



REPORT

Cross-Border Insights: Comparative Analysis of Participatory Governance Best Practices in V4 Countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia) and their Application in the Republic of Armenia

Yerevan 2025

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Introduction

The report “*Cross-Border Insights: Comparative Analysis of Participatory Governance Best Practices in V4 Countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia) and their Application in the Republic of Armenia*” was developed as a key output of the project “**Fostering Participatory Rural Governance (RA): Cross-Border Perspective through V4 Experience Exchange**”, implemented with the financial support of the **International Visegrad Fund** and the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea**. The project aims to strengthen democratic processes and enhance the engagement of citizens in rural Armenia, particularly in the Lori and Tavush provinces.

Participatory governance is increasingly recognized as a critical component of democratic development—particularly in countries transitioning from centralized systems toward inclusive, accountable governance. Armenia, in the wake of its 2018 “Velvet Revolution,” continues to face challenges in translating civic momentum into institutionalized public participation, especially in rural and underrepresented areas.

To support Armenia’s democratic evolution, this report offers a comparative analysis of participatory governance practices from three Visegrad Group countries—**Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland**—each of which has undergone significant post-socialist transformation. Drawing on their respective experiences, the Report examines tools such as participatory budgeting, citizens’ assemblies, youth councils and inclusive urban planning frameworks, assessing their adaptability to Armenia’s legal, administrative and cultural context.

This report was prepared by the outcome of an intensive review and harmonization of the reports prepared by Czech, Polish and Slovak experts in compliance with the provisions specified in the contractual agreement. The findings reached in each country report were applied to synthesise and interpret within the broader context of Armenian socio-political and economic situations. All of the specialist inputs from Instytut Nowej Europy (Poland), Institut pro politiku a společnost (Czech Republic), and Strategic Analysis Think Tank (Slovakia) were carefully studied and incorporated into this report. Their cross-border experience and views provided a basis for working up the report's

conclusions and fitting practical recommendations suitable to Armenia's local governance environment.

Objective and Scope

This report serves as a central deliverable of the “Fostering Participatory Rural Governance (RA)” project, aiming to:

- **Document and analyze** successful participatory governance practices in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland;
- **Evaluate their relevance and transferability** to Armenia’s rural and urban governance systems;
- **Provide Armenian stakeholders-** including policymakers, local authorities, NGOs and civic actors - with practical tools and recommendations for participatory governance reform;
- **Facilitate cross-border learning** and long-term cooperation between Armenian and V4 civic and governmental institutions;
- **Ensure knowledge sustainability** through the structured dissemination of insights from the project’s workshops, exchanges, and expert research.

By highlighting scalable and context-sensitive practices, the Report seeks to empower Armenian institutions and civil society to build inclusive governance models rooted in citizen engagement, local ownership and institutional trust.

Methodology

The report relies on:

A systematic review of academic literature, government reports, toolkits and civil society monitoring country-specific tools (e.g., CSO Meter, OGP Action Plans).

Case studies of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia with different models of participatory budgeting, public consultations, digital tools, civic partnerships and legal-institutional innovations.

Comparative analysis of national strategies and institutional arrangements for inclusion, transparency and stakeholder participation.

Analysis of Armenia's Participatory Governance Index, legal framework of participatory mechanisms, the role of CSOs, and the recent creation of a

Participatory and Open Government Department in the Office of the Prime Minister.

The report structure follows a logical progression of recording of Visegrád experiences, cross-country synthesis, Armenian contextual analysis, and adaptation of recommendations to the Armenian context. It is in accordance with the overall goal of the project in elaborating participatory competences in the rural governance sector in Armenia through pertinent and transferable international experience.

Relevance for Armenia

Despite constitutional reforms and decentralization processes over the past few years, direct citizen engagement remains weak in Armenia, especially in rural municipalities. The key challenges are low civic awareness, lack of participatory culture, underdeveloped digital infrastructure, and lack of capacity of the local leadership to engage stakeholders effectively.

The experience of the V4 countries provides valuable lessons for Armenia's future orientations. For instance, Slovakia and Poland have pioneered innovative inclusive participatory budgeting models and institutionalized public consultations at both the urban and rural levels. Their experience in community outreach, inclusive planning, and cross-sector coordination provides heartening lessons for Armenian municipalities, particularly those in less developed or geographically remote areas.

This report is a move towards building a knowledge base and strategic map for enhancing participatory governance in Armenia so that the local governments are not only representative but also responsive and inclusive. It helps policymakers, civil society, and development partners to advance democratic reforms, civic engagement, and sustainable community development at the local level.

Comparative Analysis of Participatory Governance Best Practices in the Slovak Republic and their Application in the Republic of Armenia

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Summary

This study investigates the practical implementation of participatory governance in the Slovak Republic, with a particular focus on tools such as participatory budgeting, deliberative planning, and inclusive civic engagement mechanisms. Drawing upon academic analyses, governmental frameworks and real-world applications, it identifies successful models and their potential relevance for replication in the Republic of Armenia. As Armenia pursues greater democratic engagement and civic inclusion, these Slovak practices offer valuable insights into building participatory capacity, transparency and public trust.

1. Introduction

Participatory governance is a form of democratic engagement that emphasises the direct involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. In post-communist societies, the development of participatory mechanisms is both a democratic imperative and a means to rebuild public trust. The Slovak Republic has, over the past decade, made significant strides in institutionalising participatory democracy. These experiences offer valuable lessons for Armenia, a nation with a growing civil society but still developing democratic infrastructure. This paper seeks to analyse Slovakia's participatory best practices and assess their applicability within Armenia's socio-political context.

The evolution of participatory governance in Slovakia must be understood within the broader context of post-socialist democratic transition. After the fall of communism in 1989, Slovakia faced the dual challenge of building democratic institutions and fostering a civic culture in which citizens could actively participate in public life. Early efforts were often top-down and limited in scope. However, following EU accession in 2004, Slovakia began to incorporate European democratic norms, including requirements for

transparency, citizen consultation, and public accountability. These external pressures, coupled with domestic civil society mobilisation, gave rise to innovative participatory frameworks.

In particular, participatory budgeting (further just PB) emerged as a practical and symbolic tool for democratisation. Initially introduced in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in the 1980s, PB has since spread across the globe. In Slovakia, its implementation in cities like Bratislava and Banská Bystrica demonstrated how structured citizen input could improve fiscal transparency and community engagement. Complementary innovations such as digital participation platforms, urban co-planning forums and youth assemblies reflect Slovakia's broader commitment to inclusive governance.

The theoretical underpinnings of these practices are rooted in deliberative democratic theory, which holds that public reasoning and dialogue among free and equal citizens are essential to legitimate policy-making (Habermas, 1996). Fung and Wright's (2003) concept of "Empowered Participatory Governance" (EPG) provides a practical framework for these theories, emphasising decentralised authority, deliberative problem-solving, and ongoing institutional learning. These ideas have become particularly relevant in contexts like Slovakia and Armenia, where traditional mechanisms of representation may lack trust and legitimacy.

Slovakia's trajectory also illustrates the importance of building institutional ecosystems to support participatory governance. From the Participatory Governance Unit in the Ministry of Interior of Slovakia to the training modules provided by the Participatory Competence Centre, the country has created a multi-level infrastructure designed to equip both public officials and civil society actors with the necessary tools and knowledge. Evaluative instruments like the „Index participácie“ ensure accountability and provide feedback for continuous improvement.

In the case of Armenia, the 2018 "Velvet Revolution" reignited interest in democratic renewal and civic engagement. However, Armenia faces structural and cultural challenges in translating this momentum into sustainable participatory governance. Issues such as centralised decision-making, limited fiscal decentralisation, and scepticism toward public institutions constrain citizen involvement. Moreover, civic participation tends to be episodic and reactive rather than institutionalised and proactive. This contrast underscores the relevance of examining Slovakia's model: not as a blueprint to be copied but as a set of adaptable practices grounded in similar post-communist experiences.

Furthermore, the study of participatory governance must also consider social inclusion. In Slovakia, special attention has been paid to integrating marginalised populations—particularly the Roma community—into participatory processes. In Armenia, similar concerns apply to rural communities, displaced persons from Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh), and ethnic minorities such as the Yezidis. Effective participatory models must be not only inclusive in design but also responsive in implementation, ensuring that historically excluded groups are empowered to contribute meaningfully to decision-making.

This paper, therefore, situates Slovakia as a comparative reference point for Armenia, examining how its participatory tools, institutional mechanisms, and inclusive practices can inform Armenia’s efforts to deepen democratic engagement. Through this comparative lens, we aim to identify actionable strategies and adaptable models that align with Armenia’s cultural, legal, and political realities.

2. Conceptual Foundations of Participatory Democracy

The conceptual foundation of participatory democracy builds upon both normative democratic theory and empirical innovations in civic engagement. Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) laid the groundwork for understanding the gradations of power-sharing between governments and citizens—from manipulation to full citizen control. In Slovakia, this model was adapted to reflect post-socialist institutional settings where citizens were historically excluded from decision-making.

In more recent literature, scholars such as Fung and Wright have promoted the notion of ‘Empowered Participatory Governance’ (EPG), which combines deliberation, decentralisation, and practical problem-solving. Slovakia’s participatory practices draw from this theory, emphasising iterative collaboration between state actors and civic groups.

The Slovak Academy of Sciences has emphasised that meaningful participation must involve more than consultation. According to Sekerák (2017), democratic legitimacy grows not only through electoral representation but also through processes that invite citizens to co-create policies. This philosophical stance is evident in the Slovak CSOs Plenipotentiary’s participatory manuals, which stress the role of inclusion, power decentralisation, and trust-building.

The transition from post-totalitarian governance structures to participatory democratic norms requires both institutional readiness and cultural change. In Slovakia, this transformation has been supported through national strategies, academic-public partnerships, and pilot projects that operationalise theoretical models into practice.

Participatory governance is grounded in a theoretical framework that prioritises citizen agency, accountability, and deliberative engagement. Seminal models such as Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’ and Fung and Wright’s ‘Empowered Participatory Governance’ provide the analytical scaffolding for this approach. In the Slovak context, research from the Slovak Academy of Sciences underscores the philosophical and political underpinnings of participatory democracy. Plichtová and Šestáková (2017) discuss the need for inclusive, transparent processes that foster active civic engagement. These ideas have informed national policies and tools in Slovakia that institutionalise citizen involvement at local and regional levels.

3. Slovak Participatory Instruments and Case Examples

3.1 Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting (further just PB) in Slovakia has evolved from a novel experiment into a practical mechanism of civic engagement, fiscal transparency, and local empowerment. While the process was first introduced in Slovakia in 2011, its maturation over the subsequent decade illustrates not only increasing municipal buy-in but also a growing cultural acceptance of citizens as legitimate co-decision-makers in budgetary matters.

The basic premise of PB in Slovakia follows global models: citizens are invited to propose, deliberate, and vote on the allocation of a specific portion of the municipal budget. What distinguishes the Slovak experience is the strong methodological backing provided by institutions like the Ministry of Interior, which has issued several manuals, and the integration of PB into broader strategic planning processes. The “Ako zapájat’ neorganizovanú verejnosť” toolkit, for example, is not merely a guidebook for civil servants—it represents a professionalisation of citizen engagement, with guidelines on outreach to marginalised and unorganised groups.

Municipalities such as **Banská Bystrica** and **Bratislava** have demonstrated how participatory budgeting can shape urban policy. Banská Bystrica pioneered one of the first sustained PB projects, gradually increasing

the proportion of the city’s budget allocated through citizen deliberation. In Bratislava, PB was implemented at the borough level, allowing district councils to run their own participatory processes. This decentralised model acknowledges the diversity of urban needs and facilitates tailored responses.

An innovative variation of PB in Slovakia is the **Youth Participatory Budgeting**, such as the ‘Nie je škola ako škola’ (*eng.: Each school is different*) project. This approach not only engages younger demographics but also acts as a form of civic education. Students are introduced to democratic decision-making, budgeting processes, and project evaluation—skills that are transferable to broader civic life.

Digital transformation has been central to PB’s scalability. Online voting platforms, such as “participacia.sk,” enable remote proposal submissions and transparent result tracking. This digital layer enhances inclusivity, particularly for residents in rural or underserved areas, and supports the goal of reducing logistical and psychological barriers to participation.

However, PB in Slovakia is not without challenges. Participation rates vary, often depending on outreach efforts, public trust, and political support. Critics point to instances where winning projects are delayed or poorly implemented, which can lead to disillusionment. The 2023 “**Index participácie**” (*eng.: Index of participation*) directly addresses these concerns by evaluating not just procedural integrity but also implementation outcomes and feedback mechanisms.

In terms of funding, PB projects often benefit from hybrid financing. EU Structural Funds are frequently tapped for the initial phases, particularly in under-resourced municipalities, while local governments provide co-financing. This model enhances financial sustainability and ensures a degree of local ownership. Furthermore, municipalities that perform well in participatory engagement may qualify for additional grants and pilot projects from the national government.

For Armenia, the Slovak Participatory Budgeting model offers key takeaways:

- (1) Institutional backing is critical—tools, training, and legislation should support PB processes;
- (2) digital platforms expand access and transparency;
- (3) youth-targeted PB serves both policy and educational objectives;
- (4) monitoring mechanisms like the Participation Index are essential to sustain public trust.

A phased implementation strategy beginning in pilot municipalities with active civil society networks and digital infrastructure could serve as the foundation for institutionalised PB in Armenia.

3.2 Deliberative Planning of Public Spaces

Deliberative planning of public spaces in Slovakia represents a sophisticated evolution of participatory governance, wherein the public is not merely consulted post-factum but engaged as co-designers in urban development. This shift towards deliberative urbanism acknowledges that built environments are social spaces and that community input is essential for responsive and sustainable urban planning.

The foundational document in this realm, **Prachárová's (2020) "Strategy for Participatory Planning of Public Spaces"**, lays out a procedural and normative framework that has been adopted by multiple Slovak cities. It emphasises three key principles: **inclusion, transparency, and co-responsibility**. Inclusion entails proactive outreach to residents, particularly those historically excluded from urban decision-making, such as the Roma, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Transparency refers to clear timelines, open data access, and visible linkages between citizen input and final designs. Co-responsibility invites citizens not only to propose but also to help implement and maintain public spaces.

Participatory urban planning often begins with **community mapping**, where residents identify underutilised or problematic spaces in their neighbourhoods. These are followed by **urban walks** moderated by architects, planners, and social scientists, where participants collectively experience and evaluate the physical environment. Ideas are gathered not just through formal meetings but via mobile engagement units—vans equipped with digital screens and interactive boards that travel to different parts of a city, especially areas with low civic engagement.

In **Košice** and **Trnava**, deliberative planning has been used to redesign parks, markets, and squares. For example, in Košice's Dargovských Hrdinov district, a community-driven redesign of a derelict public park involved over 500 residents across workshops, surveys, and digital consultations. The resulting project not only transformed the physical environment but also strengthened social cohesion.

Digital tools also play a central role in deliberative planning. Platforms such as **mestskyurad.sk** and municipal Facebook pages serve as forums for feedback collection, voting on design alternatives, and real-time updates on project status. The use of 3D visualisation software allows participants to “walk through” proposed projects in virtual environments before decisions are made. Such technology reduces information asymmetry between experts and laypeople, making participation more meaningful.

One innovative method employed in Bratislava is the “**Urban Lab**” format. These are time-bound, transdisciplinary workshops involving architects, social workers, municipal staff, and residents. Urban Labs produce concrete outputs—like temporary street furniture or mobility plans—that can be prototyped and evaluated before permanent decisions are made.

Importantly, the Slovak approach to participatory planning is supported by **legal and institutional mechanisms**. Municipal statutes in cities such as Prešov and Trenčín now include obligations for public consultation in urban development plans. Furthermore, the **Participation Department** at the Ministry of Interior provides standard operating procedures and templates for municipalities to implement participatory planning processes effectively.

For Armenia, Slovakia’s model illustrates the power of co-design in building both better public spaces and stronger civic trust. Rapid urbanisation in Yerevan and regional centres makes participatory planning especially urgent. Lessons include the value of multidisciplinary planning teams, the importance of visualisation tools to democratise design discourse, and the need for institutional backing to scale these processes nationally.

3.3 Inclusion of Marginalised Communities

Slovakia has developed an ecosystem of institutional and methodological support that sustains participatory practices. The Ministry of Interior hosts the Participatory Governance Unit, which coordinates national strategies, distributes manuals, and evaluates projects.

The Index participácie, developed in 2023, is a multi-dimensional tool assessing the quality, inclusivity, transparency, and impact of participatory processes. It is used to compare municipalities and provide tailored recommendations. For instance, it evaluates whether marginalised communities participated, if decisions were implemented, and how feedback was integrated.

A key actor in this ecosystem is the “**Participatory Competence Centre**”, which organises training for civil servants and NGOs. Over 1,000 practitioners have participated in these trainings since 2019, with modules on facilitation, conflict resolution, and digital participation.

Funding for participatory initiatives often comes from EU Structural Funds, with municipalities co-financing specific projects. This financing model ensures local ownership and sustainability.

Importantly, academic institutions collaborate closely with policymakers. The SAV (Slovak Academy of Sciences) regularly evaluates participatory initiatives, offering critical insights. These assessments have led to innovations like digital PB platforms and mobile engagement units for rural outreach.

Such institutional depth can serve as a model for Armenia, where capacity gaps and trust issues hinder participatory experimentation. A national framework mirrored on Slovakia’s integrated model, could institutionalise democratic innovations in Armenia’s governance culture.

Inclusive participation is a hallmark of Slovakia’s model. Initiatives such as ‘Hlas menšín’ (*eng.: the Voice of minorities*) ensure the representation of Roma, disabled individuals, and other vulnerable groups in policy-making. Evaluation tools such as participatory diagnostics and community workshops have been tailored to marginalised populations, facilitating trust-building and long-term engagement (Gallová Kriglerová et al., 2020).

3.4 Citizens’ Assemblies in Slovakia: Temporary and Permanent Models

Citizens’ assemblies (CAs) represent one of the most advanced forms of deliberative democracy, wherein a group of randomly selected individuals, demographically representative of the broader population, come together to deliberate on policy issues and make recommendations. In Slovakia, CAs have emerged both as temporary consultative bodies and as permanent advisory forums, showcasing their flexibility and democratic potential.

Temporary Citizens’ Assemblies

Temporary citizens’ assemblies in Slovakia typically address specific, time-bound issues. These range from climate policy and urban mobility to education reform and anti-corruption strategies. One notable example is the **2021**

Bratislava Climate Assembly, convened by the city government in cooperation with NGOs and academic institutions.

This assembly consisted of 50 citizens randomly selected to reflect the city's demographic composition (gender, age, education level, and borough representation). Over the course of six weekends, participants attended expert briefings, engaged in moderated deliberations, and ultimately issued policy recommendations on how Bratislava could achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. Recommendations included investing in sustainable transport, introducing green roofs, and reforming energy consumption in municipal buildings.

The success of the Bratislava Climate Assembly lay not only in the quality of its outputs but in the **legitimacy** it lent to policy-making. The city council adopted several of the recommendations and publicly committed to tracking implementation progress. This feedback loop—communicating how input translates into policy—proved essential to maintaining trust.

Other cities such as **Žilina** and **Nitra** have experimented with shorter, issue-specific citizens' panels. These often involve 20–30 residents and operate for 2–3 weekends. Topics have included local infrastructure priorities, public health, and even budget allocations. Although less elaborate than the Bratislava model, these panels have influenced municipal agendas and enhanced public understanding of governance processes.

Temporary citizens' assemblies are typically funded through a combination of municipal budgets, EU funds, and NGO contributions. The „**Plánovač participácie**“ (eng.: Participation Planner) toolkit provides municipalities with templates and guidelines for organising assemblies—from recruitment to facilitation and evaluation.

Permanent Citizens' Assemblies and Forums

While temporary CAs are episodic, Slovakia has also begun institutionalising **permanent citizens' forums** at the municipal level. These serve as advisory bodies with standing mandates to review public policies and suggest civic initiatives.

The city of **Banská Bystrica**, for example, established a permanent **Civic Forum (Občianske fórum)** in 2022. It comprises 25 residents appointed through a mix of sortition and voluntary nomination, ensuring both representativeness and civic initiative. The forum meets monthly and has contributed to policies on cultural funding, pedestrianisation zones, and public

safety. Its work is supported by a dedicated municipal liaison office that coordinates logistics and follow-up.

These permanent forums are increasingly seen as complements to elected councils. While they do not hold formal legislative power, their recommendations carry weight due to their deliberative nature and public visibility. Moreover, their continuity allows them to build institutional memory, track policy outcomes, and sustain engagement across electoral cycles.

Some municipalities have created **sector-specific citizens' assemblies**—such as youth, senior, or disability councils—that operate semi-autonomously under the umbrella of participatory governance. These structures ensure that demographic diversity is not only represented but empowered through thematic specialisation.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite their promise, CAs in Slovakia face several challenges. First, recruitment and randomisation processes require careful calibration to ensure legitimacy. There have been debates over whether assemblies adequately represent marginalised populations, especially in rural areas and among ethnic minorities. Second, facilitation quality varies, which can impact the deliberative depth and inclusivity of the process. Third, the absence of formal legislative powers may limit the impact of assemblies unless political actors are committed to implementing recommendations.

Nevertheless, Slovakia has taken steps to institutionalise quality standards. The **Participatory Competence Centre** offers training in facilitation, mediation, and anti-bias methods. Municipalities can also access advisory support for CA design, implementation, and evaluation.

There is a growing public interest in CAs, particularly as a counterbalance to political polarisation. According to a 2023 survey by the Slovak Governance Institute, 62% of respondents supported the idea of citizens' assemblies having a formal role in national policy-making.

Looking forward, there are proposals to introduce **national-level citizens' assemblies**. A 2024 pilot project under the Ministry of Environment aims to convene a national assembly on environmental justice, potentially setting a precedent for institutionalised deliberation at the central government level.

Relevance for Armenia

For Armenia, Slovakia’s citizens’ assemblies offer an adaptable model to deepen democratic engagement and mitigate public distrust. Armenia’s post-2018 civic awakening underscores the need for structured, inclusive, and deliberative mechanisms. Pilot CAs in Yerevan or Vanadzor—focused on youth policy, urban renewal, or corruption—could serve as trust-building exercises.

Key considerations for Armenia include:

- **Random selection protocols** to ensure representativeness,
- **Legal frameworks** to institutionalise assembly outputs,
- **Capacity-building for facilitators** and
- **Funding models** combining municipal, state, and international sources.

By embedding citizens’ assemblies—both temporary and permanent—into its governance system, Armenia could transition from reactive civic engagement to proactive deliberative democracy.

4. Evaluation and Institutional Support

To ensure the sustainability and credibility of participatory governance, Slovakia has developed a comprehensive institutional and evaluative infrastructure. These structures not only facilitate citizen involvement but also provide mechanisms for reflection, feedback, and continuous improvement. The success of participatory governance hinges on its ability to be responsive, inclusive, and accountable—qualities that are reinforced through robust evaluation and institutional support.

The cornerstone of Slovakia’s institutional framework is the **Participation Department within the Ministry of Interior**, which serves as the national coordinating body for participatory policy. This department oversees the formulation of strategic documents, disseminates best practices, and monitors compliance with national participatory standards. It plays a dual role as both a facilitator and regulator, ensuring that participatory efforts are aligned with broader governance reforms and democratic commitments.

A significant innovation in the Slovak model is the creation of the “**Index participácie**“ (Participation Index), introduced in 2023. This tool evaluates participatory processes along multiple dimensions: inclusivity, transparency, implementation outcomes, and citizen satisfaction. It allows municipalities to benchmark their performance, identify areas for improvement, and receive tailored recommendations. The Index was developed in cooperation with

academic institutions, notably the Slovak Academy of Sciences, ensuring methodological rigour and independence. Municipalities that perform well receive public recognition and may become eligible for additional funding or pilot programs.

In addition to top-down oversight, Slovakia emphasises **capacity building through the Participatory Competence Centre**. This institution offers training for local government officials, civil society organisations, and community leaders. Workshops cover areas such as participatory design, facilitation skills, conflict mediation, and digital engagement. Since 2019, over 1,000 participants have completed these programs, which are continuously updated to reflect emerging challenges, such as online misinformation and declining youth engagement.

Importantly, these institutional efforts are embedded within a broader **culture of intersectoral collaboration**. Academia, civil society, and government agencies work together to assess and improve participatory initiatives. For example, the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at Comenius University in Bratislava regularly partners with municipalities to conduct impact assessments and citizen surveys. This feedback loop strengthens the legitimacy of participatory tools and fosters mutual learning among stakeholders.

Financial support for participatory initiatives comes from diverse sources, including **EU Structural Funds**, national government grants, and municipal co-financing. This blend of funding streams ensures that participatory practices are not limited to affluent municipalities. Special funding lines have been established for inclusive projects, targeting marginalised communities and encouraging innovation in citizen engagement.

Evaluation also plays a central role in mitigating challenges such as tokenism, low participation rates, and institutional resistance. According to a 2022 report by the Institute for Public Policy, one of the most common pitfalls is the gap between citizen input and policy implementation. The Index *participácie* directly addresses this by measuring not only the quantity of participation but also its qualitative impact on public decisions. Municipalities are evaluated on whether they closed the feedback loop—informing participants of outcomes, explaining decisions, and incorporating suggestions into final policies.

Transparency is further enhanced through **public dashboards and open data portals**, where citizens can track the status of participatory projects, view

budget allocations, and access evaluation reports. These digital tools reduce information asymmetries and empower citizens to hold institutions accountable.

In sum, Slovakia's approach demonstrates that institutionalisation is not merely about formal structures but about embedding participatory norms across governance processes. Evaluation tools like the Index participácie, combined with sustained capacity-building and intersectoral cooperation, have created an enabling environment for meaningful public participation. For countries like Armenia, where participatory mechanisms are still evolving, Slovakia's evaluative and institutional ecosystem offers a practical model for scaling up civic engagement in a sustainable and accountable manner.

5. Youth Participation in Local Governance in Slovakia

Youth participation represents a crucial dimension of participatory governance, especially as younger generations are both future stakeholders and active contributors to democratic life. In Slovakia, a significant development in this area is the establishment of City Youth Councils (*svk.: Mestské mládežnícke parlamenty*), institutional platforms through which young people engage in local policy discussions, organise community initiatives and voice their needs to municipal administrations.

These Youth Councils operate in cities such as Bratislava, Žilina, Trnava, and Banská Bystrica. They serve as advisory bodies to mayors and municipal councils and are composed of elected or delegated youth representatives, often supported by municipal youth coordinators. They participate in public consultations, co-create local youth policies, and sometimes manage micro-grants for youth-led projects. A core element of their work is civic education through practice—young people learn about democratic procedures, budgeting, and policy design by engaging directly with institutions.

One prominent model is the **Bratislava Youth Parliament**, which collaborates closely with the city's Office for Youth and Sports. It runs campaigns on mental health, sustainability, and anti-discrimination while organising open forums and community mapping exercises.

A key strength of youth councils is their bottom-up nature. However, they face challenges such as varying degrees of institutional support, low awareness among peers, and the need for more sustainable funding. Strengthening their role can serve as a long-term investment in democratic resilience.

6. Rada mládeže Slovenska: National Framework for Youth Engagement

The “Rada mládeže Slovenska” (*eng.: Slovak Youth Council*) is the umbrella organisation for youth NGOs in Slovakia. It plays a vital role in advocating for youth rights, fostering civic participation, and shaping national youth policy. The council represents more than 20 youth organisations and serves as a bridge between civil society and state institutions.

Established in the 1990s, Rada mládeže has evolved into a key actor in participatory policy-making at both the national and local levels. It regularly organises public forums, policy consultations, and campaigns to ensure youth voices are considered in legislative and administrative processes. For example, it has influenced the National Youth Strategy and advised ministries on education reform, digital inclusion, and labour market policies affecting young people.

One of its flagship initiatives is the “Youth Participation Index,” a monitoring tool that evaluates how well Slovak municipalities engage with youth in decision-making. The Council also promotes democratic education in schools and supports capacity-building programs for youth leaders across Slovakia.

Moreover, Rada mládeže advocates for inclusive participation, focusing on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Roma, rural youth, and NEETs (not in education, employment or training). It often collaborates with European platforms such as the European Youth Forum to bring Slovak youth perspectives to broader debates.

The experience of Rada mládeže offers a replicable model for Armenia. Establishing a similar national youth council could strengthen Armenia’s civic infrastructure by ensuring that youth are not passive recipients of policy but active co-creators of democratic life.

7. Case studies of Slovakia’s participatory governance

7.1. Case Study: Participatory Governance in the Šurany Gigafactory Debate.

Background and Strategic Importance

In late 2023, the Slovak Government formalised its ambition to deepen national involvement in Electric Vehicles (further just EV) batteries production by signing a memorandum with **China’s Gotion High-Tech** and local

innovation-driven start-up **InoBat**, forming the joint venture **Gotion InoBat Batteries (GIB)**. The Šurany site, strategically positioned 90 km east of Bratislava, was selected for its existing infrastructure and potential to catalyse regional development.

Key details include:

- **€1.2 billion investment** with capacity phased at 20 GWh initially, scalable to 60 GWh of batteries per year;
- Expected **1,300–1,500 jobs**, positioning Slovakia as not just car-maker number one by capita but battery-maker too;
- Broad backing from Volkswagen (~25% owner of Gotion), InoBat, IPM Group, and several international investors;

This project aligns with EU green-transition goals and Slovakia’s desire for strategic autonomy in the battery supply chain—leveraging its strong automotive manufacturing legacy.

Local Reaction and Civic Mobilisation

While government and industry emphasised economic and technological upside, local communities responded with growing alarm:

- **The “Chránime si naše” initiative** (*eng.: We Protect Our Own*) emerged, mobilising thousands of residents concerned about pollution, heavy transport through residential zones, groundwater contamination, and social disruption. A petition reflecting these fears drew mass signatures by mid-2024.
- Media outlets like *SME Spectator* reported escalating protests and opposition in Šurany led by civic groups.
- An environmental review pause was triggered in April 2025 due to missing documents in the EIA submission— signalling administrative scrutiny and civic pressure.

These actions demonstrate how communities in Slovakia feel empowered to participate and challenge decisions through accessible, democratic channels.

Governance Responses and Institutional Oversight

The Slovak state and GIB countered that the plant meets EU environmental and industrial standards:

- The Ministry of Economy designated it as a **“strategic investment,”** fast-tracking approvals, plus promising subsidies (up to €150 M) and tax breaks (up to €64 M).

- GIB publicly emphasised a “**closed-loop circular value-chain**”, integration of R&D, vocational training with universities, and zero-carbon ambition.
- They affirmed adherence to legal and environmental protections, grounded in both Slovak rules and EU directives.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Environment’s pause on the EIA highlights institutional checks—reflecting participatory governance through transparent administrative oversight.

Multi-Stakeholder Consultation & Engagement

The unfolding scenario in Šurany illustrates several participatory governance elements:

| Stakeholder Group | Participation Channel | Influence Point |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Local residents and NGOs | Petitions, protests, open letters, media | Delayed EIA, heightened public scrutiny |
| GIB and Government | Official statements, legal processes, planning | Fast-tracking approvals while integrating environmental compliance |
| Ministries (Economy and Environment) | EIA evaluation, investment classification | Environmental pause provides room for feedback and documentation alignment. |
| Media and Academia | Reporting and analysis | Amplify concerns, inform public and government deliberations. |

This dynamic showcases how legal, civic, and media arenas interact, enabling diverse actors to inform and shape large-scale investment decisions.

Contextual Lessons and Broader Insight

Exploring parallels and implications enhances our understanding of comparative participatory governance:

- Similar projects (e.g., LG Poland, CATL Hungary) faced environmental emission breaches—drawing parallels with LFP battery manufacturing’s energy and chemical complexities.
- InoBat’s capacity to forge an “upgrading alliance” with Gotion, Volkswagen, Rio Tinto, and the IFC underscores how domestic entrepreneurial networks can amplify governance legitimacy.
- The paused EIA offers practical insights into how Slovak regulations unfold as genuine mechanisms for community influence—not merely formalities.

Conclusion

The Šurany battery plant case is more than an industrial development story—it is a living demonstration of participatory governance in Slovakia. It highlights how democratic mechanisms—citizen mobilisation, environmental oversight, institutional dialogue, and media engagement—collectively shape major strategic projects. These practices offer a valuable reference for Armenia and other countries seeking to balance economic advancement with environmental sustainability and social legitimacy.

8.2 Case Study: Participatory Governance in the Málinec Pumped-Storage Hydropower Controversy

Project Overview and Strategic Rationale

In early 2025, Slovakia’s Environment Ministry announced plans for a **2.4 billion EUR pumped-storage hydroelectric power plant** at the Málinec reservoir—a key strategic facility designed to bolster energy storage capacity. The plant would allow electricity to be stored by pumping water from the existing reservoir (on the Ipel’ River) to a new upper basin near Detvianska Huta during periods of surplus renewable generation; it would then release that water to generate peak-time electricity.

The strategic significance is clear:

- **Energy security:** enhances grid stability and reduces reliance on fossil fuel backups.

- **Renewables integration:** assists Slovakia’s targets for expanding wind and solar by smoothing out intermittent output.
- **Climate alignment:** supports Slovakia’s decarbonisation ambitions in line with the EU Green Deal.

Local Context and Governance Failures

The sudden announcement blindsided many stakeholders. Studies highlight that the Málinec reservoir—constructed between 1989 and 1993—primarily serves as drinking water for ~63,000 residents, encompassing rural settlements in the south-east of the Banská Bystrica region. According to reporting, some property owners received as little as five working days to provide input on substantial planned alterations.

This rushed rollout sparked an immediate public backlash, provoking concerns over water security, flooding of farmland and homes, and erosion of democratic procedure.

Civic Mobilisation and Local Authority Engagement

Local actors responded rapidly and through multiple channels:

- **Petitions:** Two independent campaigns gained 12,000 and 14,000 signatures within weeks—remarkable engagement for a rural region.
- **Public figures:** Ján Lašák, a prominent Slovak ice hockey player, endorsed activism characterising the plan as a “megalomaniac” and urged its withdrawal.
- **Local government pushback:** Ondrej Lunter, Governor of Banská Bystrica, emphasised that the scheme contravenes extant land-use regulations and that the reservoir must remain safe and functional for public water supply.
- **Civil society exclusion critique:** Established environmental NGO “OZ Čechánky” issued statements indicating it was omitted from consultation—triggering concerns around transparency and inclusion.

These interventions collectively halted the early progress and intensified the call for proper engagement.

Governance Response: Promises and Checks

Slovak Minister of the Environment Mr Tomáš Taraba framed the project as an economic and ecological positive, stressing minimal flooding—reportedly affecting only five or six cottages. Importantly, Taraba publicly reaffirmed that

local community sentiment would guide final decisions: *“If people do not want the investment, we will respect that.”*

Parallely, the government committed to launching explanatory campaigns to diffuse public uncertainty—though civic critics called this a belated and insufficient gesture.

Participatory Governance in Action: Processes and Institutions

| Element | Description |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Early Civic Mobilisation | Petitions, open letters, and political expressions of dissent reflect rapid grassroots response. |
| Local Government Legitimacy | Banská Bystrica authorities leveraged statutory roles to contest the project’s compliance. |
| Issue Framing and Communication | The government’s educational push underscores the link between public understanding and project acceptance. |
| Regulatory Gatekeeping | The project remains in the feasibility/comment phase, awaiting thorough Environmental and Strategic Impact Assessments. |
| Civic-Science Interface | The engagement of independent hydrologists and environmental experts introduced vital scientific counterpoints. |

Combined, these elements showcase a system where institutional checks and civil inputs are capable of influencing major infrastructure planning.

Conclusion

The Málinec pumped-storage project offers a compelling example of participatory governance in Slovakia’s environmental infrastructure planning. It highlights how active citizenry, local government oversight, media attention, and regulatory processes work in tandem to check project rollouts—even those framed as strategic. The ongoing debate illustrates a functioning, iterative democracy where social license matters as much as a strategic rationale.

9. Transferability of Slovakia’s knowledge to Armenia

The Republic of Armenia has made strides in decentralisation and civic engagement, yet challenges remain in institutionalising participatory practices. A comparison with Slovakia reveals opportunities to replicate certain tools adjusted to Armenia's legal and cultural context. For instance, participatory budgeting can be piloted in Yerevan and secondary cities with adapted legal frameworks. Slovakia's structured manuals and participatory charters can be translated and contextualised for Armenian use. Moreover, deliberative forums for urban planning and inclusion of minority groups and displaced populations might mirror Slovakia's efforts with Roma communities.

While the political, cultural, and institutional differences between Slovakia and Armenia must be acknowledged, the two countries share crucial characteristics that make Slovakia's participatory governance experience relevant. Both nations transitioned from authoritarian regimes to democratic systems within the last three decades. They have similarly struggled with institutional trust deficits, centralised governance cultures, and social inequalities that hinder inclusive policy-making. However, Slovakia's incremental successes demonstrate that meaningful civic participation is possible even in environments with historical barriers to democratic engagement.

A central area for transferability is **participatory budgeting (PB)**. Armenia has seen some early attempts at civic involvement in local governance, such as municipal forums or community consultations, but these have generally lacked legal anchoring, consistent methodology, and formal evaluation. Slovakia's PB models offer practical blueprints for adaptation. For instance, the Bratislava model involves digital platforms, public assemblies, and structured proposal evaluation phases. If adapted to Armenia, PB could be initiated in Yerevan's administrative districts and major cities like Gyumri or Vanadzor, where population density and existing civic organisations provide a supportive environment.

To implement PB effectively in Armenia, several preconditions must be met. First, **legal amendments** are required to authorise municipalities to earmark funds specifically for participatory processes. Second, **training and capacity-building** for local officials and community leaders must be prioritised. Here, Slovakia's manuals and toolkits, such as *Ako zapájat' neorganizovanú verejnost'* (eng.: *How to Engage the Unorganised Public*), could be translated and adapted for Armenian audiences. Third, a **pilot framework** should be created to test PB

in varied municipal contexts, with monitoring indicators and iterative feedback mechanisms.

Another domain where Slovakia's experience is transferable is the **participatory planning of public spaces**. Armenia's urban centres, particularly Yerevan, face rapid urbanisation and infrastructure challenges. Slovak practices like co-design workshops, mobile consultation units, and digital urban forums could empower residents to engage in shaping their neighbourhoods. Deliberative planning would be especially relevant in urban redevelopment areas where tensions between heritage preservation and modernisation are acute.

A significant opportunity for Armenia lies in developing **evaluation tools akin to Slovakia's Index participácie**. Creating an "Armenian Index of Participation" would provide a transparent mechanism to assess the inclusivity, quality, and impact of participatory initiatives. The index could track the diversity of participants, the integration of public input into decisions, and the level of institutional responsiveness. Collaborations with Armenian universities and civil society organisations could ensure that the index is contextually grounded and methodologically sound.

Moreover, Slovakia's approach to **institutional support** can guide Armenia's national efforts. Armenia could establish a **Participatory Governance Unit** within the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure or the Ministry of Justice to coordinate participatory policy. This unit would be responsible for issuing guidelines, training municipal staff, and evaluating local initiatives. Over time, this could evolve into a broader national framework supporting citizen engagement as a pillar of democratic development.

The **inclusion of marginalised communities** represents a further area of potential adaptation. Slovakia's focus on engaging Roma, the disabled, and other vulnerable groups resonates with Armenia's own social diversity. Minority groups such as the Yezidis, Assyrians, Kurds, and refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh face underrepresentation in Armenian policy-making. Drawing inspiration from Slovakia's "Hlas menšín" (*eng.: Voice of Minorities*) initiative, Armenia could implement targeted participation projects that use community diagnostics, culturally sensitive facilitation, and local NGOs to build trust and capacity.

Another promising avenue is **youth participation**. While Armenia has a politically engaged youth population—especially post-2018—there is no national framework for institutionalising their input into policy-making.

Slovakia's municipal youth councils and the national umbrella body Rada mládeže Slovenska offer valuable templates. Armenia could benefit from establishing city-level youth councils with decision-making powers and funding for youth-led projects alongside a national youth council that serves as a policy interlocutor with state institutions.

However, transferring participatory models to Armenia also requires addressing **structural and cultural constraints**. Centralised decision-making remains entrenched, and local governments often lack both fiscal autonomy and administrative capacity. Additionally, public scepticism toward government initiatives may result in low participation unless processes are transparent, inclusive, and responsive. This suggests the need for **incremental piloting**, starting with willing municipalities and building public trust through demonstrable results.

Armenia's civil society can play a catalytic role in this transition. Non-governmental organisations, advocacy groups, and community associations have shown strong mobilisation capacity in areas like electoral monitoring, environmental activism, and human rights. These groups could be formally integrated into participatory processes, serving as facilitators, monitors, and knowledge brokers. Partnerships between Armenian NGOs and Slovak counterparts could facilitate knowledge transfer, staff exchanges, and joint projects.

Finally, digital infrastructure will be key to scaling participatory governance in Armenia. Slovakia's use of online platforms for budgeting, feedback, and project tracking demonstrates how digital tools can enhance accessibility and transparency. Armenia's high internet penetration and active online citizenry provide a solid foundation for developing e-participation platforms. The government could invest in user-friendly digital interfaces for citizen consultations, co-design applications, and feedback loops.

In conclusion, while Slovakia's participatory governance model must be contextualised for Armenia's specific environment, its core principles—deliberation, transparency, inclusion, and institutional support—are broadly applicable. Through legal reforms, institutional innovation, and international partnerships, Armenia can adapt these models to build a more participatory and resilient democracy.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

Slovakia's participatory governance framework illustrates the potential of well-structured civic engagement in fostering democratic resilience and public trust. Armenia, at a crossroads of democratic development, stands to benefit from Slovakia's experience. This study has highlighted not only the institutional mechanisms that underpin Slovakia's success but also the philosophical and strategic choices that made public participation a functional component of governance rather than a symbolic gesture.

A key insight from Slovakia's journey is the importance of **embedding participation within institutional architecture**. Participation cannot be relegated to one-off consultations or project-specific forums; it must be systematically integrated into the policy-making cycle. Slovakia's establishment of the Participation Department and the Participatory Competence Centre ensured that participatory governance was not only promoted but also supported through capacity-building, methodological standardisation, and continuous evaluation. For Armenia, this suggests that creating a central body to coordinate, monitor, and support participatory initiatives is a foundational step toward sustainable democratic innovation.

Slovakia's use of evaluative tools such as the **Index participácie** further demonstrates how feedback mechanisms can transform participation from a process-driven exercise into an outcome-oriented strategy. This focus on both the quality and impact of participation offers a critical lesson for Armenia. If citizens are to remain engaged over time, they must see that their input leads to tangible results. Armenia should prioritise the creation of a national participatory monitoring framework—ideally involving universities and civil society organisations—to institutionalise accountability and transparency in participatory practices.

Another strength of Slovakia's model is its emphasis on **inclusivity**, particularly the proactive engagement of marginalised communities. From Roma-focused initiatives to community workshops tailored for people with disabilities, Slovakia has made efforts to ensure that participatory governance reaches beyond the socio-economically and politically privileged. Armenia must likewise adopt an equity-based approach to participation. Given Armenia's ethnic, regional, and socio-economic diversity, any participatory model must include mechanisms to ensure the representation of rural populations, displaced persons, minorities, and youth.

Digital innovation also plays a pivotal role in Slovakia's participatory infrastructure. The use of online platforms for participatory budgeting, project tracking, and public feedback has expanded access and increased efficiency. For Armenia, which has a growing tech sector and high levels of digital engagement, this represents a significant opportunity. Investment in digital platforms for civic participation—particularly in Armenian and minority languages—could dramatically enhance inclusivity and responsiveness.

Youth engagement, while often discussed abstractly, is operationalised concretely in Slovakia through youth councils and national coordination mechanisms. Armenia has a politically active youth population yet lacks formal structures to channel that energy into policy-making. Establishing municipal youth parliaments and a national youth council—modelled after Slovakia's Rada mládeže—could institutionalise youth participation and serve as a training ground for future civic leaders.

Based on the comparative analysis presented, the following **recommendations** are offered to Armenian policymakers, civil society actors, and international partners interested in supporting participatory governance:

1. **Launch pilot participatory budgeting projects** in selected municipalities: start with cities that have both administrative capacity and civil society presence, such as Yerevan, Gyumri, and Vanadzor. Ensure pilots are accompanied by methodological support, training, and transparent communication.
2. **Establish a national coordination body for participatory governance**: this unit should develop national strategies, issue implementation manuals, and coordinate across ministries and municipalities. It should also serve as a hub for training and innovation.
3. **Translate and adapt Slovak methodological tools and manuals**: practical guidance documents like those produced by the Slovak Ministry of Interior can be contextualised for Armenia. This includes manuals on engaging marginalised groups, digital participation, and conflict-sensitive facilitation.
4. **Develop an Armenian Participation Index**: in partnership with academic institutions, design a monitoring tool to evaluate the quality, inclusivity, and impact of participatory initiatives. Publish findings regularly to maintain public accountability.
5. **Implement participatory planning procedures in urban development**: use co-design workshops, digital consultations, and

community mapping to involve residents in shaping public spaces. This should include marginalised and underrepresented groups.

6. **Create inclusive youth participation frameworks:** introduce youth councils at municipal levels and a national youth umbrella organisation to formalise youth input in governance. These bodies should receive public funding, institutional support, and decision-making power.
7. **Ensure legal recognition of participatory mechanisms:** amend municipal governance laws to allow earmarking of funds for participatory budgeting, mandate citizen consultations for major infrastructure projects, and define clear responsibilities for participatory monitoring.
8. **Support civil society as a co-implementer of participatory processes:** provide funding and recognition for NGOs and community groups involved in facilitating participation. Encourage public-civic partnerships for training, outreach, and evaluation.
9. **Use digital technologies to scale participation:** develop user-friendly digital platforms for participatory budgeting, public consultations, and participatory planning. Incorporate tools for real-time feedback, transparent tracking of outcomes, and multilingual access.
10. **Foster international cooperation:** establish partnerships with Slovak institutions, EU agencies, and international NGOs to support knowledge exchange, staff training, and pilot project funding.

It is crucial to note that participatory governance is not a panacea. It requires **political will, cultural transformation, and ongoing investment**. Risks such as elite capture, consultation fatigue, or the instrumentalisation of participation in public relations must be anticipated and addressed. Nevertheless, as Slovakia's experience shows, these risks can be mitigated through transparency, evaluation, and institutionalisation.

In conclusion, Slovakia offers a powerful example of how participatory governance can be both principled and practical. Armenia now stands at a pivotal moment: the post-revolution momentum and ongoing reforms offer a window of opportunity to embed participatory values in the foundations of governance. By learning from Slovakia's successes—and its challenges—Armenia can construct a participatory ecosystem that is locally rooted, institutionally supported, and democratically transformative.

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“Cross-Border Insights: Comparative Analysis of Participatory Governance Best Practices in the Czech Republic and Their Application in the Republic of Armenia”

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Summary

Participatory governance emphasizes citizen involvement in decision-making processes. This approach fosters transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance, ultimately improving public policies and services.¹ This report explores participatory governance practices in the Czech Republic and examines their applicability to the Republic of Armenia. By analyzing successful models, case studies, and policy frameworks from the Czech Republic, this report provides actionable recommendations for enhancing participatory governance in Armenia. The insights draw attention to both successes and challenges in governance, illustrating the pathways for strengthening Armenia’s democratic processes.

Introduction

Participatory governance has become a cornerstone for democracies aiming to bridge the gap between governments and citizens. By involving citizens in decision-making, participatory governance ensures that policies are not only more transparent and accountable but also reflective of the collective needs and values of society. The Czech Republic, a member of the European Union, has emerged as a pioneer in implementing participatory governance

¹CIVICUS, *Participatory governance toolkit*, CIVICUS, retrieved from <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/es/centro-de-medios/recursos/manuales/611-participatory-governance-toolkit#:~:text=Participatory%20governance%20is%20embodied%20in,deficits%20and%20improve%20public%20accountability>.

mechanisms, achieving significant milestones in the areas of decentralization, digital engagement, and public participation. On the other hand, Armenia, transitioning to a more democratic governance model, seeks inspiration and practical solutions to enhance citizen participation in governance processes.

This report delves into the Czech Republic's practices, highlighting their relevance and potential adaptation for Armenia. It begins with an in-depth analysis of participatory governance in the Czech Republic, examines illustrative case studies and policy frameworks, and concludes with actionable insights and recommendations for Armenia's governance landscape.

1. Participatory Governance in the Czech Republic: Key Insights from the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's transition to participatory governance began after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, marking its departure from centralized authoritarian rule. The reforms aimed to create a democratic system that empowered citizens at every level of governance. Participatory governance in the Czech Republic is rooted in principles of citizen engagement, inclusivity and transparency, which are operationalized through robust legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and active civil society involvement.

1. *Legal and Policy Frameworks*

One of the foundational pillars of participatory governance in the Czech Republic is its comprehensive legal structure. The **Public Administration Reform Act of 2000** was a landmark legislation that decentralized governance, empowering municipalities to address local issues effectively. By granting decision-making authority to local governments, this act enabled citizens to have a direct say in the matters affecting their communities. It also laid the groundwork for public consultations and participatory planning initiatives.

The **Civil Society Development Strategy (2014-2020)** further strengthened participatory governance by emphasizing the role of civil society organizations (CSOs).² This strategy prioritized fostering public dialogue,

² *European Commission, Multiannual indicative programme for the Thematic Programme "Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities" for the period 2014-2020 (C(2014) 4865 final), European Commission, Brussels, 15 July 2014.*

participatory budgeting, and greater collaboration between government entities and civil society actors. Additionally, the **Freedom of Information Act** ensured transparency by granting citizens access to government-held information, enhancing their ability to hold authorities accountable and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes.³

The **Government Anti-Corruption Strategy** for 2023-2026 is a recent initiative implemented to achieve further transparency and accountability within the government. Two of its priority areas covers: 1) an independent executive and 2) transparency and open access to information.⁴ Compared to its predecessor, the **Government's Action Plan to Fight Corruption for 2023-2024**, this strategy offers a broader and more comprehensive framework for action. A robust separation of powers and an independent executive are critical components in preventing the abuse of authority and ensuring accountability. By strengthening these aspects, the strategy directly addresses systemic weaknesses in governance.

Currently, the WJP Rule of Law Index has ranked the Czech Republic 20th out of 142 countries worldwide.⁵ This index measures the extent to which countries comply with the law, courts are independent, laws transparent, justice accessible and corruption absent. Notably, Czechia is among the few nations to witness an increase in their rule of law index in 2024, in contrast to the 61% of countries that experienced a decline in adherence to the rule of law. Initiatives like the **Government Anti-Corruption Strategy**, coupled with laws such as the **Freedom of Information Act** and the **Law on Conflict of Interest (2006)**—which curtails conflicts of interest among public officials—are contributors to Czechia's high ranking. These efforts reflect the country's commitment to combating corruption, fostering accountability, and restoring trust in government, all of which are vital to more effective participatory governance.

³ Federation of American Scientists, *Czech Republic passes law on access to information*, Federation of American Scientists, retrieved from <https://sgp.fas.org/news/1999/02/czechfoi.html#:~:text=Czech%20Republic%20Passes%20Law%20on,bodies%2C%20and%20some%20other%20institutions>.

⁴ OECD, *Anti-corruption and integrity outlook 2024: Czechia*, OECD, retrieved from [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/anti-corruption-and-integrity-outlook-2024-country-notes_684a5510-en/czechia_d819af8f-en.html#:~:text=Czechia%20has%20adopted%20the%20Government,4\)%20and%20civil%20society%20development](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/anti-corruption-and-integrity-outlook-2024-country-notes_684a5510-en/czechia_d819af8f-en.html#:~:text=Czechia%20has%20adopted%20the%20Government,4)%20and%20civil%20society%20development).

⁵ World Justice Project, *Czechia ranks 20 out of 142 in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index*, World Justice Project, retrieved from https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/Czechia_0.pdf

2. *Institutional Mechanisms*

The Czech Republic's participatory governance system is supported by institutions and initiatives that facilitate citizen engagement. For instance, the country's involvement in the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)** has led to the development of digital platforms and tools for e-governance, allowing citizens to provide feedback, access data, and participate in public consultations.

One of the most celebrated participatory practices in the Czech Republic is **participatory budgeting**. Municipalities allocate a portion of their budgets to projects proposed and selected by citizens. This mechanism has been instrumental in building trust between citizens and local governments, as it empowers communities to prioritize and implement projects that address their needs directly. Additionally, public consultations and town hall meetings have become standard practices, ensuring that diverse voices are heard in policy discussions.

Case Studies

1. **Participatory Budgeting in Brno:** The city of Brno has embraced participatory budgeting as a means of involving citizens in urban development.⁶ Citizens are invited to submit project proposals, which are then reviewed and voted upon. Successful initiatives include the development of community gardens, revitalization of playgrounds, and creation of public spaces that promote social interaction and environmental sustainability.
2. **Urban Planning in Prague:** In Prague, citizen engagement has been central to urban renewal projects. Residents participated in shaping sustainable housing solutions, public transportation plans, and green infrastructure.⁷ This collaborative approach has resulted in projects that are both innovative and reflective of community priorities.

⁶World Health Organization, *Civic engagement through participatory budgeting: The city of Brno, Czechia*, World Health Organization, 12 September 2024, retrieved from <https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/feature-stories/item/civic-engagement-through-participatory-budgeting--the-city-of-brno--czechia#:~:text=The%20city%20of%20Brno%20in.now%20in%20its%20seventh%20year.>

⁷Institute of Planning and Development Prague, *Public participation is helping to shape a new, sustainable neighborhood planned for Letňany*, 30 October 2023, retrieved from

3. **Transparency International Czech Republic:** This organization has played a pivotal role in promoting participatory governance by conducting public awareness campaigns and providing platforms for reporting unethical practices. By collaborating with local governments, it has helped establish ethical codes of conduct and fostered a culture of accountability.⁸
4. **Digital Engagement in Ostrava:** Ostrava's local government introduced a mobile app that allows citizens to report infrastructure issues and suggest improvements in real-time.⁹ This initiative has improved service delivery and strengthened citizen trust in local governance.

Furthermore, over the past decade the Czech Republic has witnessed a broader and more proactive approach to raise political awareness and involvement particularly amongst the youth. Notably, the organization National Working Group for the Structured Dialogue with Youth, founded in 2014, has been instrumental in promoting civic, public, and political participation among young people across all levels of governance. The introduction of the UN Youth Delegate programme for Czech Youth, serves as an exemplary initiative of successfully involving and amplifying the voices of Czech youth in global and political affairs, leading to greater engagement and participation.¹⁰

3. *Challenges and Lessons Learned*

While the Czech Republic has made significant strides in participatory governance, challenges persist. Rural areas often face limited access to digital tools, creating disparities in participation. Additionally, an overreliance on well-established CSOs can marginalize less organized or underrepresented groups.

<https://iprpraha.cz/page/4309/public-participation-is-helping-to-shape-a-new-sustainable-neighborhood-planned-for-letnany>.

⁸ Transparency International Czech Republic, *Transparency International Czech Republic: Overview 2021*, retrieved from <https://www.transparency.cz/transparency-international-czech-republic-overview-2021/>.

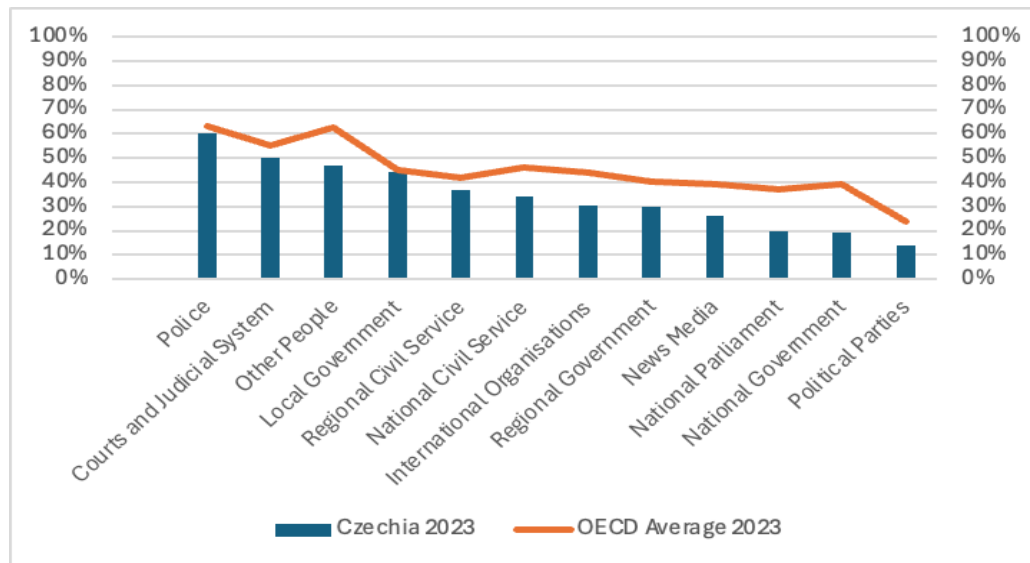
⁹ *Journal of Competitiveness, Using Crowdsourcing To Support Civic Engagement In Strategic Urban Development Planning: A Case Study Of Ostrava, Czech Republic, June 2018*, retrieved from https://publikace.k.utb.cz/bitstream/handle/10563/1008117/Fulltext_1008117.pdf

¹⁰ European Education and Culture Executive Agency. (2024, March 29). *Participation: Czechia. Youth Wiki*. Retrieved from <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/czechia/5-participation>.

Resource constraints in smaller municipalities also pose challenges, limiting the scalability and reach of participatory initiatives. These challenges underscore the need for continuous capacity building and inclusive design of governance mechanisms.

Moreover, overall public trust in the national government and parliament appears to be lacking. This is evident in **Figure 1** which illustrates the share of the population who have high or moderately high trust in different public institutions, other people and media. The graph shows that while Czechia is largely on par with the OECD average in terms of trust in local government, regional civil service, the police and judicial system, it significantly falls short in areas such as trust in the national government. This discrepancy suggests that while decentralization and, to some extent, CSO's have been effective in building trust in local and regional governments, these efforts have not extended to the national level. Clearly, much remains to be done to restore trust in the national government and parliament. For instance, as opposed to most OECD countries, Czechia still has no standards of conduct and ethical behavior applicable for ministers, members of parliament and other political appointees. Introducing stronger ethical guidelines could therefore be an essential step in restoring trust on a national level.

Figure 1: Share of population with high or moderately high trust in different public institutions, other people and media, 2023.¹¹



Source: Data taken from the OECD (2023).¹²

2. Participatory Governance in Armenia: Armenia’s Current Landscape

Armenia’s political landscape has undergone substantial changes in recent years, with participatory governance becoming a focal point of its democratic reforms. Following the Velvet Revolution of 2018, there has been a renewed emphasis on transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. The establishment of **community councils** and the introduction of e-government platforms like **e-Draft** have provided avenues for citizens to engage with legislative processes. Civil society organizations have also played a crucial role

¹¹ OECD, Note: “High or moderately high” corresponds to the aggregation of response options 6-10 to the question “On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust [institution]?”; neutral to option 5 and “low or no” to response options 0-4.

¹² OECD, *OECD survey on drivers of trust in public institutions - 2024 results: Czechia*, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results-country-notes_33192204/czechia_5bbb1c7c/54847e53-en.pdf.

in advocating for participatory governance, fostering a culture of civic responsibility.

Despite these advancements, Armenia continues to face significant challenges. Public awareness of participatory mechanisms remains limited, and their implementation is often uneven across urban and rural areas. Addressing these issues requires adopting proven strategies and practices from other countries, such as the Czech Republic.

1. Challenges to Participatory Governance in Rural Regions of Armenia

Participatory governance has become an increasingly important focus in Armenia's democratic development and decentralization reforms. However, in many rural regions across the country, significant obstacles continue to hinder the meaningful implementation of inclusive governance. These challenges are multifaceted, involving low civic engagement, limited administrative capacity, systemic institutional weaknesses, and structural inequalities.

One of the most persistent issues in rural areas is the **limited civic participation and low public awareness** of governance mechanisms. Although Armenia has made considerable strides since independence in promoting democratic values, many rural residents remain disconnected from local decision-making processes. The legacy of centralized governance, combined with a lack of civic education and weak outreach efforts, contributes to widespread public disengagement. In smaller and more remote communities, citizens often perceive governance as the domain of officials and external actors, rather than a participatory, collaborative process.

Youth involvement in rural regions also remains limited. While there are initiatives aimed at increasing young people's civic participation, these are often concentrated in urban centers or lack sufficient scope and continuity in rural areas. As a result, opportunities for youth to influence policy or local development are minimal.

Compounding these problems is the **limited administrative capacity** of local governments in rural areas. Many municipal officials lack adequate training in community engagement, participatory planning, and stakeholder coordination. Initiatives such as participatory budgeting or open town hall meetings are rarely institutionalized and are often reliant on short-term donor

funding. Without dedicated local resources or institutional frameworks, these efforts fail to generate sustainable impact.

Structural and fiscal constraints further weaken the foundation for participatory governance in rural Armenia. Despite recent territorial-administrative reforms that consolidated smaller communities into larger municipalities, many local administrations continue to operate with limited autonomy and financial independence. Centralized funding models restrict municipalities' ability to initiate local projects or respond to citizen needs independently. In some cases, administrative mergers have led to geographically dispersed and socially diverse communities where inclusive participation becomes even more difficult to ensure.

Transparency and accountability—core elements of participatory governance—also remain underdeveloped in many rural regions. Mechanisms such as citizen advisory councils, budget transparency portals, or regular public consultations are often absent or inconsistently applied. This lack of institutionalized transparency reinforces public skepticism toward local authorities and further discourages citizen engagement.

Overall, participatory governance in Armenia's rural areas is constrained by deep-rooted systemic issues. Overcoming these barriers will require a long-term commitment to civic education, legal and policy reform, capacity-building for local governments, and the development of inclusive, transparent governance structures that actively engage all segments of the rural population.

2. Applying Czech Best Practices in Armenia

The Czech Republic's experience with participatory governance offers a practical and adaptable roadmap for Armenia as it seeks to deepen citizen involvement in governance, especially at the local and rural levels. Key lessons from Czech practices highlight the importance of decentralization, legal safeguards, civil society engagement, and digital innovation—all of which can be tailored to Armenia's unique socio-political landscape.

– Deepening Decentralization and Local Empowerment

One of the most impactful lessons from the Czech model is the critical role of decentralization in enabling participatory governance. The Czech Public Administration Reform Act (2000) transferred authority and responsibility to

municipalities, allowing local governments to address community-specific issues directly. Armenia should accelerate its decentralization reforms by granting greater financial and administrative autonomy to local governments, particularly in rural areas. This would empower municipal authorities to tailor solutions to local needs and foster a more responsive and accountable governance culture.

– **Institutionalizing Participatory Budgeting**

Participatory budgeting, widely practiced in Czech cities like Brno, allows citizens to propose and vote on local development projects. Armenia can pilot and scale this practice starting in major cities such as Yerevan and Gyumri and gradually extend it to smaller towns and consolidated rural municipalities. To ensure success:

- Local officials and civil society actors should receive capacity-building support in participatory tools and community facilitation.
- Clear legal frameworks and budget allocations should be introduced to ensure continuity and transparency.
- Outreach strategies must be tailored to rural communities, using offline methods where digital access is limited.

– **Expanding Digital Engagement and E-Government Tools**

Czech initiatives such as digital platforms and mobile reporting tools (e.g., in Ostrava) have improved real-time communication between citizens and local authorities. Armenia can expand its existing tools like e-Draft into broader e-governance ecosystems that include:

- Mobile apps for rural residents to report issues or participate in consultations.
- Localized platforms in Armenian and minority languages to ensure inclusivity.
- Training programs to improve digital literacy, particularly in under-resourced rural regions.

– **Developing a National Civil Society Development Strategy**

Armenia would benefit from designing a national strategy similar to the Czech Civil Society Development Strategy (2014–2020), focusing on:

- Partnerships between government and CSOs at both national and local levels.

- Incentivizing grassroots civic initiatives in rural areas.
- Strengthening institutional channels for CSO consultation in policy processes.

This strategy should also ensure long-term funding mechanisms for CSOs outside the capital, allowing broader representation and reducing reliance on donor-driven, short-term projects.

– **Advancing Legal and Ethical Frameworks**

To build public trust—especially at the national level—Armenia should adopt legislation that introduces ethical standards for public officials, modeled on EU norms. These may include:

- Codes of conduct for ministers, MPs, and political appointees.
- Mechanisms for public oversight and conflict-of-interest prevention.
- Strengthening Armenia’s Freedom of Information Law to guarantee citizen access to government-held data.

– **Promoting Civic Education and Public Awareness**

Sustainable participatory governance must be underpinned by civic education, especially in rural communities where knowledge of participation mechanisms is low. Drawing from Czech youth engagement practices (such as the UN Youth Delegate program and Structured Dialogue), Armenia should:

- Integrate civic learning into school curricula.
- Establish youth councils in rural municipalities.
- Support local media and NGOs in raising awareness about participation tools.

By thoughtfully adapting these Czech best practices to Armenia’s governance context—with particular attention to the needs and constraints of rural areas—the country can foster a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable political culture. Over time, such reforms will not only strengthen local democracy but also enhance trust in public institutions at all levels.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite growing recognition of participatory governance in Armenia, its effective implementation—especially in rural regions—remains limited due to low civic awareness, weak administrative capacity, limited local autonomy, and insufficient transparency.

Drawing on Czech best practices, the report recommends a **comprehensive, long-term strategy** to embed participatory governance in Armenia’s democratic framework:

Key Recommendations:

1. **Empower Local Governments:** Strengthen decentralization through legal and fiscal reforms to give municipalities real autonomy and decision-making power.
2. **Introduce Participatory Budgeting:** Begin with urban centers and expand to rural municipalities, ensuring training for local officials and civic groups.
3. **Leverage Digital Tools:** Develop inclusive e-governance platforms adapted to Armenia’s linguistic, cultural, and technological realities.
4. **Adopt a National Civil Society Development Strategy:** Promote structured partnerships between government and civil society to sustain civic engagement nationwide.
5. **Establish Ethical Standards for Public Officials:** Introduce and enforce codes of conduct for ministers and MPs to restore public trust in national governance.
6. **Invest in Civic Education:** Raise awareness about participatory mechanisms through formal education, local media, and youth involvement initiatives.
7. **Foster International Collaboration:** Engage with EU institutions and global organizations to align Armenia’s governance standards with international democratic norms.

By learning from the Czech experience and focusing on inclusive, localized implementation, Armenia can create a participatory governance system that reflects its citizens’ needs and strengthens democratic trust at all levels.

Czech Republic, June 2025

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Development of Participatory Governance: Tools, Instruments, Good Practices From Poland, and Recommendations For Further Development of the Civic Society in Armenia

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Summary

This report presents a range of tools, instruments and good practices that have been successfully applied in Poland to strengthen participatory governance and civic engagement, particularly over the course of the country's democratic transformation since 1989. All recommendations provided here are grounded in Poland's national experience, particularly in overcoming challenges that are also observed in the Armenian context, identified in RA in May 2025¹³, such as low civic engagement in rural areas, lack of trust in government and limited financial resources for public initiatives.

The intention is to share Poland's practical approaches, recognizing that while the Armenian and Polish contexts differ, certain patterns of civic development in post-Soviet societies display common features.

Challenges of Developing Social Participation in Rural Areas – Polish Experience Using a Regional Product Development Case

The history of the civic society in Poland is inherent in the circumstances of the development of countries in the post-Soviet area. In 1989, Poland was an underdeveloped country with a lack of civic society and huge challenges for further growth. From 1989 to 2024, Poland increased its GDP by more than

¹³ Information concerning the project "Fostering Participatory Rural Governance(RA). Cross-Border Perspective through V4 experience exchange" available on the website of CPO Eurasia, source: <https://eurasia-cpo.com/en/post/mayisi-12-14-y-2025t-teghi-ovnecav-evrasia-hasarakakan-kazmakerpovtyan-koghmic-kazmakerpvats-masnakcayin-karavarman-modeli-khtanovm-hh-gyovghakan-hamaynqnerovm-sahmanneric-dovrs-motecovm-vishegradi-erkrneri-pordzi-pokhanakmamb-tsragri-handisavor-meknarky> [access: 03.06.2025]

800% and by more than 3 times in terms of GDP per capita¹⁴. This success would not be possible if there were no civic society creating circumstances in which some of the problems or crises characteristic of other countries in the post-Soviet area did not occur. Despite the effectiveness of bottom-up engagement of the Polish society, the further development of social participation was, and still is, hindered by the passivity of millions of Poles regarding public engagement. This issue was (and to some extent, still is) especially evident in rural areas during the last decade of the 20th century, where structural transformations of the Polish economy in the 1990s led to a profound and multidimensional crisis. In terms of the development of civic society, the lack of social engagement is one of the most prominent barriers in general¹⁵, and this report may be used as a guide for local leaders in terms of addressing the presented measures to selected challenges for further development of social engagement.

To illustrate the challenges of developing participatory governance in rural areas in Poland, this report presents the example of promoting a regional product – the “Krówka Opatowska” (a caramel candy produced by a local dairy in the town of Opatów¹⁶ in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship). In this small town, located in a rural area and far from larger cities, a clear problem was the near-total lack of community involvement in public life. Despite the presence of individuals interested in public engagement, despite the fact that the municipality possesses adequate resources for a small-scale project, sufficient material assets, and basic project management knowledge, there was hardly any proof of engagement of the local community in the public sphere. The solution to the core issue was based on the “5 Whys” method (asking the question “why?” five times, to identify the

¹⁴ Data concerning the Polish economic growth available on the website of the Polish Economic Institute, source: <https://pie.net.pl/od-1989-pkb-polski-na-mieszkanca-zwiekszyli-sie-ponad-trzykrotnie/> [access: 06.06.2025].

¹⁵ P. Czakon, *Zaangażowanie czy obojętni? : aktywność społeczno i polityczna młodych Polaków*, [in:] *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Organizacja i Zarządzanie*, Z. 95, 2016, pp. 79-84. https://rebus.us.edu.pl/bitstream/20.500.12128/18676/1/Czakon_Zaangazowani_czy_obojetni.pdf [access:04.06.2025]. Especially, the problem refers to the younger part of Polish society. [access: 03.06.2025]

¹⁶ Website of Opatów Municipality available at: <https://www.umopatow.pl/> [access: 03.06.2025]

root cause), which is recommended as a very first step for analysis of every challenge for the further development of civic society:

- Why is the local community in Opatów not involved in public life? There are no events or projects organized that would allow large-scale community engagement.
- Why are such events or projects not organized despite the community having sufficient resources for small initiatives? Because there are very few local leaders capable of implementing projects using available or obtainable resources.
- Why are there few local leaders capable of implementing such projects? Because Opatów is not perceived as an attractive place to carry out projects that could attract enough participants.
- Why is Opatów not perceived as attractive for projects? Because the regional product (Krówka Opatowska), commonly associated with Opatów, and ready to be used as a base, it had not been utilized.
- Why had the local product (Krówka Opatowska) not been used in local projects to engage the community? Because local leaders failed to recognize the product's potential as a foundation for a community-activating initiative.

Consequently, a group of leaders, usually working several hundred kilometers away from Opatów, took on the challenge. They recognized the potential of the local product and the issue of lack of civic engagement. The challenge of staff availability was resolved thanks to a growing awareness of local leaders that their involvement could be national in scope, even if rooted in a specific region located far from Opatów. The lack of sufficient financial resources was addressed by securing funding from a foreign grant program focused on rural development. The need for informational resources and know-how was met thanks to one leader's ties to Opatów. Material needs (in particular, the supply of Krówka Opatowska candies) were met through a partnership with the producer, who gained national recognition for the product as a result of the project. Today, annual editions of the Krówka Opatowska Festival are held as a supra-regional event¹⁷. Given the example of the effective use of the local product to launch a project of an annual

¹⁷ Footage from next editions of the event available on the website of the producer, source: <http://www.krowkaopatowska.pl/nowa/galeria/swieto-krowki-opatowskiej/> [access: 05.06.2025]

local festival, which is constantly boosting civic engagement in Poland, it is important to address the identified challenges or other likely to occur in Armenia in terms of participatory governance with proper tools, instruments, or good practices.

Tools, Instruments, and Good Practices for Engaging Society in Participatory Governance

One of the main barriers to participatory governance is the belief among many citizens that their involvement will not lead to meaningful outcomes or be politically significant. One of the most effective instruments for direct decision-making in democratic regimes is the referendum, whose frequency and quality serve as strong indicators of democratic development¹⁸. There is no doubt that the referendum is the best instrument of participatory governance, but it is not always available as a panacea for the lack of confidence of the people that the social engagement will result in any important decision.

However, due to diverse legal frameworks for referenda across countries, if the most important challenge is to convince the people that the social engagement has a profound relevance, the most commonly ready-to-use instrument is the participatory budget¹⁹.

One of the most widely used tools in Poland to involve citizens directly in public decision-making is the participatory budget, which was first implemented in the early 2010s. The ability to decide directly on how part of the local government's budget is spent, including the types of projects implemented is one of the most effective ways to demonstrate the positive outcomes of civic engagement. The Polish model typically follows a three-stage structure, supported throughout by experts from local institutions:

¹⁸ A. Targońska, *Referendum w kontrowersyjnych kwestiach moralnych w państwach europejskich*, University of Białystok, 2023, pp. 10-29, source: https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jsui/bitstream/11320/15661/1/A_Targonska_Referendum_w_kontrowersyjnych_kwestiach_moralnych_w_panstwach_europejskich.pdf [access: 05.06.2025]

¹⁹ J. Podgórska-Rykała, *Citizen`s budget and participatory budget. Two solutions for one city as a consequence of the amendment of the local government law o 2018*, [in]: *Roczniki Administracji i Prawa, Special Volume nr XIX, 2019*, pp. 227-232, source: <https://rocznikiadministracjiiprawa.publisherspanel.com/article/141029/en> [access: 03.06.2025].

In the first stage, the community outlines project ideas with active support from local institutions, which helps estimate project costs.

It is important to underline that the form of organization of the first stage allows for avoiding many doubts related to voting for project proposals not planned by the community, or to ensure that the possible lack of expertise in project management will not prevent the construction of a good project proposal out of ideas. Only ideas proposed by local community members are accepted, so the initial level of lack of trust was overcome due to the engagement of the local societies in planning needed projects. This stage concludes with the joint preparation of feasible projects, and this solution delivered especially the needed expertise in terms of project management, which was hard to obtain cost-free.

In the second stage, the community reviews the proposed projects during consultations to communicate potential outcomes. Thanks to public debate related to proposed projects, the problem of polarization of Polish society was multiple times effectively mitigated by the seek for support in the voting process and decisions concerning the choice of the number of projects that fit to the budget. Hence, the second stage of the standard form of participatory budgeting in Poland clears the path for a broader engagement of the local society due to the possibility of commenting on elaborate proposals of projects, which allowed to reach a great share of the local community, especially younger generations.

The third stage involves community voting after the proposals have been refined, and an information campaign has been conducted. Direct involvement of representatives of local communities allowed for conducting informational campaigns in the form of bottom-up activities, so not only authors or idea-makers could be engaged. Projects with the most votes that fall within the budget are then implemented by the appropriate institutions, with efforts to engage the community in their organization, execution, and evaluation. The third stage of the participatory budgeting ensures that the decision-making process of the local community is in accordance with democratic standards, as well as provides further evidence of the results of the project, which constitutes a solid pillar for further engagement.

It is worth underlining that the eligibility to vote in participatory budget is being at least 16 years old. Because of the fact that a constant challenge for further development of civic society in Poland is the lack of interest of teenagers in public issues, hundreds of municipalities in Poland have launched youth participatory budgets. Such an instrument allows for increasing social

engagement among teenagers and to fund needed educational, sport, cultural, social projects, meeting needs of younger generations of the Polish society. What is essential, due to an instrument of social engagement allowing the participation in the decision-making process of teenagers, it is possible to teach the youth active attitudes towards social sphere, and to strive against the most complex problem of the further development of civic society in Poland – the passivity of millions of Poles in terms of public issues. The recommendation is that there is a need to include social engagement in public sphere on the primary and secondary schools, to educate younger generations in terms of the meaning of participatory governance in democratic regimes.

Another set of tools enabling broad public participation in decision-making includes instruments for public opinion research and presenting findings in accessible formats. It is worth emphasizing that there is no better solution for social passivity than to engage citizens in the decision-making process and to show them the results of their engagement. Problems with communications are common in informational societies, hence some of the challenges for further development of Armenian civic society can be identified in Poland as well.

In Poland, **digital tools** are widely used to strengthen community engagement and overcome barriers such as geographic dispersion or lack of participation:

- **Google Forms:** Used by many Polish NGOs and municipalities to collect data from residents about community needs or public concerns. The problem of a lack of expertise to analyze gathered data is often mitigated by cooperation with researchers – in exchange for the data, scholars can provide results of analyses and support the search for the root causes. For example, this path allowed the Polish National Association of Doctoral Candidates to involve an experienced scientist to launch the first nationwide research project, concerning the mental health and well-being of young researchers in Poland in 2020. If the barrier is a lack of access to the Internet or a problem with basic digital competencies, the recommended solution is to engage local leaders to directly reach representatives at risk of digital exclusion and help them in filling out prepared forms.
- **Doodle:** Commonly used in Poland to organize community decisions via online voting, especially for informal groups. The development of the information society in Poland resulted in the common use of multiple voting applications, especially by the users of non-formal groups on social media. One of the most frequently presented problems by the local

leaders of rural areas of Armenia was the lack of responsiveness of society in terms of communicating problems. The same problem occurred in the first decade of the XXI century in Poland, but it was overcome in particular by the increased use of digital solutions for voting. If digital exclusion is a problem, one of the best solutions is to organize meetings where local leaders can assist voters in using these applications. Despite the cost of the meetings, the effectiveness of collecting data via the voting application and of presenting the results will outweigh the costs.

- **Slack:** Some Polish organizations use this platform to structure online public discussions, helping reduce communication chaos in civic debates. These simple yet effective digital tools make it possible to capture and reflect public opinion. Even when direct decision-making isn't feasible, presenting aggregated data from polls, votes, or other communication channels remain highly valuable to deliver a broader perspective. In Poland, the informational chaos is still one of the most important challenges for public debate, so many social organizations are using tools allowing them to at least partially structure the dialogue. Unfortunately, due to the increase in the use of social media, the number of simple Internet forums declined, so one of the best tools for creating a proper structure of social debate remains unpopular in Poland.

Tools, Instruments, and Good Practices for Building Budgets for Civic Projects

In Poland, the **lack of funding** is often cited as a key obstacle to civic initiatives. However, Polish organizations have developed several effective ways to overcome this:

A fundamental state instrument for developing participatory governance in financial terms is a granting program, which offers various means of funding social projects. Given the diversity of grant competitions between countries, this section focuses on tools and practices related to public donations, fundraising, and sponsorship.

- **Public Fundraising Events:**

One effective approach for national fundraising campaigns is to organize events

that serve as celebrations of public generosity. A notable example is the Great Orchestra

of Christmas Charity²⁰, held annually since 1993, which has raised over 2 billion PLN

for charitable purposes, including during times of economic crisis. This event relies

on volunteers collecting donations across Poland, usually shortly after Christmas.

A symbolic heart-shaped sticker given to donors not only serves as a gesture of appreciation but also supports event marketing and donor self-identification. The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity allowed to resolve a significant and complex problem of a lack of mass engagement in the public sphere, because it showed multiple ways of engagement for charity purposes, not necessarily in the form of donations. From the lack of a trusted channel for charity, through the psychological barrier of donating small sums for socially important goals, and the lack of a nationwide structure of volunteers needed to collect donations, multiple barriers for social engagement can be overcome.

- **Church-Based Charitable Structures:**

In the very same manner, the Caritas Polska, with developed structures in the whole country, creates dozens of different forms of civic engagement in charity, making it virtually not dependable of many common barriers to engagement in the public sphere, with the use of the existing structures of the Catholic Church in Poland²¹. It is important to remember that most structures of Christian churches offer a ready-to-use infrastructure for charity purposes. Especially in rural areas in Poland, the Catholic Church plays an important role in the aggregation of charity and the logistics of donated goods or money. The Caritas Polska, thanks to its bond to the existing structure of the most common Church, reaches 95% of cost efficiency in terms of charity on a nationwide scale, and to resolve the problem of a lack of a ready-to-use channel of charity in virtually every local community in Poland. Contrary to the Great Orchestra of

²⁰ The Website of the WOŚP Foundation available at: <https://en.wosp.org.pl/> [access: 04.06.2025].

²¹ The Website of the Caritas Polska available at: <https://caritas.pl/> [access: 04.06.2025].

Christmas Charity, the role of Caritas Polska in the Polish environment for civic engagement, it is based on the creation of everyday possibilities to donate money or goods for charity in the whole country.

- **Online Fundraising Platforms:**

When organizing nationwide fundraising actions or events requiring financial support, effective tools include platforms run by specialized organizations (e.g., siepomaga.pl²²) that can overcome some challenges in terms of financial issues, especially by reaching millions of stakeholders. Services for donor-funded budgeting (e.g., patronite.com²³, buycoffee.com²⁴) are the answer for individuals and groups, or organizations willing to support financially their activities by multiple donors. Thousands of creators of socially important content on social media are developing their activities in the public sphere thanks to individual donations. An increasing number of non-governmental organizations or even informal organizations are creating budgets by the use of donor-funded budgeting, which allows them to resolve the problem of the lack of financial stability is common to the sector of non-profit organizations. Although insufficient funds are one of the most commonly occurring barriers for civic engagement worldwide, the still unresolved problem is a common lack of endowment funds of Polish NGOs. A good practice involves building budgets based on small donations from as many stakeholders as possible, and offering specially prepared products or services to express gratitude to donors. This solution is cancelling all financial-based problems in terms of civic engagement – even very small sums from salaries multiplied by dozens of thousands of donations can create an abundant budget for important projects, and in parallel it constitutes a form of easy-to-do social engagement in the public sphere.

- **Professional Fundraisers:**

One of the most effective solutions for limited access to financial resources is working with professional fundraisers. These professionals typically earn commissions from the funds they raise, rather than charging upfront fees, make their services widely accessible.

²² The Website of the siepomaga.pl available at: <https://www.siepomaga.pl/> [access: 05.06.2025].

²³ The Website of the Patronite available at: <https://patronite.pl/> [access: 05.06.2025].

²⁴ The Website of the BuyCoffee available at: <https://buycoffee.to/> [access: 05.06.2025].

If the problem is the lack of expertise in fundraising, applying for grants, or a lack of any other resources needed to cover a position for a collaborator dealing with financial issues, seeking a professional fundraiser is the best solution. Many European fundraisers can also help raise funds for entities based outside their own countries. In direct sponsorship efforts, it is crucial to maintain strong social ties with sponsors and actively involve them or their representatives in the supported activities. Acknowledging sponsors in various meaningful ways by beneficiaries and stakeholders is also highly recommended. Even though in Poland there is a constant problem of direct sponsorship for non-profit organizations that wish to remain sovereign in their activities; fundraisers allow them to avoid such an unacceptable situation. The recommendation is to invite a professional fundraiser to cooperate, and if fundraisers are not available in the given time in Armenia, seek for help from other fundraisers from the bordering countries or from other European countries.

Tools, Instruments, and Best Practices for Accumulating Information Resources

In Poland, **information resources are among the most critical assets** in the functioning of civic society and participatory governance. Over the past decades, Polish public institutions, NGOs, and civic activists have developed and applied a range of practical **tools and methods** to manage information, improve outreach, and enhance communication effectiveness—particularly in rural or digitally underserved areas.

1. Addressing Communication Barriers in Digitally Excluded Groups

In Poland, one of the persistent challenges is **digital exclusion among the elderly**, which prevents them from accessing crucial information or contributing to public initiatives. Our solution has been to **organize volunteer groups**, usually involving family members or neighbors, to serve as intermediaries. These volunteers conduct **informational campaigns in person**, using printed materials or word-of-mouth, helping overcome the digital barrier and ensuring that senior citizens are not left out of important civic processes.

2. Structuring Dialogue Through Online Forums and Moderated Platforms

While often overlooked, **online forums** have proven to be highly effective in Poland for conducting **structured, inclusive discussions**, especially

among users with limited digital literacy. One successful Polish approach has been to start with **existing Facebook groups** or local pages and gradually **transition discussions to a dedicated forum platform**, where conversations are more easily archived, moderated, and organized by topic.

Another tool we use extensively in Poland is Slack, particularly among non-profit organizations and civic groups. Slack enables structured, topic-based discussions and reduces the chaos often found on open social media platforms. For larger, youth-driven initiatives, Discord also works well in Poland for organizing information into thematic channels.

Recommendation for Armenia: Consider establishing **moderated digital communication spaces** for civic issues, using tools like forums, Slack, or Discord, which are cost-free and user-friendly. This can help reduce communication overload and allow stakeholders to focus on meaningful dialogue.

3. Accessing and Sharing Know-How via Expert Networks

In Poland, many civic organizations rely on **expert portals and specialized forums** to exchange project management knowledge and lessons learned. These platforms allow activists, local leaders, academics, and civic professionals to **share practical know-how** in real time.

One effective method we use is to **build and maintain contact databases** of experienced individuals who can be consulted when specific expertise is needed. For instance, when a Polish doctoral candidate association needed data on mental health, they partnered with a professional researcher in exchange for access to survey data.

Recommendation for Armenia: Establish similar **expert networks** and online platforms for exchanging civic knowledge. A central database of Armenian civic experts, NGO practitioners, and community leaders would greatly support decentralized, informed local initiatives.

Tools, Instruments, and Best Practices for Accumulating Material Resources

In Poland, non-governmental organizations and informal civic groups frequently face difficulties in acquiring the material resources needed to sustain their activities. While the Polish government does offer targeted grants for purchasing fixed assets, these programs are often limited in scope and unable to

fully meet the growing demand among civic actors. This challenge has prompted Polish organizations to develop alternative solutions, many of which can be adapted to the Armenian context to support local civil society.

1. Barter-Based Resource Exchange Platforms

One solution that has worked well in Poland, especially for smaller NGOs and informal groups, is the **organization of barter exchanges**. These are informal or semi-formal systems that allow organizations to **trade goods or services** without financial transactions. For example, a youth center may provide graphic design services in exchange for donated furniture or IT equipment.

In Poland, platforms such as **Microsoft Teams** or other accessible digital tools are often used to **coordinate these exchanges**. Organizations post available items and needed resources, and exchanges are facilitated through chat or forum-based threads.

Recommendation for Armenia: Establish **local or regional barter markets**, either digitally or in person, where civic groups can list surplus materials and request needed items. This method is especially effective in communities with limited financial resources but a strong culture of cooperation.

2. Co-Working Spaces Supported by Local Governments

In Poland, one successful public policy instrument is the establishment of co-working offices by local or regional governments. These spaces, offered at minimal or no cost, enable NGOs to operate in a shared professional environment while significantly reducing fixed operational expenses. The cost of offering co-working space to NGOs is usually far lower than renting commercial office spaces and is often absorbed by municipalities as a form of social investment.

These hubs also serve as networking points, encouraging collaboration among local actors, including civic groups, activists, and public institutions.

Recommendation: In Armenia, where maintaining office space is often financially unsustainable for NGOs, municipalities or donor-supported institutions could pilot co-working civic hubs, offering desk space, internet access, and meeting rooms.

3. Avoiding Unsustainable Office Costs

Polish experience also shows that one of the main reasons for the failure of small civic organizations is the burden of fixed costs, especially rent for private office spaces. Unless an organization has stable, long-term funding, it is recommended to avoid committing to full-time office rentals. Instead,

organizations should explore shared-use arrangements with other NGOs, or seek in-kind sponsorships from businesses or institutions.

This recommendation is strongly applicable to Armenia, where many new or small civic groups risk collapse due to unsustainable operational models.

4. Securing In-Kind Donations and Sponsorships

In Poland, in-kind sponsorships are a commonly used approach to securing essential material resources, such as office supplies, technology or furniture. Many organizations form long-term partnerships with local businesses willing to donate goods in exchange for visibility or public recognition.

5. Public Fundraising and Individual Support Tools

In recent years, Polish NGOs have increasingly turned to **individual donation platforms**, such as **Patronite** and **BuyCoffee**, to fill funding gaps and purchase material goods. These platforms enable hundreds or even thousands of small monthly donations from individual supporters, helping to cover recurring material needs or one-off purchases.

These tools have helped resolve critical shortages of basic goods for thousands of organizations across Poland, and they can be equally effective in Armenia if well promoted and trusted by local audiences.

6. Resource Sharing Supported by Public Instruments

Finally, in Poland, **publicly managed leasing schemes** and **credit mechanisms** have been used to support NGOs in accessing expensive equipment, such as agricultural machinery, event infrastructure, or transportation vehicles. These are often **shared among multiple users**, with clear rules of access and scheduling. Structured access management is essential to **minimize potential conflicts** in shared-use models.

Recommendation for Armenia: Encourage municipalities or regional bodies to **pilot leasing or equipment-sharing programs** for civic or community groups, especially in rural areas where equipment is scarce and expensive to maintain individually.

Good Practices in Managing Social Projects and Recommendations for the Further Development of Civil Society in Armenia

Drawing from decades of civic development in Poland, we have found that **overcoming social passivity** is one of the central challenges for leaders working to strengthen civil society. In the Polish context, one of the most

effective ways to encourage civic engagement has been to demonstrate the **concrete value of participation**, starting with **clearly defined project goals**.

In Poland, a widely adopted tool for setting effective objectives is the **SMART method**—focusing on goals that are **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound**. This framework has allowed civic leaders and organizations to structure their initiatives in a way that increases transparency and impact, while building public trust and participation.

Polish Practice: Strategic Goal Setting and KPI Use

Based on our experience, it is also crucial to define **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** from the outset. In Polish civic projects, KPIs help track and communicate project relevance throughout implementation—providing a visible link between citizen engagement and measurable results. Our approach insists that every goal must respond to a **real, observed social problem**, avoiding symbolic or abstract activities that don't resonate with communities.

To ensure alignment between problems and solutions, Polish organizations often begin their project design with the **“5 Whys” method**. This tool is widely used to uncover the root causes of complex issues. In more advanced cases, Polish civic project managers also use analytical methods such as the **Ishikawa Diagram, 8D Method, Pareto Charts, or FMEA**, to systematize problem analysis and plan suitable interventions.

These practices can be directly relevant for Armenian leaders facing similar challenges. In Poland, another key insight is that **effective communication is central to participatory management**. Our civic organizations have learned, sometimes through failure, that the **absence of communication often dooms promising initiatives**.

While digital tools are important, **face-to-face communication** remains a cornerstone of effective relationship-building. In our experience, even the most technologically advanced tools cannot replace the **trust and connection built through in-person engagement**—especially in rural areas and among older demographics.

We recommend integrating communication strategies across all four phases of project management:

- **Planning:** Engage stakeholders early, ideally using **remote collaboration tools** like Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace.

- **Organizing:** Use tools such as **Asana** to coordinate tasks and involve community members in gathering necessary resources.
- **Leading:** Encourage **broad civic participation**, which we've found is the most powerful way to generate a sense of ownership.
- **Controlling:** Use feedback tools like **Microsoft Forms** to evaluate outcomes and collect stakeholder input.

We have repeatedly applied the **Pareto Principle** in Poland to focus our efforts—identifying the 20% of communication channels that bring 80% of impact. This has helped Polish NGOs improve outreach even with limited capacity.

Case Example from Armenia: Applying Polish Tools to Local Issues

During the implementation of the project “**Fostering Participatory Rural Governance**” by the Armenian NGO “Eurasia” CPO (May 12–14, 2025), we observed how Polish methods could be applied to local Armenian challenges.

One issue raised by Armenian participants was **widespread resistance to paying taxes**. This is a challenge we are also familiar with in Poland, especially in the 1990s. To explore the root causes of this issue, we applied the “**5 Whys**” method, and found the following insights:

- **Why** do citizens avoid paying taxes? → They don't associate taxes with tangible improvements to their daily lives.
- **Why not?** → They lack awareness of how tax revenue benefits their communities.
- **Why is there a lack of awareness?** → Because there is limited **public access to data** on how taxes are used.
- **Why is that the case?** → Public communication on the matter is insufficient.
- **Why is public communication insufficient?** → Because it is not seen as a **core responsibility** of democratic governance.

In Poland, we've addressed this by setting **SMART goals** tied to civic awareness. For example, a goal might be:

“Reach 20% of local taxpayers with visual and narrative evidence of public projects funded by tax revenue.”

And a relevant **KPI** might be:

“Increase voluntary tax compliance without raising rates, through public awareness alone.” This goal structure has enabled Polish

municipalities to **build tax morale**, especially when citizens begin to see how their contributions lead to improved infrastructure, education, or health services.

Final Recommendations for Strengthening Participatory Governance in Armenia

1. Start with Local, Tangible Initiatives

- **Utilize Local Identity:** Identify and promote local cultural, agricultural, or artisanal products (e.g. traditional foods, crafts, festivals) as anchors for community engagement, as was done with *Krówka Opatowska* in Poland.
- **Apply the “5 Whys” Method:** Use this simple problem-analysis tool in community meetings to identify root causes of social passivity and co-create local solutions.

2. Implement Participatory Budgeting at the Community Level

- **Start with Pilot Projects:** Launch participatory budgeting pilots in selected rural municipalities (e.g. Gyulagarak, Tumanyan or Akhuryan), allowing citizens to propose and vote on small-scale community projects.
- **Ensure Expert Support:** Involve local NGOs, municipal staff, and youth leaders to support community members with proposal development and budget estimation.
- **Engage Youth through “Youth Budgets”:** Introduce participatory budgeting in high schools and youth centers to cultivate a culture of democratic involvement from an early age.

3. Strengthen Digital and Offline Communication Channels

- **Leverage Simple Digital Tools:**
 - Use *Google Forms* to collect community input.
 - Use *Doodle* or similar apps to organize informal community voting.
 - Use platforms like *Slack* or *Telegram groups* to coordinate discussions and ideas.
- **Mitigate Digital Exclusion:** Combine online tools with in-person facilitation (e.g. local coordinators helping fill forms or hosting digital literacy sessions in libraries and village halls).

4. Invest in Leadership and Capacity Building

- **Train Local Facilitators:** Identify and train local leaders, teachers, librarians, and active citizens as facilitators of civic initiatives.
- **Develop Civic Education Modules:** Integrate participatory governance into the curriculum of secondary schools, vocational colleges, and adult learning centers.
- **Create Mentorship Programs:** Connect rural activists and youth with experienced civil society leaders (including from the Armenian diaspora or abroad).

5. Improve Access to Funding for Civic Projects

- **Establish Local Micro-Grants:** Advocate for small-scale grant programs from regional governments or donor organizations (e.g. EU, UNDP, GIZ) to support civic initiatives proposed by communities.
- **Encourage Partnerships:** Facilitate cooperation between local governments, private sector actors (e.g. banks, food producers) and CSOs to co-fund community-driven projects.

6. Institutionalize Citizen Feedback Mechanisms

- **Use Public Consultations:** Before major decisions (e.g. infrastructure investments, cultural events), hold open consultation rounds to collect opinions.
- **Create Feedback Loops:** Share the results of citizen surveys, participatory budgeting, and public votes through community notice boards, local TV/radio, and social media.
- **Promote Transparency:** Regularly publish simple, visual summaries of municipal spending and project outcomes.

Conclusion

To overcome civic passivity and rebuild trust in governance, Armenia must invest in **community-driven solutions** that are **low-cost, inclusive and rooted in local realities**. The Polish experience shows that even in resource-limited, post-Soviet contexts, sustainable participatory governance is achievable through **tools that build confidence, skills, and shared ownership** among citizens.

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Strengthening Participatory Governance in Armenia: Lessons from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia

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Summary

This report presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of participatory governance practices in three Visegrád countries—Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia—and offers tailored recommendations for the Republic of Armenia. Developed within the framework of the “Fostering Participatory Rural Governance (RA): Cross-Border Perspective through V4 Experience Exchange” project, the study aims to consolidate key findings from the V4 region, synthesize lessons learned, and contextualize them within Armenia’s evolving governance landscape, particularly following the post-2021 administrative and local governance reforms.

The core objective of this report is to improve the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and institutionalization of participatory governance mechanisms in Armenia by leveraging relevant international experiences while taking into account local socio-economic and political conditions. The report is grounded in a structured analysis of participatory tools such as participatory budgeting (PB), digital engagement platforms, legal frameworks, civic consultations and national coordination mechanisms for civic participation.

Key Findings from the Visegrád Region

- **Czech Republic** has demonstrated robust municipal-level PB models, strong civil society engagement, and multi-phase participatory design, particularly in urban planning and strategic decision-making. Participatory tools are supported by digital infrastructure and transparency laws.
- **Poland** has institutionalized PB at the national level, mandating its implementation in all cities with county rights. Additionally, national networks of PB practitioners, dedicated funding streams, and legal mandates have elevated civic input in local and regional decision-making.
- **Slovakia** has pioneered innovative models in civic dialogue and co-creation, including strong inter-municipal cooperation and participatory

offices within city halls. Notable practices include Bratislava’s co-governance models and multi-stakeholder forums for urban development, supported by donor-funded initiatives.

Contextual Analysis for Armenia

The analysis shows that Armenia has taken foundational steps toward participatory governance, particularly after its administrative territorial reform and the launch of PB pilots in 21 communities by 2025. Legal and policy frameworks exist for citizen engagement, such as the Law on Local Self-Government and the use of platforms like e-draft.am. However, participatory practices remain fragmented and underutilized in practice. A recent study on the **Participatory Governance Index (2023)** shows that ministries in Armenia score low on cooperation and active involvement stages of policymaking. Furthermore, digital tools for participation are limited in scope and reach, particularly in rural or newly amalgamated communities.

Research also highlights the critical need for more inclusive and accessible participation—especially for people with disabilities, national minorities, and marginalized groups. A promising institutional development is the recent creation of a **Participatory and Open Government Department** under the Office of the Prime Minister in December 2024, tasked with coordinating participatory strategies, methodologies, and state-CSO collaboration.

Another notable finding is the digital gap in community participation. A recent study (Mkhitarian, 2024) calls for a unified mobile application for all communities to enhance public awareness, reduce bureaucracy, and enable residents to engage in consultations, voting, and direct communication with local governments.

Comparative Insights and Lessons

Across the three Visegrád countries, the study identifies key enablers of effective participatory governance:

- Legal mandates and procedural clarity
- Institutional coordination and capacity support
- Digital innovation and transparency mechanisms
- Multi-stage participatory design including project formulation, co-design, and feedback
- National and local networks of participation actors (both government and CSOs)

Armenia has initiated important reforms, but gaps remain in institutional ownership, enforcement of participatory mandates, digital tool integration, and inclusive outreach. The comparison demonstrates that merely establishing mechanisms is insufficient—systematic facilitation, community engagement, feedback loops, and ongoing learning are vital to ensure meaningful participation.

Policy Recommendations

To address identified challenges, the report offers practical and strategic recommendations, such as:

1. **Strengthen the new Participatory and Open Government Department** through cross-ministerial coordination, capacity-building, and CSO partnerships.
2. **Scale and improve Participatory Budgeting**, including co-design phases and project formulation with citizen input.
3. **Enhance legal decentralization**, giving amalgamated communities clearer mandates and resources for civic engagement.
4. **Develop a national participation platform or mobile app**, accessible to all communities, with clear standards for digital engagement.
5. **Support institutional learning and data-driven monitoring** of participation quality across ministries and municipalities.

These recommendations are structured into short-term and long-term strategies and are designed to foster a more transparent, inclusive and responsive governance culture in Armenia.

1. COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: CROSS-COUNTRY VIEWS ON PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

Participatory governance emerged as an appealing model of supporting transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness in democratic regimes. Comparative examination of the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Armenia highlights shared aspirations as well as varying degrees of institutional maturity, civic capacity, and legal flexibility in the implementation of participatory instruments and mechanisms.

Strengths Across Contexts

Legal and Institutional Foundations

The Czech Republic and Slovakia have both established solid legal systems that explicitly support participatory government, including decentralization statutes, Freedom of Information Acts, and codified anti-corruption policy. These frameworks empower municipalities and embed participatory practices as standard operating procedure in law. Although Armenia has begun to bring its legal system into conformity with these policies through Electoral Code reforms and decentralization policy, it still lacks superordinate legislation that institutionalizes participatory mechanisms (e.g., participatory budgeting, CSO co-governance councils).

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a shared asset across both the Czech and Slovak cases, where city governments like Brno and Bratislava have institutionalized and matured PB procedures. These projects have matured over time, featuring participatory committees, thematic budgeting topics, and multi-stage project cycles. Armenia has experimented with PB in single municipalities since 2023, but practice is still in its infancy. Perhaps surprisingly, Armenia often bypasses the project design and co-design with citizens step, a critical stage that ensures high-quality participation and participation outcomes.

Digital Tools and Open Governance

The Czech Republic and Slovakia have invested in online platforms that promote citizen interaction with public institutions, including mobile apps for reporting infrastructure, open data portals, and digital feedback tools. The new technologies lower the bar of participation and enhance transparency. Armenia has made impressive progress with portals like e-draft.am, but integration between sectors and municipalities remains uneven, particularly in rural and geographically distant locations.

Youth and Civil Society Engagement

Both EU countries report significant numbers of youth and CSO involvement in decision-making. The Czech UN Youth Delegate framework and Slovakian youth parliaments are two models of institutionalized participation. Armenia boasts increasingly dynamic youth and CSO involvement since 2018

but has feeble mechanisms for long-term policy influence and which are in large part donor-generated rather than state-mandated.

Local-Level Decentralization

The three countries all acknowledge the importance of enabling the municipality. Czech Republic and Slovakia have had a long history of multi-level decentralization with relatively independent municipalities, while Armenia's territorial-administrative consolidation (2021) is recent and has created larger communities. However, these generally lack fiscal autonomy, professional skills, or the participatory planning frameworks to convert participatory mechanisms effectively.

The Most Important Challenges Identified

Deficits in National Institutions Trust

Despite local innovations, Czech Republic and Slovakia continue to experience citizen mistrust in national institutions of government. The case is the same for Armenia, compounded by political instability and weak ethical control at the upper levels of governance. The resultant trust gap discourages citizen incentive for participation and emphasizes the importance of closing local innovations with national credibility.

Implementation Disparities

A chronic problem in nations is unequal territorial distribution of participatory instruments. Urban centers are disproportionately advantaged, while rural or peripheral groups suffer from weaker enforcement. This is especially prevalent in Armenia and parts of Slovakia, where smaller municipalities barely possess the budgets or qualified personnel to undertake inclusive processes.\

Tokenism vs. Meaningful Participation

There is a risk that participatory processes can become symbolic, not substantive—employed as legitimating instruments for pre-ordained choices. The criticism is generalizable to all three nations, but it also highlights the necessity that mechanisms address concerns involving feedback loops, transparency of choices, and incorporation of citizen contributions in final solutions.

Capacity Constraints

In all contexts, there is a demonstrated necessity to invest in civic education among the general public, particularly youth and marginalized groups, as well as capacity development for local governments. Without adequate training and sensitization, participatory tools can experience low usage or poor-quality implementation.

Shared Lessons and Ways Forward

- *Institutionalization Matters*: Legalizing participatory arrangements (e.g., PB, public consultations, councils of civil society) guarantees sustainability over political cycles or donor programs.
- *Start Local, Scale Smart*: Pilot inclusive instruments in medium-sized towns first, like in Czech Republic and Slovakia, to offer a practical template for Armenia to learn and scale mechanisms before scaling up countrywide.
- *Design for Inclusion*: Special focus should be given to involving youth, rural dwellers, and marginal groups. Multi-stage PB design—more so involving project conception—can boost participation.
- *Transparency as a Pillar*: Online platforms must be coupled with mechanisms for accountability. Disclosure of project status, consultation outcomes, and assessment data increase public trust.
- *Engagement with Civil Society*: Governments should seek to actively involve CSOs not just as implementers but as co-designers of governance, integrating them into decision-making forums and public oversight roles.

This comparative review underscores that while Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia have developed, institutionalized participatory frameworks, Armenia is just beginning to adopt and borrow these phenomena. While borrowing from regional neighbors, combined with ongoing political will and civic capacity investment, can place Armenia as a regional democratic innovation and inclusive governance leader.

2. COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: OPPORTUNITIES AND HURDLES IN PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN V4 COUNTRIES

The experiences of the V4 countries provide lessons in participatory governance models to be taken on board and localized by Armenia. Practicing unique traditions of practices, institutional designs, and innovations, each one of the V4 country's participatory governance is influenced by its democratic transition, EU membership, and local government tradition.

Legal and Institutional Foundations

The three Visegrád countries all demonstrate the potency of robust legal and institutional arrangements as the base for successful participatory governance. The Czech Republic's well-developed legislative framework—grounded in decentralization reforms, freedom of information laws, and anti-corruption initiatives—has provided the structural foundation for openness and local participation. Similarly, Slovakia has integrated participatory mechanisms into broader decentralization reforms and local development strategies, although consistency in implementation varies by region. Poland, by means of its system of decentralization and law of civil society, has promoted one of the most vibrant civic environments in Central Europe, characterized by rather highly autonomous municipalities and citizen participation in local decision-making.

In contrast, institutional development in Armenia is still in infancy. While there has been adoption of reforms (e.g., decentralization, consolidation at the community level), participatory mechanisms remain to advance from pilot or non-formal levels. Armenia would benefit from enforcing legal requirements and institutionalizing participatory processes at the local government level, especially following territorial and governance reform.

Participatory Budgeting

Inclusive government's common denominator in all three V4 countries is participatory budgeting (PB). PB in Poland is legislatively required for large cities and is also used as a common instrument of civic engagement. Cities actively involve citizens in project proposal, voting, and implementation phases. The Czech Republic, while not legislatively enforced, has effectively implemented PB in cities like Brno and Ostrava with transparent application and community ownership. Slovakia has also tried out PB models, particularly at the

local municipalities like Bratislava, where CSOs and the local authorities collaborate to uphold process integrity.

Armenia began testing participatory budgeting in different municipalities. However, the process doesn't reach the project development and co-design stage, lessening the level of citizen ownership and transparency. V4 experiences show that successful PB requires establishment of all phases—needs assessment, proposal building, voting, execution, and feedback. Armenia must include PB in municipal legislation and ensure local authorities are trained to hold participatory cycles on a regular basis, including monitoring and evaluation tools.

Digital Engagement and Transparency Tools

The V4 countries are making extensive use of digital platforms to facilitate participatory government. The Czech Republic has made remarkable advancements in digital citizen participation through e-consultation technologies, crowdsourced mapping, and open data. Slovakia is making use of digital platforms for municipal communication and the collection of opinions, even if rural regions remain behind in terms of digital inclusion. Poland uses ICT tools for participatory planning and e-democracy, which are usually supplemented by NGOs and civic tech communities.

Armenia has initiated sites like e-draft.am, e-request.am and budget monitoring systems. Nevertheless, their connectivity and usability remain limited, especially in rural pockets. The V4 can show Armenia how to upscale and localize digital tools to better engage citizens and local authorities. Multilingual and mobile-enabled platforms can optimize accessibility

Role of Civil Society and Community-Based Actors

In all three V4 states, CSOs have also had a significant role in organizing participatory governance. The high presence of NGOs in Poland has led to community-driven initiatives, monitoring mechanisms, and activism. In the Czech Republic, CSOs engage in participatory planning and anti-corruption efforts. Participatory practice in Slovakia also tends to rely on CSO facilitation of capacity building and mobilization of citizens.

Civil society is developing in Armenia but largely without secure funding and institutionalized access to government decision-making. More cooperation between CSOs and local government—through grants, formal collaborations,

and joint activities—can enhance civic participation and service provision. Armenia also needs to encourage the role of informal leaders and community groups, particularly in newly consolidated areas.

Youth Engagement and Democratic Culture

Young people's engagement is prioritized in the Czech Republic, where mechanisms of organized dialogue and youth councils provide for early civic engagement. Youth-focused initiatives are also implemented in Slovakia and Poland, in particular under EU-financed programs and city platforms.

Armenia has expanded youth participation, yet participation is uneven. Rollout of well-designed youth participation schemes from the V4, such as youth advisory boards or school participatory simulations, can contribute to long-term democratic culture and build future local leaders.

Common Challenges and Adaptive Lessons

Although V4 member states present strong examples, they share common challenges:

- *Disproportionate application:* Rural and small-town areas in Czech Republic and Slovakia have limited capacity to maintain participatory mechanisms.
- *Funding and sustainability:* Politically reliant or donor-financed participatory initiatives at times take place.
- *Trust deficits:* Institutional change is insufficient; at the national level, trust is low, particularly in Czech Republic, and emphasizes the necessity of ethical political conduct.
- *Risks of exclusion:* Poor individuals and minorities are often underrepresented in participatory activities.

These are challenges for Armenia as well, where limited local capacities, financial constraints, and authoritarian traditions limit deeper engagement. However, the V4 model ensures that dedicated investment in parliamentary frameworks, civil society support, institutional capacity building, and information technology enhances participatory democracy.

Strengths and Challenges in Participatory Governance Across V4 Countries

The experiences of the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, and Poland provide a diverse yet complementary set of lessons in participatory governance. Each country demonstrates how participatory instruments—such as participatory budgeting, digital engagement, and structured civic participation—can be institutionalized, scaled, and sustained in the context of post-communist transformation, decentralization, and European integration.

These cases also highlight shared challenges: uneven implementation across municipalities, gaps in citizen trust (especially at the national level), limited outreach to marginalized groups, and fluctuating political will. Despite these obstacles, all three countries have made strides in embedding participatory mechanisms into law and practice, particularly at the local level.

In contrast, Armenia is in the early stages of institutionalizing participatory governance. While the country has made notable efforts in decentralization and digital governance, many participatory tools are still fragmented or underutilized. Insights from the V4 countries can help Armenia design inclusive, transparent, and context-sensitive participatory governance systems that build trust and empower communities.

To better visualize and compare these insights, the table in the Appendix 1 presents a structured comparative analysis of key participatory governance factors across the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, and Poland, with reference to the Armenian context.

This cross-country comparative analysis underscores the importance of a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to participatory governance. Armenia’s ongoing reforms provide an opportune moment to draw on V4 lessons and establish mechanisms that are not only inclusive and democratic but also adapted to local needs and capacities.

3. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS FOR ARMENIA

Socio-Economic Background

Armenia continues to grapple with severe socio-economic problems that predominantly affect rural communities. They are typified by the absence of employment, under-development of infrastructure, and extensive rural out-migration to cities or abroad. The demographic hemorrhage and deepening socio-economic differentials between Yerevan and the rest of Armenia

complicate community cohesion and development at sub-national levels. In this respect, participatory governance is emerging as an important tool for guaranteeing inclusive decision-making, improving public service provision, and reclaiming citizen trust in the machinery of the government.

Political and Institutional Framework

Armenia is a parliamentary republic with a centralized political system. Over the past decade, extensive decentralization reforms have been undertaken to ensure more effective and efficient local self-government. Most importantly, the amalgamation reform (2016–2021) merged the communities from over 800 to 79 through mergers, which increased the scope of administrative reach and mandate of the local governments. But this mergers and acquisitions were not followed by a corresponding extension of financial, legal, and participatory capacity at the local level.

Armenian Government has put in place a range of policy frameworks to support democratic governance, such as the 2022–2025 Public Administration Reform Strategy and Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plans. The frameworks have formed the basis for increased transparency and accountability, such as the use of online platforms like e-draft.am, e-request.am, and the conduct of public hearings. Despite this, effective operation in practice remains unequal and mechanisms often lack institutional follow-through and engaged citizen participation.

Some participatory mechanisms are institutionalized, but actual and meaningful implementation remains constrained. Many operate more as rituals than as tools of real civic engagement. Enhanced legal mandates, better regulatory structures, and institutional capacity building are essential to convert symbolic mechanisms into real channels of participation.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) and Institutional Engagement Mechanisms

Armenia has progressed by enacting participatory budgeting as law and piloting it in four municipalities in 2023. The initiative was expanded to 21 municipalities in 2025 with the support of a national fund of AMD 1 billion. Although this growth is welcome, the process tends to start at the voting point, with insufficient public engagement during the project development and co-design processes, both of which are critical to ownership and legitimacy.

Strengthening these initial phases would both increase the quality of chosen projects and contribute to greater public satisfaction with the process.

Concurrently, institutionalized mechanisms for engagement like public hearings and councils are legally required but are plagued by very poor turnout and minimal effect on decisions. Surveys of local experts provide evidence that citizens tend to view them as ineffective; among the arguments given is restricted follow-up and lack of openness.

Insights from Participatory Governance Index

According to the 2024 study, "The Participatory Governance Index in the Development and Implementation of the Policy of RA State Administration Bodies," overall participatory process among ministries is weak. The participatory score range is from 0% to 46%, and the highest score is that of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Ministries generally only meet the minimum legal standards of providing information and fail to take seriously incorporating public input in policy design, implementation, or effectiveness evaluation.

The study also finds that most participatory processes are not inclusive: hardly any ministries are made accessible to include people with disabilities or national minorities, and accessibility mechanisms such as the use of sign language interpretation or audiosupport are seldom utilized. The report stresses, however, the requirement for systemic change and recommends institutionalizing participatory techniques in all four steps of the policy cycle—priority-setting, formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

Digital Tools and Innovation

Armenian e-governance solutions are not used yet. Services such as e-draft.am provide opportunities for engagement but are late entry points in the process once key decisions have already been made. In response, new proposals have appeared to further involve digital tools in enabling local participation.

The 2024 "The Role of Digital Solutions Facilitating Public Participation in Amalgamated Communities of the Republic of Armenia" report outlines the need for mobile applications to bridge the gap between residents and the municipality. The proposed "COMMUNITY" application would allow citizens to make complaints, track municipal services, receive personalized messages,

vote on matters of community concern, and provide real-time feedback. This would help address the issue of participation in larger consolidated communities where interpersonal contact has worsened.

Nevertheless, as the report underscores, there is not a single one of Armenia's 71 consolidated municipalities that possesses a department for promoting participatory governance or strategies and personnel to support e-participation. Without institutional support, even the most advanced tools are likely to become redundant.

Obstacles to Participation

Underlying to civic participation are a lack of knowledge, distrust of government responsiveness, and low digital literacy. Scheduled public hearings are weakly attended beyond Yerevan, and citizen interest is usually confined to matters of individual rather than community interest. Citizen input is seldom taken into account in decisions or practices made final, and this diminishes trust in the participatory process even further.

The Participatory Governance Index also demonstrates that legal systems do not go the extra mile to foster active participation. While consolidation has increased the number and potential of municipalities, their public participation roles in law have not kept pace. More authority to operate and greater areas of responsibility for participatory planning and implementation are overdue.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ARMENIA:

INCLUSIVE AND INSTITUTIONALIZED PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

1. Strengthen Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Participation

1.1. Establish Effective Enforcement of Existing Mechanisms

Although a number of participatory instruments have already been institutionalized in Armenia, such as public councils, e-draft.am for consultations, and participatory budgeting in over 20 municipalities, they are often compromised by low functionality and citizen engagement. There is a need to develop the operational effectiveness of these instruments through improved operating mechanisms, regulatory certainty, and oversight.

1.2. Enhance Legal Decentralization and Local Autonomy

Against the backdrop of reforms in territorial and administrative consolidation, Armenia will need to fortify newly expanded communities with wider mandates. The experience of the Slovaks and the Poles can teach Armenia to:

- ✓ Amend legal systems to detail and broaden the authority and responsibilities of local self-governments.
- ✓ Enshrine participatory rights and procedures at the municipal level and make sure legal participation duties (e.g., consultations, hearings, PB) are in force.
- ✓ Apply frameworks for inter-municipal cooperation and mutual delivery of services.

2. Enhance Participatory Budgeting (PB) as a Flagship Model

2.1. Improve Project Formulation and Co-Design Processes

Although PB is legal and pilot-tested in Armenia (through the 2023–2025 program), it can be further significantly enhanced. Most municipalities are faced with project identification, citizen co-design, and open voting transparency. Armenia must:

- ✓ Set national PB guidelines aiming for inclusive project formulation, co-design workshops, and post-implementation feedback.
- ✓ Facilitate peer learning with and between cities and with Visegrád countries (like Poland's PB structures).
- ✓ Ensure budget transparency and regular publication of PB results and implementation progress.

2.2. Institutionalize and Scale Up PB to all Consolidated Communities

While the Czech Republic harmonizes its PB with strategic planning, Armenia needs to harmonize PB with municipal development plans and community budgets. MTAI and MoF can work together to expand PB across the country, incrementally scaling up.

3. Build Inclusive and Responsive Civic Engagement

3.1. Scale Up the Participatory Ecosystem Beyond CSOs

While civil society in Armenia has matured, involvement remains confined to a limited circle of NGOs. Adopting the template from Slovakia's citizen assemblies and Poland's civic dialogue centers, Armenia should:

- ✓ Expand outreach to rural, marginalized, and minority segments through online and offline channels.

- ✓ Extend more community representation on local councils and consultative forums.
- ✓ Provide assistance and capacity-building to informal groups, youth councils, and grass-roots organizations.

3.2. Conduct Citizen Assemblies and Deliberative Forums

To ensure maximum deep and reflective participation, Armenia needs to try out deliberative methods such as citizen assemblies, participatory foresight, and thematic roundtables—especially on controversial or complex subjects like city planning, climate change, or public health. These mechanisms, well employed in the Czech and Slovak context, can be supported by universities and think tanks.

4. Build Capacity and Participation Culture within Public Administration

4.1. Incorporate Participatory Competencies into Civil Service

As identified in the OECD 2024 assessment, Armenian public officials are generally lacking in skills and motivation to act effectively with stakeholders. The Academy of Public Administration and Civil Service Office need to:

- ✓ Include participation and co-creation into civil service competency frameworks.
- ✓ Make compulsory training in inclusive consultation, digital tools, and participatory techniques.
- ✓ Reward innovation and participatory excellence through HR policies.

4.2. Operationalize the Participatory and Open Government Department as a National Coordination Unit for Participation and Innovation

In December 2024, the Armenian Government took a pivotal step toward institutionalizing participatory governance by establishing the Department on Participatory and Open Government within the Office of the Prime Minister. This development addresses long-standing concerns raised in successive CSO Meter Armenia reports, which consistently highlighted Armenia’s lack of a coherent state strategy for civil society development and the absence of structured cooperation mechanisms between the state and civil society. In fact, the "State-CSO Cooperation" domain has ranked lowest among the 11 assessed areas in Armenia since 2019.

The creation of this department responds directly to Armenia’s commitments under the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Strategy 2023–

2025 and the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plan (2022–2024). Its core responsibilities include developing methodologies and standards for participatory governance across government bodies; monitoring and evaluating participatory processes in policymaking, leading the development and implementation of Armenia’s open governance programs, supporting CSOs and facilitating state-CSO dialogue.

To ensure the department fulfills its mandate effectively, it should be developed into a functional national coordination unit modeled after best practices from Slovakia and Poland, where central bodies oversee and promote participatory governance across all levels of government.

Key recommendations for the department’s strategic operationalization include:

- *Establishing a network of participation focal points in ministries and municipalities to coordinate participatory initiatives and ensure coherent standards and practices across government.*
- *Supporting and auditing digital participation platforms (e.g., e-draft.am, e-request.am) by setting usability, accessibility, and feedback loop standards to ensure inclusivity and responsiveness.*
- *Facilitating systematic CSO engagement by mapping relevant organizations by policy area, organizing joint forums, and serving as a liaison to resolve cases of limited ministerial responsiveness or lack of CSO access.*
- *Developing a national methodology on participatory governance for use by all state institutions, with guidance on consultation formats, stakeholder mapping, feedback integration, and impact monitoring.*
- *Hosting annual forums or open governance summits to review progress, foster innovation, and share cross-sector best practices between state bodies and civil society actors.*

This department should not only serve as a technical coordination unit but also as a symbol of Armenia’s commitment to participatory democracy, open governance, and meaningful civic engagement. Its success will depend on sustained political will, transparent procedures, and continuous collaboration with both national and local CSOs.

Ultimately, this coordination mechanism has the potential to embed participation into the policy cycle, support strategic partnerships with civil society, and contribute to a more trusted, inclusive, and accountable governance system in Armenia.

5. Leverage Digital Technologies and Innovations for Broader Engagement

5.1. Improve Usability and Efficiency of e-Participation Platforms

Armenia's e-draft.am and e-request websites are a good idea but not being utilized effectively. Learning from the Czech Republic's online consultation portals and Slovakia's participatory geo-mapping websites:

- Redesign interfaces to be accessible and mobile-based.
- Install user feedback loops showing how feedback informed policy.
- Translate content into minority languages and add AI chatbots for better navigation.

5.2. Maximizing Data Use for Participatory Monitoring and Decision-Making

Open data integration can help digital governance in Armenia with evidence-based policy implementation. The Information Systems Agency should develop data dashboards, such as those in Poland and Czechia, enabling communities to track service delivery, local government budgets, and participatory processes in real time.

6. Institutionalize Monitoring and Evaluation of Participation

6.1. Develop a Framework for Impact Evaluation

Armenia lacks systematic data on the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms. As a measure of progress and performance, there should be a national M&E system, with the following indicators:

- Number and diversity of participants.
- Impact on decisions.
- Indicators of satisfaction and trust.

6.2. Engage Citizens in Oversight

As a best practice example from Poland and Slovakia, Armenia must institutionalize municipal-level participatory monitoring councils. These will be able to scrutinize budget implementation, PB implementation, and social service delivery through the application of citizen scorecards and community audits.

7. Develop a National Policy and Legal Framework for Civil Society Development

While recent progress has been made in institutionalizing participatory governance—such as establishing the Participatory and Open Government Department in the Prime Minister's Office—Armenia still lacks a comprehensive state strategy for civil society development, as highlighted in several CSO Meter assessments and the TIAC 2023 policy review. To fill this

gap and create an enabling environment for civil society engagement in public life, Armenia should prioritize the adoption of a National Policy on Civil Society Development with the following aims:

- *Define the government’s vision, priorities, and commitments for enabling civic space and structured cooperation with CSOs;*
- *Address legal, institutional, and financial mechanisms for supporting CSO sustainability, participation, and accountability;*
- *Establish a transparent and participatory process for drafting and monitoring the strategy in close collaboration with CSOs;*
- *Align with international standards and best practices by referencing models from countries with well-functioning state-CSO cooperation frameworks (e.g., Slovakia);*
- *Ensure integration with the Public Administration Reform Strategy and the new Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plan (2025+).*

A state-endorsed strategy will provide a consistent basis for long-term collaboration with civil society, enabling co-creation in policy-making, service delivery, and community development at both national and local levels.

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Appendix 1.

| Governance Factor | Czech Republic | Slovak Republic | Poland | Lessons/Implications for Armenia |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| Legal Framework | Decentralization laws, anti-corruption strategy, CSO development strategy | Legal decentralization with regional development focus | Strong local self-governance with legal mandate for civic participation | Certain participatory mechanisms are already institutionalized in Armenia. However, there is a critical need to ensure their effective and meaningful operation through improved regulation, oversight, and capacity-building. Although community consolidation has been completed, there remains a pressing need to strengthen legal decentralization, expand the scope of community responsibilities, and develop a more robust legal mandate that facilitates and safeguards civic participation |
| Participatory Budgeting (PB) | Widely practiced; voluntary at municipal level; full-cycle PB with citizen input | Piloted in large cities (e.g. Bratislava); often supported by CSOs | Legally mandated in large cities; structured PB with clear phases | Participatory budgeting (PB) has been legalized and piloted in 21 communities in Armenia as of 2025. To further enhance its effectiveness and impact, it is important to improve the mechanisms of PB—especially by strengthening the project formulation and co-design phases. Emphasizing inclusive planning and community-driven proposal development will ensure that PB initiatives are more responsive, transparent, and trusted by citizens. |
| Digital Tools for Participation | Strong digital tools; OGP-supported | Basic e-consultation and municipal | Integrated e-democracy tools | Develop multilingual, accessible digital platforms; improve e-literacy and outreach in consolidated communities |

| Governance Factor | Czech Republic | Slovak Republic | Poland | Lessons/Implications for Armenia |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| | platforms; mobile apps (e.g. Ostrava) | portals; uneven use in rural areas | and open budget platforms | |
| Civil Society Engagement | Active CSOs engaged in planning and monitoring; supported by national strategy | CSOs collaborate in participatory budgeting and public consultations | Strong NGO presence; civic education and watchdog roles | Build long-term partnerships with CSOs; ensure sustained funding and inclusion in decision-making |
| Youth Participation | Structured Dialogue, youth delegates to UN, youth parliaments | Youth councils and local youth forums supported by EU programs | Youth participation embedded in local policies, often supported by NGOs | Institutionalize youth councils and participatory education in schools and local governance structures |
| Public Trust | High trust in local institutions, low at national level; ethical standards lacking | Similar gap between local and national trust levels | Relatively higher trust in local governments, but concerns at national level | Promote ethical codes for elected officials; prioritize transparency to rebuild trust in all levels of government |
| Equity and Inclusion | Risk of marginalizing smaller CSOs and rural communities | Capacity gaps in smaller towns and peripheral regions | Risk of urban-rural divide in PB and digital tools | Ensure rural outreach and inclusive formats; tailor engagement methods to vulnerable and underrepresented communities |



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