal treatment.
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6.4 Political Parties and Candidates

Political parties play a critical role in ensuring that democratic participation is open and accessible to all citizens.

Political actors should:

- Promote respectful and inclusive public discourse throughout electoral campaigns.
 - Refrain from rhetoric that may contribute to discrimination, polarization, or the exclusion of marginalized communities.
 - Ensure that campaign activities are accessible and welcoming to diverse groups of voters.
 - Engage constructively with civil society organizations representing underrepresented communities.
 - Recognize that inclusive political participation strengthens democratic legitimacy and public trust.
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6.5 Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations remain essential partners in promoting informed participation and strengthening democratic resilience.

Organizations working on democracy, elections, and human rights should:

- Continue providing community-based voter education.
 - Expand civic education initiatives beyond major urban centers.
 - Facilitate dialogue between electoral institutions and marginalized communities.
 - Document barriers to participation and contribute evidence to electoral reform discussions.
 - Strengthen collaboration across sectors, including organizations working on democracy, youth participation, disability rights, women's rights, and LGBTQI+ equality.
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6.6 International Partners

International organizations and development partners have made significant contributions to strengthening democratic institutions in Armenia.

Future support could include:

- Continuing technical assistance for inclusive electoral reforms.
- Supporting community-led civic education initiatives.
- Encouraging participatory approaches to electoral policy development.
- Facilitating the exchange of good practices from other democratic contexts.
- Supporting research and evidence generation on inclusive political participation.

Cross-Cutting Priorities

Across all stakeholder groups, the following priorities emerged consistently from the evidence collected:

Accessibility

Ensure that voter information, electoral procedures, and participation opportunities are accessible to all communities, including those in rural areas and other underserved locations.

Respect and Dignity

Promote professional, respectful, and non-discriminatory treatment of every voter throughout the electoral process.

Trust

Strengthen public confidence by increasing awareness of electoral rights, institutional responsibilities, and available complaint mechanisms.

Participation

Recognize community organizations as partners in promoting civic engagement and reaching populations that may otherwise remain excluded.

Evidence-Based Policymaking

Continue consulting marginalized communities when designing, implementing, and evaluating electoral policies and outreach initiatives.

1. Looking Ahead: Towards More Inclusive Elections in Armenia

Ensuring equal electoral participation for LGBTQI+ people in Armenia should be understood as a continuous democratic commitment rather than a one-time intervention linked only to a specific electoral cycle. While the 2026 elections represent an important opportunity to strengthen inclusive participation, sustainable change requires long-term efforts to address structural barriers, build institutional capacity, and ensure that all citizens can exercise their political rights safely, freely, and with dignity.

Inclusive elections are built through ongoing dialogue between state institutions, civil society organizations, communities, and other democratic actors. The experiences documented through this project demonstrate that meaningful participation cannot be achieved only through formal guarantees of universal suffrage. It requires accessible information, responsive institutions, non-discriminatory procedures, trusted complaint mechanisms, and an environment where every voter feels protected and respected.

Moving forward, public institutions have an important role in strengthening their understanding of the diverse experiences of voters and integrating inclusion principles into electoral planning and implementation. Continuous institutional learning, including training of electoral officials, development of inclusive communication approaches, and engagement with affected communities, can contribute to building greater public trust and confidence in electoral processes.

At the same time, civil society organizations and community-led initiatives remain essential partners in identifying emerging challenges, providing evidence-based recommendations, and ensuring that the voices of marginalized communities are reflected in democratic decision-making. Community participation should not be limited to consultation during election periods but should become part of broader governance processes and policy development.

The recommendations presented in this brief should therefore be viewed as steps toward a broader vision: an electoral system where diversity is recognized as a strength of democracy, where all citizens can participate without fear of discrimination, and where institutions actively work to remove barriers to equal participation.

Creating inclusive elections is an ongoing process of strengthening democratic culture, accountability, and human rights protection. By investing in cooperation, dialogue, and evidence-based reforms, Armenia can continue advancing toward a more participatory democracy where every person's voice has equal value and every citizen can contribute to shaping the country's future.



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Thank you for taking the time to read this policy brief. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our findings in more detail, please feel free to contact us.

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