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**BUREAU OF THE  
STEERING COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY  
(CDDEM)**

**GUIDELINES ON ENHANCING PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS OF WOMEN,  
GIRLS AND YOUNG PERSONS, AND PERSONS AT RISK OF DISCRIMINATION**

**DRAFT**

prepared by Prof. Anna Lavizzari, Council of Europe consultant, for the  
Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity  
Democratic Institutions and Civil Society Division

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Aim and scope of the guidelines

The Council of Europe's founding aim is to achieve greater unity among its member States for the purpose of safeguarding and realizing common ideals and principles, including pluralistic democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In this spirit, equality, diversity and inclusive democratic participation are fundamental to the health and legitimacy of democratic societies.

However, across Europe, women and girls, persons with disabilities, national minorities (including Roma), people with a migrant background, youth, and LGBTI+ persons remain systematically underrepresented in democratic institutions. While the principle of universal suffrage is widely guaranteed, significant disparities persist in electoral participation rates, both in terms of voting and standing for office. These inequalities are compounded by legal, procedural, social, economic and cultural barriers – many of which intersect to disproportionately affect those in vulnerable situations. Wider trends of declining voter turnout, eroding trust in institutions, and the lack of diverse voices in elected bodies point to a crisis of representation. These challenges demand not only legal equality, but proactive and inclusive policy responses that address the structural conditions shaping participation in democratic life.

In line with its [Terms of Reference for 2024–2027](#), and under the authority of the Committee of Ministers, the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDEM) has been tasked with delivering Guidelines on Enhancing Participation in Elections of Women, Girls, Young Persons and Vulnerable Groups by the end of 2026. These guidelines build on existing Council of Europe standards and tools related to electoral assistance, gender equality, youth participation and anti-discrimination, and aim to provide practical, targeted recommendations to help member States identify and address obstacles to electoral inclusion.

The aim of the guidelines is to support member States in enhancing the participation in electoral processes of women, girls, young people, and people in vulnerable situations by identifying barriers, promoting enabling conditions, and offering practical, right-based guidance. In line with the guiding principles on equality and discrimination contained in the Parameter 1 of the draft Parameters for the Application and Implementation of the [Reykjavík Principles for Democracy](#), which calls for free, fair and resilient elections that are genuinely inclusive and representative, these guidelines stress the need to remove discriminatory obstacles and empower people in vulnerable situations to claim and fully exercise their rights. In particular, Parameter 1.2 on Universal and Equal Suffrage states that legislation and practical measures should be adopted to ensure that all citizens – including women, minorities, citizens with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups – can register and participate effectively in the electoral process, while also guaranteeing equality of opportunity for candidates. The parameters further encourage the development of awareness-raising campaigns and voter education programmes to promote participation among young people and marginalised communities and to address any societal and structural barriers to democratic inclusion.

The guidelines aim to serve as common reference for the exchange of experiences, good practices and innovative solutions among Council of Europe members states and relevant stakeholders.

The development of the guidelines is guided by a holistic and inclusive approach, as agreed at the CDDEM plenary meeting in May 2025. This means considering the full range of conditions that shape electoral participation – from voter registration to political candidacy and campaigning – and adopting both transversal and group-specific perspectives to promote

equality of access and opportunity. This dual lens ensures that both shared structural issues and groups-specific dynamics are addressed in a coherent and inclusive manner. This approach is also consistent with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) [Resolution 2222 \(2018\) on Promoting diversity and equality](#) in politics, which highlights the systemic underrepresentation of women, minorities, LGBTI+ persons, young people, and people with disabilities in elected institutions, and calls for a holistic strategy to make politics more inclusive and representative of European societies. The Resolution stresses that greater representativeness enhances democratic legitimacy, improve decision-making, and builds trust in political institutions.

The guidelines contain examples from documented practices and measures in different contexts across Europe, information collected through an analysis of relevant Council of Europe documents in all relevant areas, publications from institutions active in the field of democracy and human rights promotion (e.g. OSCE ODIHR, United Nations, International Idea, etc.). Feedback gathered from CDDEM plenary meetings and contributions from member states has also informed their development.

Finally, the guidelines are conceived not only as a practical tool for policy development and reform, but also as a forum for peer learning, enabling the exchange of good practices and innovative approaches across member States, electoral bodies, and civil society actors committed to strengthening democratic participation for all.

### Target groups

The guidelines target groups that face persistent and intersecting obstacles to electoral participation:

- Women and girls, with a focus on gender equality
- Young people
- People with disabilities
- LGBTI+ persons
- Roma communities
- People with migrant background

The term people in vulnerable situations refers to context-specific exclusions arising from legal, economic, social, or political disadvantages, often at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination.

The primary audience for these guidelines includes national government and public authorities involved in elections, equality and inclusion; electoral management bodies; political parties; civil-society organizations working on democracy and equality; educational and media stakeholders engaged in civic education and public communication.

### Definitions and general principles

In line with the Venice Commission [code of good practices for electoral matters](#), **electoral participation** encompasses active voting – the right and ability to cast a vote in elections – and passive voting – the right and opportunity to stand for election and be elected to public office. Effective participation requires not only formal legal rights but also substantive conditions that enable individuals to exercise those rights freely, equally, and meaningfully.

In line with the Council of Europe's human rights standards, **people in vulnerable situations** refers to individuals or groups who face context-specific exclusions or disadvantages in law, policy, or practice due to social, economic, legal, political, or cultural barriers. These situations may arise from factors such as disability, age, gender, ethnic or migrant background, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socio-economic status, or their intersections. The term emphasizes the situational and structural nature of vulnerability, rather than inherent characteristics.

**Intersectionality** is an analytical and normative approach that recognizes how various forms of discrimination interact and compound to produce unique forms of exclusion or marginalization. Applying an intersectional lens means identifying overlapping disadvantages that affect individuals in complex and reinforcing ways.

**Transversal barriers** are obstacles that cut across multiple target groups, affecting a wide range of people in similar ways. While not specific to one group, these barriers must be addressed in ways that are sensitive to how they may manifest differently across populations.

**An inclusive electoral environment** is one in which all individuals, regardless of their identity or background, have equal and effective opportunities and means to participate in electoral processes. This includes legal provisions, institutional practices and infrastructure, public attitudes, information accessibility, safety, and resources.

**Enabling conditions for participation** refer to the broader set of legal and institutional, administrative, cultural, informational and educational, socioeconomic factors that impact individuals' ability to engage in elections, beyond the legal right to vote or run for office.

**Universal design** refers to the creation of environments, services, products, and processes that are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. It means considering diverse needs – including those related to age, disability, language, and learning styles – at the outset of any planning or design process. For example, using clear visuals and plain language in voter education materials can support persons with intellectual and/or sensorial disabilities, but also helps those with low literacy, non-native speakers, and anyone seeking quick, accessible information. Anticipating diversity and reducing the need for individual accommodations at a later stage allows for inclusion in democratic and political life.

## **2. Factors shaping electoral participation: challenges and recommendations**

### **2.1. Legal and institutional factors**

Despite universal suffrage be guaranteed in member States by law, significant disparities persist in how legal provisions affect different groups in practice. Age, citizenship, legal capacity, and eligibility criteria for candidacy can all create direct or indirect barriers to inclusion in electoral processes. At the same time, institutional measures such as quotas, reserved seats, or representation targets can play a key enabling role in correcting structural imbalances.

#### **2.1.1. Restrictive candidacy and voting requirements**

In line with Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(CRPD), the right to vote and to stand for election must be universal and equal. Legal requirements to participate in elections often create systematic exclusions, especially in terms of age, gender identity, disability, and residency status. High candidacy age thresholds delay the entry of young people into political life, while in many member states persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities continue to be denied the right to vote or stand for office under guardianship regimes. Restrictive registration rules can block Roma and migrant voters who lack stable housing or formal documents proving residence, while restrictive citizenship requirements exclude many long-term foreign residents from participation in national or local elections. For transgender and non-binary individuals, the lack of accessible gender affirmation procedures hinders their ability to register, vote, or run as candidates without being exposed to discrimination, forced coming out and harassment.

- High candidacy age limits delay young people's entry into political life, while raising barriers to early civic engagement. Allowing voting in local elections at 16 or 17, as piloted in some member states, and reducing candidacy age requirements for local and regional elections can help bridge generational gaps and ensure youth voices are represented not only as voters but also as candidates.
- Residency requirements and documentation barriers often exclude Roma communities and migrants who lack permanent addresses or stable legal status, despite being integrated in their local communities. Extending both voting and candidacy rights to long-term residents, as foreseen in the Council of Europe's 1992 Convention, ensures that people who contribute to and are affected by local policies can also stand for office.
- Transgender and non-binary individuals are disproportionately affected when voter rolls, registration systems, or candidacy forms require gender matches with official documents. In accordance with Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity and in line with Principle 3 of the Yogyakarta principles, accessible procedures for legal gender recognition combined with training for electoral authorities on privacy and dignity, prevents unnecessary scrutiny at polling stations and ensures that transgender persons can also register as candidates without facing discrimination or harassment.

<p><u>Good practice: removing restrictive voting barriers</u></p>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some member states have lowered the voting age to 16 or 17 in local elections, fostering early engagement in public life</li> <li>• Local voting rights for foreign residents can be designed as simple, automatic, and residency-based, by linking eligibility to the population register and keeping residence requirements modest. For instance, Sweden grants local and regional voting rights to all foreign residents after three years of continuous legal residence. Eligible residents are automatically entered into the electoral roll through the national population register, ensuring simple and inclusive access without additional registration hurdles. Finland allows foreign residents to vote in local and regional elections after just two years of continuous residence. As in Sweden, registration is automatic, tied to the population register, which reduces bureaucratic obstacles and ensures high levels of participation among long-term residents</li> <li>• Several jurisdictions have abolished blanket voting bans for persons under guardianship, replacing them with individualised support</li> <li>• States with streamlined gender-recognition procedures ensure that ID documents align with lived gender, reducing discrimination in registration and voting</li> </ul> |
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### 2.1.2. Underrepresentation and positive measures to promote diversity in candidate lists

Even where legal frameworks guarantee formal equality, political parties continue to nominate candidates from majority groups in disproportionately high numbers. Women, young people, persons with disabilities, Roma and other minorities, and LGBTI+ persons are often absent or relegated to unelectable positions. Without proactive measures, the structural disadvantages these groups face in access to resources, networks, and visibility are reproduced in party nominations.

International standards recognise that equality of opportunity is not sufficient without measures to correct structural imbalances. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly has repeatedly underlined that special measures such as quotas, placement mandates, or financial incentives are legitimate and necessary to ensure balanced representation on candidate lists.

- In accordance with PACE Resolution 2111 (2016) on assessing quotas for women in politics, member States should promote equal opportunities in candidate nomination through legislative or voluntary measures. These should require that a minimum percentage of candidates are women (often 40%) and that they are placed in winnable positions on party lists (e.g. “zipper” systems alternating men and women).
- Quota or target systems should avoid reinforcing binary categories, for instance, by setting rules ensuring that the number of candidates identifying as male and female does not differ by more than one, leaving room for non-binary candidates without preventing parity goals from being met.
- Political parties should be incentivised to include candidates from underrepresented groups through reserved slots, voluntary or mandatory quotas. Parties are encouraged to adopt transparent selection procedures and to publish disaggregated data on candidate diversity, while electoral authorities should monitor compliance and report publicly.

<h4><u>Good practice: closing the gender gap in political representation</u></h4>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A multi-pronged approach combining legal (quotas, funding linkage) and supportive (training, mentoring) measures tends to be more effective. By anchoring parity in electoral law and reinforcing it through capacity-building and incentives, the political environment becomes more conducive to closing the gender gap sustainably. Member States use legally mandated quotas or parity rules for candidate lists in elections (e.g. quotas requiring that lists present a minimum share of women) to boost women’s presence in representative institutions</li> <li>• Some systems implement list ordering rules (alternating women and men) to ensure that female candidates appear in electable positions rather than only marginal ones</li> <li>• In France and Portugal public funding of parties is tied to compliance with parity criteria</li> <li>• Training, mentoring, targeted funding and capacity-building are emphasized, particularly for young women and women from underrepresented backgrounds, to reduce structural disadvantages in candidacy</li> <li>• Encouraging parties to embed gender equality in their founding documents, adopt targets internally, establish women’s sections, and demonstrate an inclusive political culture</li> </ul> |
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### 2.1.3. Weak monitoring and enforcement of equality standards

The adoption of equality policies and diversity commitments in electoral processes has increased across Europe, but their implementation often remains weak. In many cases, political parties and institutions make voluntary commitments without binding mechanisms to ensure compliance. Equality bodies and electoral management bodies (EMBs) rarely collect or publish disaggregated data on candidate selection, voter turnout, or elected representatives by gender, age, disability, ethnicity, or other identity factors. Where data exists, it is often limited to gender, leaving other axes of exclusion invisible. Few parliaments or EMBs are legally required to produce annual or periodic reports on diversity in electoral participation.

- Independent monitoring bodies should be empowered to oversee political participation indicators, with legal mandate and resources to oversee compliance and issue recommendations
- Parliaments and electoral management bodies should be required to report annually on candidate diversity, voter turnout, and elected representatives disaggregated by gender, age, disability, minority status, and other relevant categories
- Gender audits of political parties and parliaments can assess not only the composition of candidate lists but also internal rules, decision-making structures, and party cultures that affect equal participation. When repeated periodically and made public, gender audits create accountability and encourage parties to implement reforms
- Civil society organisations representing affected groups should be involved in monitoring processes

**Electoral system design.** Electoral systems with high thresholds and majoritarian rules systematically disadvantage minority candidates who often lack access to mainstream parties or are left without realistic chances of election. Without mechanisms to ensure minority representation, these groups remain locked out, even when they mobilise effectively. In line with the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (2002), member states should periodically review the inclusiveness of their electoral systems. Lowering thresholds in proportional systems, creating reserved seats, or exempting minority parties from thresholds are legitimate measures to enhance representation of disadvantaged groups. These reforms must be designed in a way that balances inclusivity with proportionality and stability.

## 2.2. Administrative and procedural factors

Electoral administration plays a central role in shaping accessibility and inclusiveness in elections. Even when legal frameworks are formally inclusive, poorly designed or inconsistently applied procedures can result in de facto exclusion for many target groups. These challenges often relate to the design of registration systems, voting procedures, polling station environments and staff.

### 2.2.1. Voter registration

The design of voter registration systems is a key determinant of electoral inclusiveness. Where registration is not automatic, requires complex procedures, or relies on strict documentation, certain groups are disproportionately excluded. Roma communities without permanent addresses, migrants unfamiliar with administrative systems, and transgender persons whose ID documents do not reflect their gender identity are particularly affected. Youth and first-time voters also face barriers when outreach and information about registration are inadequate.

In line with the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (2002), voter registration should be simple and accessible.

- Member States are encouraged to ensure that registration systems do not indirectly discriminate against individuals on grounds such as residence, disability, or gender identity. Where possible, voter rolls should be generated from existing population or civil registers, with eligible individuals added unless they opt out. This reduces dependence on individual initiative. Flexible documentary requirements, permitting a range of proofs such as utility bills, attestations from recognised institutions, or sworn affidavits, rather than rigid residence documentation, can be adopted.
- Electoral bodies can partner with civil society, community organisations, and local authorities to set up registration drives in underserved areas (e.g., community centres, schools, markets) and mobile units can reach remote or marginalised communities.
- Outreach through schools, community centres, and civil society can further ensure that information about registration reaches all eligible voters. Registration data can be useful to identify communities with low registration and design campaigns in collaboration with trusted local organisations (e.g. minority organizations, youth groups)

Good practice: *Empowering Under-Registered Groups Initiative*

The *Empowering Under-Registered Groups* initiative in the UK provides a useful model of how targeted, community-based registration processes can reduce exclusion. The project developed easy-read guides and infographics in multiple community languages (e.g. Punjabi, Polish, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Arabic) and deployed video series and in-person outreach in minority communities to clarify voter ID and registration requirements. It explicitly addressed confusion about registration steps, language barriers, and lack of trust in official processes.

A well-designed registration outreach campaign uses multiple formats, languages, and trusted community networks to reach under-registered populations. Coupled with flexible documentary rules and mobile units, this approach helps close registration gaps among excluded groups.

## **2.2.2. Inaccessible polling stations and facilities**

The physical accessibility of polling stations is a fundamental condition for equal participation, yet it remains one of the most persistent barriers in European elections. Despite legal guarantees, many persons with disabilities, elderly voters, carers, and residents of remote or marginalised communities continue to face obstacles in accessing polling places. These barriers interact with social and economic inequalities, effectively disenfranchising entire groups.

Polling stations are often located in buildings with physical obstacles such as stairs, narrow doorways, or corridors too small for wheelchairs. Even where accessible entry exists, polling booths and ballot boxes may be placed at heights unsuitable for voters with mobility impairments. For persons with sensory disabilities, the absence of tactile ballots, Braille materials, large print, or sign language interpretation severely limits independent voting. In rural areas and in Roma settlements, polling places may be far from communities, with no adapted public transport available. For elderly voters or those with caregiving responsibilities, the distance and lack of transport can be as significant a barrier as the inaccessibility of the polling place itself.

Administrative practices often assume uniform needs, providing no flexibility for those requiring assistance. Voters may be prevented from being assisted by a person of their choice,

or electoral staff may lack the training to provide respectful and adequate support. At the same time, many groups experience harassment or intimidation in or around polling stations. Lack of security protocols or complaint mechanisms leaves these voters unprotected, deterring them from participating. For instance, women with disabilities may be exposed to double discrimination when seeking assistance, and Roma communities often face hostile or biased treatment when they arrive at polling places.

- Member States should adopt and enforce national minimum standards for accessibility in polling stations, in consultation with organisations of persons with disabilities and in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Accessibility audits should be conducted prior to elections, and alternative arrangements such as mobile polling stations or home voting should be available for those unable to access polling places.
- Legal frameworks should explicitly allow voters with disabilities or literacy barriers to be assisted by a person they trust, rather than being restricted to assistance from polling staff.
- Beyond physical access, security protocols must ensure that voters from marginalised groups can participate free from harassment or intimidation. Electoral authorities should establish clear rules to prevent intimidation in or around polling places, including fast-track complain mechanisms and trained security presence where needed.

#### Good practice: security during elections

Security is a precondition for equal participation in elections. OSCE/ODIHR guidance highlights several practices that can be applied across contexts:

- Electoral laws and regulations should explicitly prohibit intimidation and harassment in and around polling places, with zero tolerance for discriminatory or threatening behaviour targeting minorities
- Electoral commissions can establish accessible, rapid procedures for reporting and addressing incidents of intimidation or violence
- Police and electoral staff should receive specialised training to recognise and respond to gender-based violence, racist abuse, or minority-targeted harassment during the electoral process
- Practical measures such as emergency hotlines and safety guidelines for candidates can provide reassurance and support
- Recording and analysing incidents of election-related harassment or violence, disaggregated by gender and minority status, might help identify patterns and adapt protection strategies

### **2.2.3. Limited training for electoral staff**

Even when legal frameworks are inclusive, their implementation depends on well-trained election officials. Without adequate preparation, staff may unintentionally apply rules in a discriminatory manner, mishandle sensitive situations, or fail to provide necessary assistance. Inconsistent practices across municipalities undermine trust in electoral processes and can lead to the exclusion of minority groups. For Roma, migrants, or transgender voters whose documents may not align with their lived identities or residence status, the risk of exclusion is especially high when officials are unfamiliar with legal flexibilities or anti-discrimination obligations.

Equally problematic is the lack of awareness of accessibility needs. Polling officials may not know how to set up tactile ballots or Braille templates, provide space for wheelchair users, or allow voters with disabilities to be assisted by a person of their choice. Women and LGBTI+ voters may encounter dismissive attitudes, while minority-language speakers may struggle to communicate in environments where staff are unprepared to offer translation or intercultural support. These experiences discourage participation and reinforce mistrust in electoral institutions.

- Training for electoral staff should be compulsory and standardised, in line with principles of non-discrimination under the European Convention on Human Rights. Curricula should integrate specific modules on disability accessibility, gender equality, and intercultural communication, with clear guidance on how to apply accommodations in practice. Codes of conduct and complaint mechanisms should be in place to address discriminatory behaviour. Organisations of persons with disabilities, Roma, and LGBTI+ persons should be consulted to ensure training addresses real challenges and uses respectful terminology.

### **2.3. Socioeconomic factors**

Socioeconomic inequalities directly influence individuals' ability to engage in both voting and candidacy processes. Barriers related to financial insecurity, time constraints, care responsibilities, mobility and precarious work conditions can significantly limit electoral participation, especially among structurally disadvantaged groups. Standing for office requires financial stability, time flexibility, and access to networks that many do not possess. These conditions disproportionately affect women, low-income individuals, youth, persons with disabilities, Roma communities, and people with migrant background. To promote equitable access to electoral participation, material constraints must be taken into account, enabling supportive conditions, such as financial and logistical assistance, and the design of flexible systems that account for time and mobility constraints.

#### **2.3.1. Economic insecurity and inflexible working conditions**

Many individuals are unable to leave work during voting hours. Women, who are more likely to work in part-time, informal, or care roles, and youth and migrants, who often occupy unstable job positions, face barriers to taking time off. In addition to financial resources for transportation and the inability to take unpaid time off, poverty also correlates with lower levels of education and limited access to information, which weakens further awareness of registration procedures, election dates, and other informational content produced by institutions or political parties. Solutions include introducing "voting leave" provisions, extending polling hours, allowing early or weekend voting, designing nomination periods that account for diverse working schedules.

- States are encouraged to introduce provisions such as early voting, weekend or holiday elections, extended polling hours, and advance polling, to ensure workers with rigid schedules and carers can participate.
- Labour legislation should explicitly provide the right to time off to vote without loss of pay. Such provisions are especially important for precarious workers, carers, and those with multiple jobs who otherwise face practical exclusion.

- Political parties should ensure that candidacy deadlines and administrative requirements do not disproportionately burden those balancing work and care responsibilities, especially women and migrants in informal employment.

### **2.3.2. Limited financial resources for transportation and candidacy**

Financial barriers to participation affect both voters and candidates. The cost of reaching polling stations can be prohibitive for low-income individuals, especially those living in rural or underserved areas where public transport is limited. Roma communities, migrants, elderly voters, and people with disabilities are particularly affected, since they may also face social stigma or the need for specialised transport. For potential candidates, financial exclusion is even more acute: the costs of campaigning, unpaid leave, and communication are often insurmountable for women, young people, persons with disabilities, and minority candidates, who are less likely to have access to wealthy networks of donors or established party structures.

- To reduce mobility barriers, States should consider subsidies or reimbursement schemes for voter transport and ensure adapted services for persons with disabilities or those in remote settlements.
- Public funding mechanisms can be designed to provide targeted support to underrepresented candidates, including seed grants or reimbursements for campaign-related costs. Political finance frameworks may also include diversity incentives, allocating additional resources to parties that nominate women, youth, or minority candidates. These measures reflect the principle of equal opportunity in political life under Article 3 of Protocol No. 1 ECHR, which requires more than formal access to the ballot box.

#### **Good practice: Discounted or free transportation on election day**

In Italy, electoral regulations provide special concessions for travel to and from polling stations during election periods. These concessions apply to multiple forms of transport, including rail, road, air, and sea travel. Discounts can reach up to 70% on return tickets issued by national railway companies for travel within Italy, reduced fares (generally up to 40% on domestic flights) from participating airlines, concessions on ferry services to ensure island residents can return home to vote, and reduced fares on long-distance bus routes operated by national carriers.

At the 2024 European elections, an additional measure was introduced to facilitate the vote of students living away from their municipality of residence. Students were enabled to vote directly in their place of study, responding to longstanding barriers faced by young people unable to afford travel back to their home municipality.

Providing reduced or free access to multiple modes of public transport and introducing special provisions for groups such as students away from home, are systemic ways to lower mobility barriers. To maximise effectiveness, such schemes should be publicised in advance and inclusive of voters with different mobility needs.

### **2.3.3. Lack of social and political networks**

Electoral participation depends not only on resources but also on access to social and political networks. Established parties and political elites often recruit candidates from circles dominated by older men from majority groups, excluding youth, women, Roma, migrants, and persons with disabilities. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle in which underrepresented groups lack the mentors, allies, and platforms needed to build political credibility. It also reinforces the perception among marginalised communities that politics is a closed arena, detached from their realities.

- Member States, political parties, and electoral authorities are encouraged to foster inclusive recruitment and mentoring. Leadership programmes can create pathways for emerging candidates, while internships and fellowships in parliaments and councils can expose underrepresented groups to political practice. Partnerships with civil society organisations are particularly effective in identifying new leaders and bridging the gap between marginalised communities and political institutions.

## **2.4. Informational and education factors**

Inadequate civic education, inaccessible formats, and biased media coverage create deep information gaps. These affect first-time voters, persons with intellectual or sensory disabilities, migrants, Roma, and youth in particular. Without deliberate outreach, many individuals either do not receive the information they need, or receive it too late, in forms they cannot use, or from sources they do not trust.

Ensuring equal access to information is a cornerstone of the right to participate in public affairs, recognised under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)8 on citizenship and human rights education. Electoral authorities and governments therefore bear a responsibility not only to guarantee freedom of expression but also to remove barriers that prevent equal access to information, education, and communication.

### **2.4.1. Limited civic education in schools and communities**

Civic education is a critical foundation for democratic participation, yet in many member states it is underfunded, inconsistently delivered, or absent from formal curricula. Where it does exist, it often remains abstract or limited to constitutional principles, without equipping young people with practical knowledge about electoral systems, registration procedures, or avenues for civic engagement. This lack of grounding perpetuates cycles of disengagement across generations.

Moreover, civic education rarely reflects the realities of diversity or addresses the barriers faced by specific groups. The perspectives of women, Roma, migrants, LGBTI+ youth, and persons with disabilities are largely absent, and materials often reproduce majority-centric narratives that exclude or marginalise minority experiences. Non-formal learning spaces, such as youth organisations, community centres, or cultural associations, are seldom recognised or supported, despite their potential to engage groups who are hardest to reach through schools alone.

- States should integrate comprehensive, participatory civic education into formal curricula and non-formal learning programmes, with a strong focus on inclusivity and

diversity. Such programmes should be timetabled as independent subjects, delivered through interactive methods, and linked to real electoral processes. Civic education should normalise the political participation of women, youth, Roma, migrants, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI persons, presenting diversity as an essential component of democratic life. Partnerships with civil society and youth organisations can ensure relevance and cultural sensitivity, and further support outreach beyond schools.

#### Good practice: Roma political schools

The Council of Europe has established Roma Political Schools in several member States, including Albania, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Ukraine, to strengthen the democratic participation of Roma communities. These schools provide training in civic activism, democratic institutions, and leadership, tailored to the realities and experiences of Roma citizens.

Participants gain practical skills for engaging with public institutions, understanding electoral processes, and advocating for their rights, while also building confidence and networks to overcome the systemic barriers created by antigypsyism and social exclusion. The programmes use inclusive pedagogies, adapting to learners with diverse educational backgrounds, and emphasise mentorship and peer support.

Civic education initiatives can be designed to specifically reach groups who face systemic barriers to participation. By combining knowledge of rights, practical skills, leadership development, and community-building, political schools like these create pathways for underrepresented groups to engage in elections and democratic life on an equal footing.

#### **2.4.2. Inaccessible or non-inclusive voter information**

Access to clear and inclusive voter information is fundamental, yet many electoral management bodies continue to communicate in ways that exclude large segments of the population. Official electoral information is often written in highly technical or legalistic language, which can be difficult for first-time voters, persons with lower literacy, or individuals with intellectual disabilities to understand. Minority-language speakers frequently encounter a lack of translations, leaving migrant and Roma communities unable to access critical information on registration, voting procedures, and election dates.

Voter information is rarely provided in Braille, audio, sign language, or easy-to-read formats, effectively disenfranchising persons with sensory or intellectual disabilities. Digital platforms may be inaccessible to screen readers or poorly designed for mobile use, compounding digital inequalities faced by low-income households, older voters, or rural communities. When voters perceive that information is not tailored to their needs, they may disengage altogether or turn to unreliable sources, leaving them more vulnerable to misinformation. Youth and first-time voters, in particular, may miss critical deadlines or procedural steps if information is not communicated in accessible and engaging ways.

- Electoral authorities should ensure that all information is presented in plain language, translated into minority languages, and adapted into accessible formats, including Braille, audio, sign language interpretation and easy-to-read versions.
- Materials should be disseminated across multiple channels, including online, broadcast, and in-person outreach, with support from trusted community actors. Investments in training for electoral staff and communication officers are critical to ensuring consistent application of inclusive communication practices.

<p><u>Good practice: accessible and inclusive voter information</u></p> <p>A number of practices have proven effective in removing communication barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some electoral authorities produce guides in plain language, easy-to-read versions, making procedures accessible for persons with intellectual disabilities or those with low literacy</li> <li>• Electoral information is provided not only in print but also in Braille, large print, audio recordings, and sign language videos, ensuring inclusion of persons with sensory impairments. Helplines can be also activated for voters with hearing impairments.</li> <li>• In areas with sizeable minority populations, ballots, instructions, and voter education materials are made available in all relevant minority languages</li> <li>• Combining traditional methods (posters, radio, in-person information desks) with digital platforms, social media, and SMS campaigns helps reach diverse groups, including rural populations and youth</li> <li>• Polling station accessibility data should be published and communicated in advance</li> <li>• Training on how to use assistive tools should be provided to EBs staff</li> <li>• Some EMBs have developed chatbots, apps, or helplines where voters can ask questions directly and receive guidance in multiple languages.</li> </ul>
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### 2.4.3. Underrepresentation and stereotyping in media

Media play a central role in shaping public perceptions of candidates and political participation. Yet coverage of underrepresented groups often reflects deep-seated stereotypes or exclusionary practices that undermine equal participation. Women candidates are frequently trivialised, with greater focus placed on their appearance, family roles, or private lives rather than their political agendas. Roma are often portrayed through a lens of criminality or dependency, reinforcing antigypsyism and discouraging both voter support and candidacy. LGBTI+ persons are commonly framed as “controversial” figures or their legitimacy as political voices is questioned, exposing them to harassment and reducing their visibility in mainstream debate.

These patterns discourage individuals from underrepresented groups from seeking office, while simultaneously reinforcing prejudice among the broader electorate. The result is a cycle in which discriminatory media portrayals sustain political underrepresentation, and underrepresentation in turn limits the diversity of voices visible in media coverage. Social media platforms have further amplified these dynamics, providing new spaces for targeted harassment and disinformation campaigns.

- Media regulators and public broadcasters should promote balanced and fair coverage, prohibiting discriminatory portrayals and ensuring visibility for underrepresented groups. Training for journalists, incentives for inclusive programming, and guidelines on gender-sensitive and diversity-aware reporting are key tools. In line with PACE Resolution 2144 (2017) on ending sex discrimination in political life, efforts to address bias in media coverage should be systematic and linked to accountability mechanisms.

#### Good practice: Media monitoring and inclusive reporting

Across Europe, independent monitoring of election coverage has become a standard tool to ensure fair representation. The *Council of Europe Toolkit on Monitoring Media Coverage of Elections* provides practical guidance for civil society and EMBs to track bias and stereotypes in TV, print, and online media. Similarly, the OSCE/ODIHR Handbook on Media Monitoring offers a widely used methodology for election observers, covering how to measure balance, tone, and inclusivity in media coverage during campaigns. By publishing regular reports, such monitoring makes discriminatory practices visible and increases accountability of broadcasters.

Journalist associations and public broadcasters have begun introducing gender-responsive and diversity-sensitive guidelines for political coverage. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has issued EU-level guidelines to avoid sexist portrayals, discouraging focus on appearance, family roles, or stereotypes when covering women candidates.

Combining independent monitoring with journalist training and professional guidelines creates a comprehensive approach to tackling underrepresentation and stereotyping in media. Monitoring highlights problems; training and guidelines equip journalists to address them; and public accountability helps shift narratives toward inclusive, balanced representation of all candidates.

#### **2.4.4. Digital divides in information access**

Digital technologies have become central to electoral processes, from voter registration and candidate information to outreach campaigns and, in some cases, remote or online voting. Yet not all citizens benefit equally from this digital transformation. Older voters, rural populations, low-income households, and Roma communities often lack reliable internet access, affordable devices, or sufficient digital literacy. Persons with disabilities may encounter inaccessible websites or online forms that exclude them from participation. Women in marginalised groups may face additional barriers linked to unequal access to resources within households. For young people, the assumption that they are “digital natives” can mask serious inequalities. Many youth from poorer areas face significant barriers to engaging online, lacking access to computers, stable connections, or the ability to pay for data costs. EMBs and civic and voter education providers too often design outreach strategies that assume universal access to social media, websites, or apps. In reality, outreach that overlooks these disparities risks excluding precisely those young people most in need of encouragement to participate. EMBs must carefully analyse which technologies different groups access, and adapt their strategies to those realities.

- Electoral authorities should maintain paper-based and in-person channels alongside digital platforms. Digital tools must be mobile-friendly, accessible, easy to navigate, and comply with accessibility standards.
- EMBs should research which technologies different groups actually use, recognising that poor and rural youth may not access the same platforms as their urban peers. Outreach should be tailored to those realities, using channels that are genuinely accessible.
- Partnerships with libraries, youth centres, and NGOs can provide physical access points and training. Media literacy campaigns and targeted digital education should be

integrated into broader civic education efforts, equipping young and marginalised voters to participate confidently online.

At the same time, online environments expose women, LGBTI+ persons, and minority candidates to harassment and hate speech, which can deter participation or silence political voices. In line with Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech, states should ensure that online abuse during campaigns is recognised as a democratic integrity issue, not just a private harm.

- Electoral management bodies, equality institutions, and communications regulators should establish clear protocols for reporting and responding to election-related online harassment. States should also ensure that law enforcement authorities are trained to investigate and prosecute threats against candidates and voters. In cooperation with online platforms, authorities should implement fast-track reporting and removal mechanisms during election periods, with safeguards for freedom of expression. Non-legal measures such as awareness-raising, counter-speech initiatives, and support services for targeted candidates should complement legal protections.

#### **2.4.5. Limited outreach to marginalised communities**

Electoral outreach often assumes mainstream channels are sufficient, overlooking communities with long-standing mistrust of institutions. Roma settlements, migrant communities, and persons with disabilities are less likely to be reached through official channels. Youth are often left out when outreach fails to use platforms or methods that resonate with them.

- Outreach strategies should be designed with and through the communities they aim to reach. Authorities are encouraged to partner with trusted intermediaries such as NGOs, community leaders, disability organisations, and youth networks. Messages should be culturally relevant, accessible, and address specific barriers to participation. Sustained engagement, not just during election periods, is essential to building trust and inclusion.

### **2.5. Cultural and social norms**

Cultural and social norms shape how individuals perceive their place in public life and whether they feel entitled, or safe, to participate in electoral processes. While such norms are not codified in law, they can act as powerful deterrents to participation. Groups that do not conform to dominant norms – including women, LGBTI+ persons, Roma, persons with disabilities, and people with migrant backgrounds – often face both implicit and explicit messages that their participation is unwelcomed, through media, institutional bias, hate speech or public harassment. Tackling these challenges requires addressing the visibility of diverse candidates and voters, public safety, inclusive narratives, and proactive countering of stereotypes.

#### **2.5.1. Social norms and stereotypes**

Stereotypes and social norms continue to shape who is perceived as a “legitimate” political actor, excluding large segments of the population from equal participation. These biases operate across gender, ethnicity, disability, and age, and are often reinforced by intersecting forms of discrimination.

Women and girls are frequently discouraged from political participation by expectations of modesty, caregiving responsibilities, or prioritisation of family duties. When women do enter political life, they are often subjected to higher scrutiny than men, reduced to private or family roles, or dismissed as lacking seriousness.

For LGBTI+ individuals, rigid gender norms mean their candidacy is often questioned on grounds of “fitting” traditional categories, with trans and non-binary people facing additional challenges to being recognised as legitimate political leaders.

Roma voters and candidates are often portrayed as “unfit” or “corrupt,” feeding antigypsyism that sustains systemic exclusion.

Persons with disabilities are perceived through ableist assumptions of dependency or passivity, undermining their recognition as independent political actors. These stereotypes not only discourage candidacy but also contribute to ongoing legal and structural restrictions, such as guardianship regimes that curtail political rights.

Youth are frequently dismissed as inexperienced, disengaged, or overly radical. Political parties are often reluctant to nominate younger candidates, reinforcing the dominance of older elites in elected office. For young women, Roma youth, and young LGBTI persons, these perceptions combine with other stereotypes, compounding their exclusion.

- Challenging entrenched stereotypes requires long-term investment in awareness and education. National and local campaigns should actively highlight the contributions of women, Roma, persons with disabilities, youth, and LGBTI persons to political life, countering narratives of “unfitness” or dependency. Diversity must also be normalised from an early age through civic and voter education: school curricula and outreach programmes should present political leadership across gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and sexuality as a natural and expected feature of democratic life.
- Beyond public messaging, concrete pathways are needed to support participation. Mentoring and leadership programmes can connect emerging leaders with experienced political actors, building the skills, confidence, and visibility necessary to break cycles of exclusion. Political parties, electoral management bodies, and parliaments should take responsibility for reforming internal cultures by adopting codes of conduct against stereotyping and harassment. Training on unconscious bias and inclusive recruitment practices can ensure that candidate selection processes are transparent, fair, and representative.

### **2.5.2. Harassment and violence**

The fear or experience of violence is a major barrier to participation, especially online. Women in politics face disproportionate levels of sexist hate speech and threats; trans and non-binary persons may experience targeted attacks questioning their identity or legitimacy; Roma, migrants, and ethnic minority candidates are often exposed to racist abuse or disinformation. Young activists are particularly vulnerable to harassment in digital spaces. These risks are increasingly amplified by the misuse of artificial intelligence tools, such as automated bots that spread hate messages, algorithmic amplification of polarising content, or deep fakes designed to discredit candidates through manipulated audio-visual material. Such technologies lower the cost and raise the reach of online abuse, compounding barriers for underrepresented groups.

- Electoral authorities and parliaments should adopt codes of conduct and complaint mechanisms against sexist and racist abuse, ensuring accountability. Electoral

commissions should introduce candidate safety protocols, while police officers should be trained to recognise election-related harassment. Cooperation with social media platforms should include fast-track reporting systems to protect candidates and voters from coordinated hate campaigns, consistent with CoE CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech.

- Electoral authorities and regulators should cooperate with technology platforms to establish clear protocols for detecting and countering AI-generated disinformation and deep fakes during election periods. Complaint mechanisms and fast-track reporting systems should be adapted to include AI-generated content. Public awareness campaigns can also help voters recognise manipulated content, reducing its impact.

### 3. Intersectional aspects and inclusive design

Intersectional aspects are particularly important to consider in the design of inclusive electoral processes, as overlapping disadvantages and compounded barriers are particularly evident based not only on law and institutions, but also cultural norms, socioeconomic status and background. Intersectional perspectives help us understand how a combination of factors (age, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, socioeconomic background) creates specific experiences and circumstances. For example, a young man may face barriers because of his age, while a young woman may face barriers rooted in both ageism and sexism. If she is Roma, she may also face racism and antigypsism. This is different from taking into account racism, ageism, and sexism separately. Specific groups of women and girls, in particular, are especially vulnerable to multiple discrimination and could find additional barriers to participate in the electoral process and fully exercise their political rights.

International human rights standards recognise intersectional aspects. The CEDAW and the CRDP recognise that women experience multiple forms of discrimination and calls for attention to intersectional dimensions. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2029 calls for the inclusion of an intersectional approach in all policies and measures. Applying an intersectional lens to electoral processes means recognising that reforms designed to remove barriers for one group may not be sufficient if they fail to account for the specific ways discrimination combine.

- Young women: young women face a “double bind” of age and gender, they are often dismissed as inexperienced due to age, while also being subject to gendered stereotypes that question their competence. Candidate selection processes tend to favour older men, and where youth quotas exist, they may not guarantee gender balance. This leads women under 30 being among the least represented in political institutions.
- Young LGBTI+ persons: age-related hierarchies combine with stigma linked to sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBTI+ youth are frequently exposed to online harassment when they engage publicly, and civic education rarely include LGBT issues, further reducing their preparedness and confidence to enter politics.
- Women with disabilities: women with disabilities experience barriers from both ableism and sexism, as they may be legally restricted from voting or standing for election under guardianship laws, while also excluded from party networks and leadership opportunities. Campaigning requires financial and logistical resources that are often inaccessible, and political environments rarely provide necessary accommodations.
- Roma women and youth: Roma women confront racist and sexist stereotypes making them less likely to be nominated or supported by parties. When Roma are included, men are often prioritised as candidates. Roma women are disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education, making campaigning

financially unrealistic. Roma youth face parallel exclusion as they are often dismissed as unfit for politics and often excluded from mainstream youth initiatives.

Intersectionality highlights not just that multiple barriers exist, but that their interaction produces distinct outcomes. Without applying an intersectional approach in designing inclusive electoral processes, there are specific patterns of exclusion that risk being overlooked. These include:

- Invisible participation gaps: disaggregated data on sex, age, ethnicity, disability or SOGIESC is rarely combined, which means groups like young Roma or women with disabilities remain statistically invisible. Measures often target women or youth in general, missing those most excluded.
- Double and triple discrimination in institutions: when quotas or outreach target one dimension (e.g. gender quotas), those who fall outside the “mainstream” of that category (Roma women, trans women, disabled women) often remain excluded.
- Compounded socioeconomic disadvantage: poverty, care responsibilities, and discrimination intersect to make candidacy and active participation especially difficult for certain groups, given their multiplicative effect.
- Amplified vulnerability to violence: groups at intersections (LGBTIQ+ youth, women with disabilities, young Roma women) are systematically more exposed to harassment and violence in electoral processes, yet protection framework, where they exist, are rarely designed with them in mind.

To operationalise intersectionality in electoral processes, it is possible to integrate an intersectional perspective into existing practices and planning cycles. Key entry points include:

- Inclusive needs assessments: at the start of electoral planning, consultations should involve organisations representing groups at intersections (e.g. Roma women’s networks, youth disability organisations, LGBTI+ youth associations) to ensure that procedures, communication and safeguards are designed with intersectional aspects in mind
- Civic and voter education should be developed paying attention to overlapping discrimination and diverse needs at the same time
- EMBs and other institutions can introduce a simple review mechanism when designing new measures, asking: does this procedure create unintended barriers for specific groups at intersections?
- Collecting disaggregated data

### *Insertion of a visual “Intersectionality checklist for electoral planning”*

A checklist can be used as a starting point and practical reference for electoral authorities, political parties, and observers.

- Have we engaged with organisations that represent people at the intersection of multiple identities?
- Could voter registration, nomination, or voting procedures unintentionally disadvantage certain intersecting groups?
- Are voter information and education materials provided in accessible, culturally appropriate, and gender-sensitive formats?

- Have we assessed harassment and violence risks for candidates and voters at intersections, and put in place adequate protections?
- Are inclusion efforts monitored and reported in ways that capture the realities of intersectional groups, not just broad categories?
- Are there financial and logistical support mechanisms for candidates from intersectional groups?
- Do political parties have internal mechanisms (quotas, mentoring, leadership pathways) that take intersectional groups into account, beyond generic measures?

### *Focus 1: Voting rights of foreign residents*

The issue of political participation for foreign residents remains one of the clearest gaps in electoral inclusion. The [Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level \(1992\)](#) established the principle that lawful, long-term residents should have the right to vote and stand in local elections after five years of residence. Yet, nine member states have ratified the Convention, and in some cases ratification excludes the provisions on voting rights.

Across Europe, EU mobile citizens are guaranteed local voting rights under EU law, but non-EU citizens face far more restrictive rules. Local voting rights to foreign residents are often tied to long-term or permanent residency, reciprocity agreements, or additional registration procedures. In States like Germany, Austria, and France, migrants are excluded altogether, while in others, such as Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Finland, voting rights are granted after relatively short residence periods.

Moreover, naturalisation regimes mean that large numbers of long-term residents remain non-citizens, without access to the voting rights that come with citizenship. This makes participation rights for non-citizens particularly urgent. In contrast, countries with more liberal citizenship laws and early access to naturalisation may perceive voting rights for non-citizens as less pressing. Some countries balance these dynamics by offering local voting rights even while maintaining strict citizenship policies. In these cases, voting rights function as a substitute pathway to political participation for those excluded from citizenship.

Member States should introduce local voting rights for foreign residents based on reasonable residence periods, avoiding unnecessary requirements such as permanent residency. Stringent language and integration tests, or discriminatory practices that favour certain groups, create unnecessary barriers and exclude large numbers of long-term residents. Where naturalisation laws are restrictive, granting local voting rights to long-term residents can compensate for exclusion and support integration. States should also ensure awareness campaigns and simplified registration procedures so that eligible residents can exercise their rights in practice.

### *Focus 2: Voting rights for transgender and gender-diverse persons*

Transgender and gender-diverse individuals often face unique barriers in exercising the right to vote, particularly where identification and gender marker requirements do not align with their self-identification or lived presentation. Electoral laws and processes that rigidly tie voting eligibility or ballot access to name, gender, or photo matching can lead to discrimination, disenfranchisement, or the need for invasive scrutiny.

Because many trans persons cannot or have not yet updated their identity documents to reflect their current name, gender, or appearance, polling officials may refuse to accept their ID and deny them the right to vote. Some jurisdictions require that names or gender markers on voting credentials exactly match ID documents, without flexibility for change or mismatch. This requirement disproportionately burdens trans people who are in the process of legal name or gender transition.

Trans voters may be asked to present multiple IDs, utility bills, or secondary verification steps, which add complexity, privacy risk, and opportunity for bias or rejection. In many cases, appearance-based judgment (i.e. whether the voter seems to “match” the ID) is applied, which opens the door to discrimination based on gender expression.

Fear of harassment or exposure is real: trans persons might avoid going to polling stations under conditions where officials are untrained or unsympathetic, or where there is no clear procedure to protect their dignity, privacy and identity.

Member States should establish inclusive identification procedures that do not rely strictly on gender matching. Voters whose appearance does not align with their ID should be allowed to vote if their name, address, and signature match the register. Alternative forms of identification should be accepted to prevent exclusion. Electoral authorities should be trained in non-discrimination and sensitivity to gender diversity, and complaint mechanisms should be available for voters who experience denial or harassment.

These measures reflect Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2048 (2015) on discrimination against transgender people, which calls on member states to ensure full political participation without barriers based on gender identity.

### *Focus 3: Social media and elections*

Social media platforms have become central channels for political communication, voter information, and civic engagement. They provide opportunities to reach younger voters, diaspora communities, and groups often overlooked by mainstream media. However, they also present significant risks of exclusion, manipulation, and abuse. Unequal access to digital technologies — the “digital divide” — means that marginalised groups, such as Roma communities, migrants, rural residents, or youth from low-income households, may lack equal opportunities to engage. At the same time, women, LGBTI persons, and minority candidates face disproportionate levels of online hate speech, harassment, and disinformation, creating deterrents to political participation.

Social media algorithms and advertising systems may also amplify stereotypes or disinformation, shaping perceptions of underrepresented groups in ways that distort democratic competition. Moreover, the reliance of electoral management bodies on social media for outreach, without complementary offline strategies, risks deepening inequalities in access to official information.

Electoral authorities should not rely exclusively on social media for voter education and outreach. Efforts should be combined with offline channels and in-person initiatives, ensuring access for communities facing digital exclusion.

In line with Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on combating hate speech, authorities should establish protocols with platforms for fast-track reporting and removal of election-related hate campaigns targeting candidates and voters.

Platforms and regulators should guarantee transparency around political advertising, including targeted ads, to prevent discriminatory profiling or the exclusion of certain groups from campaign messages.

Civic education should include training in media literacy and critical consumption of online information, equipping young people and marginalised groups to navigate social media confidently and recognise manipulation.

Public institutions, parties, and civil society should use social media proactively to highlight role models from underrepresented groups, countering stereotypes and normalising diversity in political life.