



POLICY BRIEF

GENDERED PRIORITIES AHEAD OF THE 2026 ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Civil society organisation
EU	European Union
EUMA & EUPM	The EU Monitoring Mission/EU Partnership Mission
FIMI	Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference
GBV	Gender-based violence
GID	Gender- and Identity-based Disinformation
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (“+” denotes everything on the gender and sexuality spectrum that letters and words cannot yet describe)
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
WPS	Women, peace and security
WHRD	Women human rights defender
WROs	Women’s Rights Organisations

KVINNA TILL KVINNA

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has defended women’s rights since 1993. For every woman’s right to be safe and to be heard.

Today we are one of the world’s leading women’s rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen women’s influence and power. We work closely together with more than 100 local partner organisations across 20 countries to end violence against women, reach lasting peace and close the gender gap once and for all

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Armenia's parliamentary elections on 7 June 2026 take place at a defining moment for the country's democratic future. Following the displacement of over 100,000 ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, and against a backdrop of post-war trauma, deep political polarisation, and ongoing peace negotiations with Azerbaijan, the stakes of this electoral cycle extend well beyond the ballot box. At the same time, Armenia's accelerating approximation with the European Union opens new, if fragile, opportunities for rights-based reform, including in terms of women's meaningful socioeconomic and political participation and the women, peace, and security framework. How these intersecting dynamics unfold will shape the country's democratic trajectory for years to come.

With less than a month remaining until the elections, the realities are unevenly distributed. Women's rights organisations (WROs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs), LGBTQI communities, displaced persons, people with disabilities, border-region residents, and young people each face distinct and compounding barriers to meaningful participation in public and political life – barriers that have been only partially addressed. This brief attempts to map those realities: the structural conditions, lived experiences, and advocacy priorities of the most marginalised communities in Armenia ahead of the June elections, with the aim of informing targeted, rights-based engagement in the weeks ahead, during, and in the aftermath of the elections.

In this context, Kvinna till Kvinna calls upon the EU and Member States to:

1. **Support targeted civic and voter education for the most marginalised women ahead of and during the elections**
2. **Press for and support disability-inclusive electoral processes and housing programmes**
3. **Counter gender- and identity-based disinformation (GID) as a distinct and targeted strand of FIMI programming**
4. **Prioritise flexible, multi-year core funding to women's rights organisations, with a focus on regional and crisis-affected groups**
5. **Invest in gender-responsive support for displaced women from Nagorno-Karabakh, including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and legal clarity on citizenship**
6. **Anchor gender equality and anti-discrimination reforms within the EU approximation framework**
7. **Integrate Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) into the EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership's people-to-people contacts dimension**

8. **Allocate resources for WROs to build and strengthen intersectional coalitions and cross-movement solidarity**
9. **Support women's substantive political participation through capacity development, financial resources, and mentoring**
10. **Advocate for women's meaningful inclusion in peace processes at all stages, including in the aftermath of the elections**

REALITIES FOR WOMEN-LED CIVIL SOCIETY IN ARMENIA AHEAD OF THE JUNE ELECTIONS

Armenia's parliamentary elections on 7 June 2026 mark a pivotal moment for the country's democratic trajectory – the first regular national elections since over 100,000 ethnic Armenians were displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. Against a backdrop of post-war trauma, deep political polarisation, EU approximation, and ongoing negotiations with Azerbaijan, women's and LGBTQI rights organisations and communities face a complex operating environment.

WROs and WHRDs face heightened risks, including gender- and identity-based disinformation, which is already prevalent in the political landscape and has increased in the run-up and in the aftermath of the June elections. Security for WROs/WHRDs is a key concern, including in terms of bearing the brunt of the severe funding cuts from international funders¹ and finding themselves handling humanitarian and crisis response measures, while dealing with burnout and anti-gender backlash.

Civil society remains deeply fragmented along political, geographic, and thematic lines. WROs describe polarisation and divisions among civil society groups, ranging

from 'core' CSOs doing human rights work with communities to fictitious pro-opposition CSOs run by former political actors fuelling disinformation and polarisation to politicised and party-specific CSOs, supported to develop a 'political alternative' for Armenia, especially within the youth organisations. Another notable phenomenon is strategic self-censorship: both **WROs and queer rights groups deliberately temper their advocacy to avoid instrumentalisation and attacks.**

Intra-community tensions are prevalent along displaced-host community and urban-rural community divides. Tensions between Yerevan-based and regional organisations persist, as the latter often operate in more conservative contexts and risk closure or loss of community trust if openly affiliated with queer rights advocacy, however simultaneously restricting the community's access to safe spaces and referrals. This points to a need for **confidential referral networks between regional and LGBTQI organisations to ensure hate-motivated incidents receive timely attention.** Such non-public, trust-based models may offer a pragmatic path forward in the current environment.

¹ Šišić, Merima; Binişik, Derya. [Beyond the Cuts: How the Defunding Affects Feminist and Civil Society Organizations](#), Heinrich Boell Foundation, 13 March 2025

While everyday Armenian citizens – including young people – are primarily concerned about poverty, unemployment, healthcare, and security, these issues were largely absent from the pre-election advocacy frameworks discussed by civil society organisations.

At the same time, civil society is active in coordinating voter/civic education, media monitoring, fact-checking, and anti-corruption and countering disinformation efforts. Engagement of the most marginalised groups, including those displaced from Nagorno Karabakh, women, youth, LGBTQI people, people with disabilities, and voters outside major urban centres is crucial to ensure their meaningful participation.²

However, regardless of the outcome of the elections, a strong focus on supporting independent civil society, WROs and WHRDs as watchdogs of democratic processes must remain if Armenia is to continue its path towards democratisation.

GENDER AND IDENTITY-BASED DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA

Armenia faces a significant and coordinated disinformation challenge ahead of the elections, attributed primarily to Russian-linked actors operational in Armenia since at least April 2025.³ The EU has allocated €15 million to strengthen Armenia's

disinformation resilience,⁴ and the Council of Europe's Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026 includes media literacy and anti-disinformation measures in the electoral context.⁵

While the overall focus is frequently on the general concept of hybrid threats and foreign information manipulations and interference (FIMI), Gender- and identity-based disinformation (GID) is a specific and documented tool in this arsenal.

Tactics include sexual smearing and intimidation, stereotypical media portrayals reinforcing conservative gender roles, and moral attacks systematically target women politicians and discredit WROs. In Armenia, elected officials have made explicit sexist attacks on women political opponents – including a call for a rival to undergo STI testing⁶ – with limited civil society pushback. An opposition actor's recorded promise that 'there will be no unsatisfied women in Armenia'⁷ if elected, strongly criticised by the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women,⁸ illustrates the broader pattern.

The scarcity of larger-scale robust civil society responses to such rhetoric – particularly when it originates from ruling party representatives – reflects a co-optation dynamic: organisations fear that publicly criticising the government risks facilitating the opposition's return to power. The VAW Coalition's response offers a model: **broader civil society solidarity in calling out sexist rhetoric regardless of its political source is essential.**

² [Statement of Findings and Recommendations | IRI Pre-Election Assessment Mission to Armenia's 2026 Parliamentary Elections](#), International Republican Institute (IRI), 29 April 2026

³ [Russia's election interference playbook targets Armenia](#), EUvsDisinfo, 27 April 2026

⁴ [EU-Armenia Partnership Council: Press remarks by High Representative Kaja Kallas](#), EEAS, 2 December 2025

⁵ [Promoting freedom of expression, media and access to information in Armenia](#), Council of Europe, 2026

⁶ ["Get tested for STIs," Armenian ruling party MP tells opposition politician](#), JAMnews, 10 September 2025

⁷ [Karapetyan's son vows there will be 'no unsatisfied woman' in Armenia under their government](#), OC Media, 3 February 2026

⁸ [Women's Dignity and Sexuality are Seen as Instruments for Addressing Political Issues in Armenia](#), Media.am, 14 February 2026

Anti-gender propaganda operates through a diffuse network of self-organised anti-LGBTQI groups, pro-Russian political networks, the Armenian Apostolic Church, military-affiliated groups, and sections of the independent media – framing WROs and LGBTQI organisations as foreign-funded threats to Armenian sovereignty. Queer rights organisations are undertaking contingency planning, including documenting their history and impact, in anticipation of potentially restrictive post-election legislation.

Displaced communities from Nagorno-Karabakh and women in border communities are specific disinformation targets, with false narratives circulating about NK passport status, citizenship implications, the right to return, and the peace deal with Azerbaijan. Lower digital and media literacy, social isolation, and greater susceptibility to social media manipulation make these populations particularly vulnerable. Young Armenians are both especially vulnerable to, and potentially powerful allies against, disinformation; **strengthening digital and media literacy – particularly among young women – is a stated priority.**

WROs need to shift from reactive to proactive communications, investing in their own narratives rooted in lived realities and positive rights visions rather than perpetually responding to anti-gender actors and disinformation operations. This requires resources, coordination, and strategic communication expertise that many organisations could benefit from strengthening.

⁹ [2025-2028 Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy](#), Legal Information System of Armenia, 23 April 2025

MEANINGFUL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Armenia has made measurable progress in women's political inclusion, with 38.3% parliamentary representation significant by regional standards and with the upcoming June elections serving as a test for Armenia's strategic commitments to uphold women's leadership and political participation.⁹ However, **the gap between formal inclusion and meaningful participation remains wide.** While a significant contributor to this increase, the quota system has also reinforced tokenism – women are placed on electoral lists to meet thresholds rather than as genuine political actors, and are assessed by voters and parties through the lens of gender stereotypes and social roles rather than political competence, a notion that is also bolstered by high levels of patriarchal norms and structures.¹⁰

The post-war political culture has further constrained women's agency. **Since 2023, political credibility has become closely tied to military participation, implicitly relegating women, who generally contribute to the war effort in indirect means, to secondary status.** The glorification of male soldiers systematically devalues women's political contributions.

The security priorities and worldview of rural and urban communities often significantly differ from each other. Military security guarantees are seen as a key aspect of day-to-day safety by women living in border communities versus those living in

¹⁰ Davies, Sarah et al, [Challenges and Opportunities in the Politics of Armenia-Azerbaijani Peace Processes](#), The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, February 2026

capital/urban settings. This points to a high level of securitisation and militarisation of the society, where peace is difficult to imagine without military guarantees.¹¹

Women have been almost entirely absent from the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process and broader regional peacebuilding – falling well short of the standards set by UNSC Resolution 1325 and the WPS framework. The third Armenian NAP on WPS (launched in 2025) was developed with unprecedented civil society involvement, focuses on localisation and the WPS agenda in border communities, and introduces new dimensions including cybersecurity and climate change, with a monitoring and evaluation framework. However, WROs raise concerns that its treatment of women's political participation remains constrained around military roles – a framing that WROs criticise as restrictive rather than transformative.

At the grassroots level, however, women are already active in post-conflict recovery, humanitarian support, and community peacebuilding in border and displaced communities.

The engagement of women in the peace process is vital, as they have deep contextual knowledge – they are the ones who are working directly with communities, who have access to those most affected by conflict, who understand their needs, who respond to crises, and are able to incorporate this experience into analysis and strategic thinking. **This first-hand analysis, if better supported, can become a pertinent source of early warnings and conflict and violence prevention.**¹²

In several *marzes*,¹³ women's rights organisations often use their offices as safe spaces for women from the community – a form of local solidarity and informal support that proves particularly effective in rural contexts. It is in these spaces that women frequently come together to self-organise and strategise. Using storytelling as an advocacy method is utilised as a powerful but resource intensive tool.

Alongside formal processes, investment in 'everyday peace' – grassroots, community-level coexistence and social trust – is essential but underinvested in both state policy and donor programming. This includes addressing tensions between displaced and host communities, trauma healing, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and socioeconomic inclusion of marginalised groups. It also entails a sensitive and guided process of addressing differing interpretations of history, and a constructive critique of nationalism and militarised masculinities that are the root cause of the conflict dynamics.¹⁴

The notion of everyday peace has also been instrumentalised: the narrative of national survival and permanent emergency is used to depoliticise and defer fundamental rights claims, framing rights-based discussions as a luxury Armenia cannot currently afford.

¹¹ Davies, Sarah et al, [Challenges and Opportunities in the Politics of Armenia-Azerbaijani Peace Processes](#), The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, February 2026

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Administrative regional units in Armenia

¹⁴ Davies, Sarah et al, [Challenges and Opportunities in the Politics of Armenia-Azerbaijani Peace Processes](#), The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, February 2026

THE RIGHTS, NEEDS, AND PRIORITIES OF MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE ELECTIONS

The displaced community from Nagorno-Karabakh

The 2023 Azerbaijani offensive resulted in the forcible displacement of virtually the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh – over 100,000 people, approximately 52-53% of whom were women and girls.¹⁵ This population joined existing communities of Armenians displaced in the 1990s and refugees from Syria, Lebanon, and Ukraine, creating a complex, multi-layered displacement context.

Many Karabakhi Armenians hold Armenian passports but are not formally citizens. While some have applied for Armenian citizenship, others retain Nagorno-Karabakh identity documents as a symbolic assertion of their right to return – perceiving citizenship acceptance as undermining that right.¹⁶ Structurally, only those who have accepted Armenian citizenship may participate in the 7 June 2026 elections, yet **the relationship between citizenship acceptance and the right to return remains insufficiently clarified.** The community has also not been adequately informed about the rights they retain upon accepting Armenian citizenship,

including continued eligibility for social benefits and displaced person status. **Housing remains the most urgent and politically charged issue for the displaced community.** The government's voucher programme¹⁷ has been widely criticised for prioritising demographic policy over welfare. Following sustained advocacy, a March 2026 decree – widely seen as a pre-election move – confirmed an increase in the amount allocated under this programme though it applies only to communities adjacent to Yerevan, excluding those in the capital.¹⁸ Moreover, **neither the housing programme nor integration programmes adequately account for the needs of displaced women with disabilities.**¹⁹

Unemployment is pervasive, particularly in the regions, despite targeted programmes. Lack of pharmacies, specialist healthcare, and basic commerce exacerbates hardship, driving emigration including to Russia. Unemployment is higher among displaced women (53%) than men (45%),²⁰ with overall poverty at approximately 27%,²¹ disproportionately affecting the displaced community – and women within it even more so,²² which further increases their susceptibility to various forms of violence and exclusion and undermines their political participation.

There is no dedicated state institution for the displaced population; responsibility is fragmented between the Migration and Citizenship Service, under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Labour

¹⁵ [World Vision Armenia Report](#), 14 November 2023

¹⁶ [Karabakh Armenians reject Armenian citizenship: fears and expectations](#), JAMnews, 21 October 2024

¹⁷ AMD 2-5 million / approx. EUR 4,600-11,580 per person, with higher amounts for those settling in remote or border areas. See: Barseghyan, Arshaluys, [Pashinyan offers increase in housing aid for Nagorno-Karabakh refugees ahead of elections](#), OC Media, 19 March 2026

¹⁸ [Karabakh Armenians reject Armenian citizenship: fears and expectations](#), JAMnews, 21 October 2024

¹⁹ [Nothing about Us Without Us](#), The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2025

²⁰ [Report on the Results of the Labour Force Assessment among Refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia](#), IOM, October 2024

²¹ [UN Women Datahub](#)

²² Shahnazaryan, Gohar (2022). [Gender Inequality and Poverty in Armenia: A Multidimensional Approach](#). Journal of Sociology: Bulletin of Yerevan University. 13. 38-47. 10.46991/BYSU:F/2022.13.2.038.

and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) without coherent coordination.

The community has also been subject to political instrumentalisation – including being labelled 'ungrateful' – fuelling tensions with host communities, while there are no strong, unified political advocacy platforms representing displaced persons, particularly women.

Displaced women often do not feel integrated into their host communities, which in turn impacts their feelings of safety and security.²³

The gendered dimensions of displacement remain systematically under-addressed. **The wartime context of the Nagorno-Karabakh society – shaped by strong patriarchal norms – has left many women as single mothers or heads of households, now navigating unfamiliar urban environments with limited support.**

Despite representing the majority of the displaced population, women are almost entirely absent from formal political representation of the community.

The psychological toll of displacement – loss of community, identity, property, and the right to return – disproportionately affects women, who continue to bear primary caregiving responsibilities. **MHPSS services, including gender-sensitive provision, remain underfunded, with much of this support currently delivered by women's rights organisations, some of which are themselves displaced from Karabakh.**

Border communities

Armenia's border communities approach the June 7 election carrying layered vulnerabilities poorly reflected in national political discourse. Ongoing insecurity – including fear of renewed conflict – is a lived material reality that shapes how women living in border regions relate to the state and the electoral process.

A persistent 'state of traumatic emergency' suppresses rights-based discussions, making it difficult for community members – women in particular – to articulate political demands beyond immediate survival. Border communities' risk being spoken *about* rather than spoken *with*, their security instrumentalised by competing electoral actors without genuine attention to their differentiated needs.

Women in border and conflict-affected regions such as Syunik, Tavush, and Vayots Dzor face an intersection of conflict exposure, patriarchal norms, economic challenges, and civic isolation. Women who have remained in border villages, managing households, livelihoods, and informal care networks under conditions of ongoing insecurity, possess first-hand knowledge of what sustainable peace and community resilience requires – but the formal political channels to translate that knowledge into policy remain inaccessible to most of them.

Mobility restrictions – shaped by security and financial constraints near the Azerbaijani border – compound this, disproportionately limiting women's access to services, civic information, and political events. In an electoral environment where campaign outreach is already weakest

²³ Davies, Sarah et al, [Challenges and Opportunities in the Politics of Armenia-Azerbaijani Peace Processes](#), The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, February 2026

in rural and border regions, these restrictions deepen an already significant access gap. Existing electoral preparations do not adequately address the need for targeted, conflict-sensitive planning to ensure women can reach polling stations and access voter education.

The absence of gender-sensitive voter education means many women in these communities – including women displaced from Nagorno Karabakh who have settled in border areas – lack accurate information about their citizenship and electoral rights.

Awareness-raising on electoral rights must be tailored to reach women specifically through trusted local channels rather than digital outreach, which assumes levels of connectivity and literacy many border-area women do not have.

Any civic engagement strategy towards June 7 must treat border communities as a heterogeneous group with differentiated needs – not a backdrop for national security and territorial loss narratives. For women in Syunik, Tavush, Gegharkunik, and Vayots Dzor, and women displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh who have settled across these regions, **the most pressing pre-election priorities are: access to voter information in accessible formats through trusted community channels; mitigation of practical barriers including mobility constraints; and an end to the instrumentalisation of their vulnerability by political actors.**

WROs working in these regions need adequate resources, cross-movement solidarity – including stronger links between Yerevan-based and regional organisations – and a commitment to politicising socioeconomic issues such as housing, land and property rights, unemployment, and healthcare.

Women with disabilities

Women with disabilities face compounded barriers to meaningful political participation in Armenia. Polling station accessibility remains critically unresolved: while the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) has taken steps towards electronic systems and transparency measures, **physical accessibility for people with mobility, visual, and hearing impairments is inconsistently implemented.** Awareness campaigns have tended to frame people with disabilities – particularly women – as passive voters rather than active political agents (candidates, observers, campaigners), and underrepresentation in decision-making roles remains acute despite formal legal inclusion frameworks.

Armenia also lacks a comprehensive plan for community-based services for people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, instead prioritising institutional care and maintaining legal incapacity determinations without supported decision-making alternatives.

The CEC has been identified as a key advocacy stakeholder. A previous successful model – a multi-party conference resulting in signed commitments to accessibility-related electoral reforms – could be replicated ahead of June 2026.

The intersection of disability and displacement creates vulnerabilities that neither disability-focused nor displacement-focused policy frameworks adequately address. The housing voucher programme for Nagorno-Karabakh displaced persons was not designed with disability accessibility in mind, and integration programmes have similarly omitted disability considerations. Kvinna till Kvinna's

publication *Nothing about us without us*²⁴ documents how disability, gender, and security intersect in this context, and its recommendations remain relevant to the pre-election advocacy agenda. Advocacy priorities voiced by relevant disability and women's rights organisations include **ensuring state housing support programmes contain specific accessibility measures for women and girls with disabilities, and that integration programmes for displaced persons explicitly include disability considerations.**

LGBTQI people and communities

Militarised patriarchal norms make the environment particularly hostile for LGBTQI people in Armenia, with homo/bi/transphobic attitudes broadly unaddressed. The Armenian constitution defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, same-sex partnerships are unrecognised, and a draft anti-discrimination law, which has stalled for nearly a decade, does not include sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) as a protected ground in its most recent formulation.

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights recommended SOGI-inclusive anti-discrimination legislation in February 2026,²⁵ renewing the call directly to the Prime Minister in March 2026;²⁶ and PINK Armenia has held consultative status with four government ministries since January 2026. Armenia's score in ILGA Europe's most recent annual assessment of LGBTQI rights protection remains unchanged since 2024

(9.16%) as it continues to rank among the bottom 5 of 49 European countries.²⁷

LGBTQI people continue to face systematic discrimination, harassment, and violence, intensified by militarised patriarchal norms following the 2023 Nagorno-Karabakh war. Fear of disclosure prevents most survivors from reporting crimes, and law enforcement consistently fails to address violence on SOGI grounds, generating a climate of impunity – a trend reflected in PINK Armenia's 2025 report documenting a significant decline in community trust in law enforcement.²⁸ The Criminal Code reformed in 2022 technically allows hate crime prosecutions on homophobic or transphobic grounds (through an open list of aggravating circumstances), but authorities remain reluctant to apply it. Discrimination cases place the burden of proof on the victim/survivor, and the Ombudsperson can only issue non-binding recommendations.

Within the LGBTQI community, political disillusionment runs deep. The replacement of progressive government figures with more conservative ones, combined with a governmental decision to halt LGBTQI-inclusive legislation ahead of elections, has bred widespread scepticism – risking political non-participation that could paradoxically weaken the community's electoral influence. **Key identified needs include clear information on party platforms regarding LGBTQI issues, structured community spaces for political discussion, and organisational contingency planning in the event of restrictive legislation following the vote.**

²⁴ [Nothing about us without us](#), The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2025

²⁵ [Armenia: Build on human rights progress in non-discrimination, combating violence against women, and integration of Karabakh Armenians](#), Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 10 February 2026

²⁶ [The anti-discrimination law was discussed in the correspondence between the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and Nikol Pashinyan](#), PINK Armenia, 27 April 2026

²⁷ [Rainbow Map – Armenia](#), ILGA Europe, 12 May 2026

²⁸ [The Human Rights Situation of LGBT+ People in Armenia during 2024](#), Annual Report, PINK Armenia, May 2025

An important aspect is **the need for community engagement and awareness raising among the public, structuring the messaging around the significance of anti-discrimination legislation as a protection mechanism for all marginalised groups**, since currently the association is only with the LGBTI community.

Both the ruling party and opposition use homo/bi/transphobic language as a tool of political discreditation. The instrumentalisation of LGBTQI issues is also visible in the context of the Istanbul Convention ratification debate: ratification is simultaneously advocated for by WROs as necessary for women's protection, and weaponised by conservative actors as evidence of a 'Western agenda' that threatens Armenian values. This dynamic has made even mainstream WROs cautious about publicly advocating for ratification, for fear of triggering a backlash that undermines broader gender-equality work.

Youth engagement

Youth political apathy is a significant concern ahead of the June 2026 elections. Young people, including first-time voters, face a political landscape dominated by polarisation between established blocs, with little space for new voices or issue-based platforms. The prevailing narrative of the 'former vs. current' governments offers little to engage those who identify with neither camp.

Youth organisations identify two key priorities: **voter empowerment – helping young people understand how elections affect their lives and what tools they have to influence the process – and combating disinformation**. Youth organisations, especially those based in non-capital

settings, face resource constraints and questions of political legitimacy, while often being excluded by the more 'established' CSO/WRO actors.

Nevertheless, first-time voter and youth engagement in the electoral process is a recognised issue that is being addressed through relevant civic education programmes, including in the regions.²⁹ **It is significant that these programmes also include a focus on the most marginalised communities.**

The legacy of the 2020 war and 2023 displacement crisis weigh heavily on young Armenians. The glorification of male military participation – particularly in the regions – has shaped a political culture in which young women's voices are subordinated to those of veterans and military-affiliated actors, as well as older women. This is an issue that can be addressed through resourcing safe spaces for young women to organise their own stance and then connecting these with regular consultative platforms with the EU.

THE GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSION AND EU APPROXIMATION

The EU approximation process creates both opportunity and risk for progressive civil society. On the one hand, the December 2025 EU-Armenia Strategic Agenda explicitly commits Armenia to combating anti-LGBTQI discrimination and hate crimes, and the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP) includes references to anti-discrimination legislation. On the other hand, the EU's association with progressive values – pejoratively labelled 'Gayropa' – is used by Russian-aligned actors to delegitimise civil society organisations as

²⁹ [Empowering First-Time Voters in Armenia through the "Choose to Vote" Training](#), Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU), 30 March 2026

foreign agents. The government's use of 'agent' rhetoric against the Armenian Apostolic Church has already seeded³⁰ this narrative in the public space, making it easier to redirect it against WROs and queer rights groups at a later stage.

Nevertheless, **it is important to ensure WROs and WHRDs in Armenia have adequate support to forge and strengthen connections between the most marginalised communities and policy processes**, especially in light of the launching of the EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership announced during the EU-Armenia Summit, which entails 'people-to-people contacts'.³¹ This is underpinned by the Strategic Agenda for the EU-Armenia Partnership launched in December 2025.³²

The EU approximation process represents a structural opportunity. Armenia's 'Europeanisation' trajectory is not primarily driven by values – it is driven by strategic calculation, following the failure of the Russian security guarantees. WROs and queer rights organisations should engage with this momentum to anchor rights-based reforms – including gender-equality legislation, the Istanbul Convention, and the anti-discrimination law – within the Europeanisation framework, with the EU providing space, resources, and advocacy opportunities for them to do so. **This approach requires strategic communication that connects rights reforms to EU standards and Armenia's stated integration objectives, rather than framing them as purely normative demands.**

However, it is crucial that Europeanisation must be connected to socioeconomic issues – poverty alleviation, labour rights, housing, and economic redistribution – if it is to build genuine public buy-in. A Europeanisation narrative that focuses exclusively on liberal values without addressing material welfare is likely to remain elite-facing and fail to mobilise broad public support, an aspect also crucial in the lead-up to the elections.

³⁰ Sargsyan, Isabella, [Armenia's State-Church Relations: Not Much Room for Optimism](#), International Center for Law and Religion Studies, 29 January 2026

³¹ [EU and Armenia deepen their relations in a first Summit in Yerevan](#), European Commission, 1 May 2026

³² [European Union and Armenia adopt new Strategic Agenda to deepen partnership](#), European Commission, 2 December 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of this analysis and the commencement of the official campaigning in Armenia ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections on 7 June 2026, international partners, especially the EU should consider the following:

- 1. Support targeted civic and voter education for the most marginalised women ahead of and during the elections** Support voter education initiatives and programmes, specifically designed – including in accessible formats – for displaced women from Nagorno-Karabakh, women in border communities, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI people. This should be done in consultation with and through support to relevant WROs, who have trusted local channels and community outreach.
- 2. Press for and support disability-inclusive electoral processes and housing programmes** Engage the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) as a key advocacy stakeholder, with support and consultation from WROs, to ensure physical and procedural accessibility of polling stations is consistently implemented for women with mobility, visual, and hearing impairments. Simultaneously, advocate for the integration of specific accessibility measures for women and girls with disabilities into the displaced persons housing voucher programme.
- 3. Counter gender- and identity-based disinformation (GID) as a distinct and targeted strand of FIMI programming** Ensure that the EU's work to counter FIMI and support disinformation resilience explicitly integrates GID as a documented and specific tactic. Support WROs and queer rights organisations in building proactive, narrative-driven communications strategies. Prioritise digital and media literacy programmes for young women, displaced communities, and border populations, who are identified as both especially vulnerable to and potentially powerful allies against disinformation.
- 4. Prioritise flexible, multi-year core funding to women's rights organisations, with a focus on regional and crisis-affected groups** (particularly those operating outside Yerevan, in border regions, and among displaced communities). Funding should explicitly cover security, burnout support, and strategic communications capacity, enabling organisations to shift from reactive to proactive advocacy rooted in the lived realities of the most marginalised women.
- 5. Invest in gender-responsive support for displaced women from Nagorno-Karabakh, including MHPSS and legal clarity on citizenship** Support advocacy and service delivery that addresses the specific vulnerabilities of displaced women. Priorities include: mental health and psychosocial support with gender-sensitive provision; legal information on the compatibility of Armenian

citizenship with displaced person status and the right to return; and targeted economic inclusion programmes given the disproportionately high unemployment rate among displaced women, including older women and those living outside of the capital.

6. **Anchor gender equality and anti-discrimination reforms within the EU approximation framework.** Link rights-based reforms (Istanbul Convention ratification, SOGI-inclusive anti-discrimination legislation, etc.) explicitly to EU integration benchmarks, focusing not solely on LGBTQI and women's rights, but the broader fundamental rights framework that will support Armenia's overall Europeanisation trajectory.
7. **Integrate WROs into the EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership's people-to-people contacts** Leverage the EU-Armenia Connectivity Partnership and its people-to-people dimension to deliberately connect the most marginalised communities – displaced women, border-region women, women with disabilities, LGBTQI people – to EU policy processes. Support WROs as the primary bridge between these communities and formal EU-Armenia annals, recognising their existing role as community anchors, sources of early warnings, informal safe spaces, and first responders in crisis and conflict settings.
8. **Allocate resources for WROs to build and strengthen intersectional coalitions** and cross-movement solidarity, potentially developing shared advocacy frameworks while respecting each group's specific priorities and constraints through a Do No Harm approach.
9. **Women's substantive political participation** – as candidates, campaigners, and policy advocates, not just quota-fillers – should be supported through capacity development, financial resources, and mentoring.
10. **Advocate for women's meaningful inclusion in peace processes at all stages.** Engage WROs through regular inclusive consultation formats with the EU Delegation in Yerevan, the EUMA (the EU Monitoring Mission), the incoming EUPM (the EU Partnership Mission),³³ the EUSR,³⁴ and Member State embassies to ensure that the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process meets WPS standards and recognises the gendered dimensions of peace, including peaceful coexistence and everyday peace – efforts that should garner continued support also in the aftermath of the elections

³³ [Armenia: EU establishes a new civilian mission to contribute strengthening the country's resilience](#), Council of the European Union, 21 April 2026

³⁴ [EUSR Grono speaks at Yerevan Dialogue 2026 on Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process](#), Commonsense.eu, 6 May 2026

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