



RECOMMENDATIONS

ON

**PROMOTING POLITICAL AND CIVIC RIGHTS OF PEOPLE
WITH DISABILITIES IN SHIRAK MARZ**



December 2021



The aim of presenting these recommendations is to contribute to the exercise of political and civic rights by people with disabilities in Shirak Marz and to promote their participation in electoral processes

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Introduction

This document was developed and agreed upon by “Agate” Rights Defense Center for Women with Disabilities non-governmental organization and 30 persons from different groups of people with disabilities in Shirak Marz. Serving as a basis for this document is also the assessment of polling stations carried out by “Agate” NGO in 2020. The recommendations are addressed to Shirak Governor’s Office, local self-government bodies of Shirak Marz, and Gyumri municipality and are aimed to promote political and civil participation of people with disabilities and to make their communities and processes more inclusive and accessible.

Justifications

According to the data provided by the RA Ministry of Labor and Social Issues in 2020, there are 191 827 people with disabilities registered in Armenia, which makes up 6.5% of the population of the Republic of Armenia. Shirak Marz has the highest number of people with disabilities registered in the Republic of Armenia – 18 730 persons. People with disabilities have to confront numerous obstacles and challenges when exercising their educational, political, and civic rights and participation. There are only 524 partially accessible polling stations in the Republic of Armenia.

“Agate” Rights Defense Center for Women with Disabilities non-governmental organization attaches great importance to the role of Shirak Governor’s Office, Gyumri municipality and local self-government bodies of the marz (province) in the processes aimed at promoting political and civil participation of people with disabilities. Facilitation of the exercise of the electoral right of people with disabilities will allow promoting inclusiveness also in the areas of education, science, culture, sport, etc.

People with disabilities cannot exercise their voting right in an unimpeded way, cannot participate in all stages of electoral processes on equal footing with people without disability as candidates, commission members, observers, authorized representatives or voters.

In 2020, “Agate” NGO, within the framework of the project “Accessibility and Political Inclusion,” carried out comprehensive research on the accessibility of polling stations in the entire territory of the Republic of Armenia and it became clear that the greater part of the polling stations are inaccessible or partially accessible. Based on the results of the conducted research, our organization is implementing different programs and cooperating with relevant public bodies to address the existing problems and make Armenia more inclusive and accessible.

“Agate” non-governmental organization attaches importance to the role of local self-government bodies of Shirak Marz in the process of promoting exercise of rights by people with disabilities and has come up with these recommendations. We are hopeful that our recommendations will serve as a basis for positive changes in your communities and will be included into your annual programs and promptly addressed.

Recommendations

- To take into consideration the principle of accessibility and inclusiveness when planning and allocating sums from the community budget for community development.
- To be guided by the RA Law “On the Rights of People with Disabilities” adopted by the RA National Assembly on May 5, 2021 and ensure the exercise of their rights by people with disabilities, including political rights.
- To ensure the organization and conduct of voting for different groups of people with disabilities by providing accessible buildings.
- To take into account the problem of accessibility for different groups of people with disabilities when acquiring inter-community and urban public transportation means.
- To present mandatory requirements of accessibility, security, information provision, and convenience for people with disabilities when making a decision on renovation of buildings/structures serving as polling stations and carry out oversight.
- To secure the requirements of accessibility and safety for people with disabilities in the area of service provision and construction works carried out in the communities.
- To develop a plan on ensuring accessibility, information provision, security, and convenience for people with disabilities at each polling station.
- To select a parking lot in advance and attach guiding signs.
- To develop a timetable and each year plan in the annual community budget allocations for building ramps in buildings with staircases, which serve as polling stations.
- To attach the sign of the international symbol of people with disabilities in those polling stations, which meet the accessibility requirements.
- To assign special accessible places at stops for people with disabilities and attach the international symbol.
- To ensure quality inclusive education.

Creation of accessible environment at educational and cultural institutions (schools, kindergartens, TVETs, musical and art schools, culture houses, etc.) serving as polling stations promotes not only political participation of people with disabilities, but also accessible and quality inclusive education of people and their full involvement in public and cultural life.

The policy paper has been prepared based on the reports of the “Assessment of the Accessibility of Polling Stations in the Republic of Armenia” and assessment of accessibility of polling stations in Shirak Marz.