UNDP

Abridged version

Building inclusive democracies

A guide to strengthening the participation of LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral processes

This document is an abridged version of a longer and more
detailed publication also released in November 2023:
**'Building inclusive democracies: A guide to strengthening
the participation of LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral
processes'**. The abridged version is structured similarly
and includes many of the best practice examples and basic
analysis grouped by different important stakeholders in LGBTI+
engagement. A list of suggested approaches and strategies
for increased LGBTI+ participation is associated with each
stakeholder group.

Extensive background and supportive information are available
in the main publication, including descriptions of and links
to many resources available online. Annexes in the main
publication provide an in-depth explanation of the methodology
for the overall research and a general assessment framework
on the participation of LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral
processes.

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Contents

Purpose of this guide

This abridged guide has a similar purpose to the more comprehensive version of 'Building inclusive democracies: A guide to strengthening the participation of LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral processes' prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Both documents aim to promote and ensure the participation and inclusion of LGBTI+ persons in all roles of those processes, including as voters, candidates, elected representatives, electoral administrators and activists.

This document includes selected examples from the larger guide of actions and strategies gathered from a wide range of stakeholders, including political leaders, political parties, electoral management bodies (EMBs), civil society organizations, legislators, the media, election observers and international electoral assistance practitioners. The examples featured come from more than 80 countries from all the world's regions, and especially from the Global South. They identify entry points for the greater participation of LGBTI+ persons throughout the electoral cycle and the wider political process and, more importantly, highlight the need to embrace sexual and gender diversity as a way to build stronger and more inclusive democracies.

In democratic systems, meaningful political participation is generally based on the free exercise of civil and political rights, including the rights to vote and to be elected; the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly; the right to participate in the formulation of government policy; equal access to public service at all levels of government; and the participation in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country. For their human rights to be respected, upheld and sustained, LGBTI+ persons and the organizations, groups and structures that support and speak for them should be able to exercise such rights wherever they live and at all times.

In both this abridged version and the more detailed one, 'Building inclusive democracies' seeks to inspire, strengthen, and empower a wide range of stakeholders as agents of change, with strategies and entry points for promoting the rights and participation of LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections. In doing so, political and electoral stakeholders can consult and join efforts with LGBTI+ activists, organizations and movements to identify participation gaps and design intervention strategies that match their needs and expectations. The approaches and considerations suggested by this guide are based on good practice, and its applicability will ultimately depend on the country context.

Introduction and overview

Introduction and overview

The right of LGBTI+ persons to participate meaningfully in political processes is rooted in the principle of non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other human rights instruments.

Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a legally binding international treaty, not only recognizes the right of all citizens to take part in the conduct of public affairs, but also "to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors", and "to have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country".

Also legally binding is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In its Article 7, the convention places a positive obligation on States party to the convention to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the exercise of the rights to vote, to be eligible and to hold public office at all levels of government. Furthermore, Article 4 of CEDAW encourages the use of special temporary measures. These CEDAW provisions protect all sorts of women, including lesbian, bisexual and trans women, as is borne out by General Recommendations No. 27 and 28 issued by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which highlight the intersectionality of discrimination faced by women and refer to sexual orientation and gender identity among the multiple dimensions of discrimination.

Non-discrimination provisions in core international human rights treaties ensure that everyone has the right to be free from discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex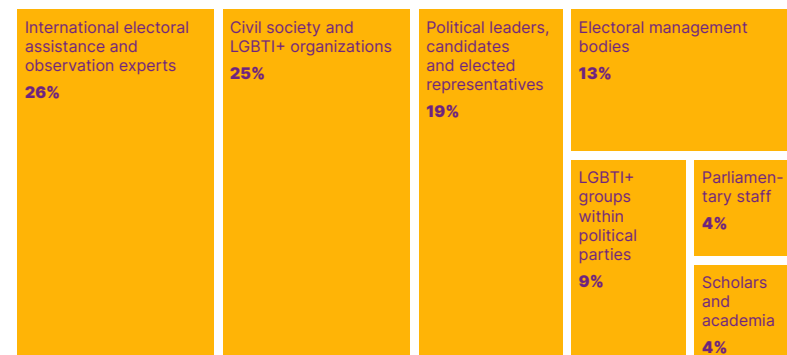 characteristics. Article 2 in both UDHR and ICCPR establishes the obligation for States party to respect and to ensure the human rights of all individuals "without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." Similarly, Article 7 of UDHR and Article 26 of ICCPR recognize the principle of equality before the law.

The United Nations (UN) treaty bodies have consistently shown in their jurisprudence, general comments and concluding observations that discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity is forbidden under international law. In Toonen v. Australia (1994), the UN Human Rights Committee concluded that reference to sex in Articles 2 and 26 of ICCPR must be interpreted as including sexual orientation. In Young v. Australia (2003) and X v. Colombia (2007), the committee stated that differences in treatment of pension benefits for same-sex partners were a violation of the right to be free from discrimination based on grounds of sexual orientation. In their general comments and concluding observations, several UN treaty bodies have also called attention to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and expressed concerns about human rights violations towards LGBTI+ persons.[1]
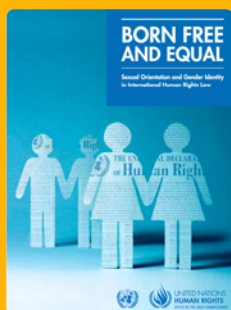
LGBTI+ persons are a heterogenous and extremely diverse group. Throughout this publication, there are references to a wide range of terms and concepts around gender and sexual diversity. The following glossary offers some definitions that can be useful for readers. It is important to recognize, however, that some of these definitions and many others related to the overall LGBTI+ community are not universally accepted, since terminology related to gender and sexuality differs among cultures and languages and evolves over time. Also, there is a growing recognition in many parts of the world that identities related to gender and sexuality are not fixed and immutable but rather should be understood as part of a spectrum, and thus at the individual level they may evolve over the course of a lifetime. In any case, it is important to consider the contextual dimension of language, approach LGBTI+ persons with respect and be open to the terms that they use to refer to themselves. While this abridged guide offers information about some concepts, a more detailed glossary can be found in the comprehensive version of 'Building inclusive democracies: A guide to strengthening the participation of LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral processes'.

Regarding the research methodology, three important approaches were used to gather information for this guide: desk research, written submissions and interviews. A total of 100 persons in 39 different countries were interviewed by the author in the period going from October 2019 to September 2020; they participated through 88 in-depth online interviews, of which 80 were with just one person (one on one) and eight were group interviews. The graphics below illustrate the distribution of interviewees by stakeholder and region.

Profile distribution of interviewees

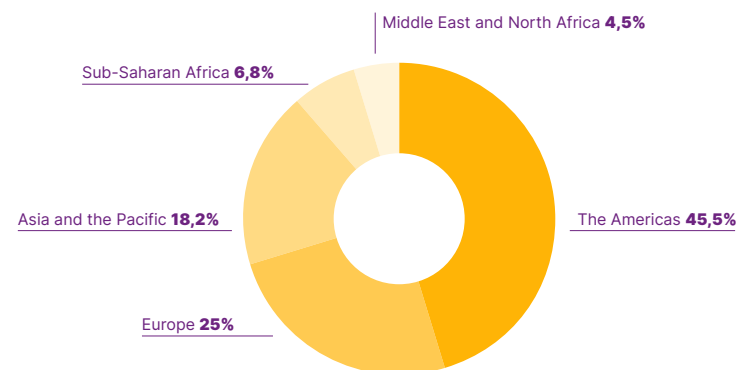| International electoral assistance and observation experts **26%**	Civil society and LGBTI+ organizations **25%**	Political leaders, candidates and elected representatives **19%**	Electoral management bodies **13%**	
			LGBTI+ groups within political parties **9%**	Parliamentary staff **4%**
				Scholars and academia **4%**

Key resource

In the publication 'Born free and equal: sexual orientation and gender identity in international human rights law', the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights establishes the source and scope of some of the State obligations to protect the human rights of LGBTI+ persons. This publication is designed as a tool to help States better understand the nature of their obligations and the steps required to fulfil them. It is equally addressed to civil society activists and human rights defenders seeking to hold governments accountable for human rights violations.

The full publication is available online.

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/BornFreeAndEqualLowRes.pdf

Regional distribution of the interviews

Middle East and North Africa **4,5%**

Sub-Saharan Africa **6,8%**

Asia and the Pacific **18,2%**

The Americas **45,5%**

Europe **25%**

Glossary on gender and sexual diversity

LGBTI+ stands for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex', with the plus sign used to denote inclusivity of other sexual and gender minority groups. This acronym generally refers to persons with diverse sex characteristics, gender identity or sexual orientation. There are several alternative acronyms, such as LGBTQIA+, which stands for gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual and other groups.

In general, a wide range of words have long been used in different cultures to refer to persons with diverse genders and sexualities, such as *hijra* (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan), *muxe* (Mexico), *travesti* (Argentina and Brazil), *meti* (Nepal), *fa'afafine* (Samoa), *fakaleiti* (Tonga), *kuchu* (Uganda), two spirit (North America), *skesana* (South Africa), *hamjensgara* (Iran) and *motsoalle* (Lesotho), among many others. These terms may have culturally specific meanings that differ from Western understandings of gender identity or sexual orientation.

When referring to specific cases or examples, this publication reproduces their own terminology, using the term referred by the source.

Lesbian refers to women sexually or romantically attracted to other women.

Gay refers to persons sexually or romantically attracted to other persons of their same gender. This term is often used to refer to homosexual men.

Bisexual, also known as **bi**, refers to persons sexually or romantically attracted to persons of more than one gender, but not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to an equal degree.

Trans, also known as **transgender**, is an umbrella term that refers to persons who identify with a different gender to the one assigned at birth. Different cultures use different terms to refer to persons with diverse gender identity.

Intersex refers to persons born with sex characteristics that do not match the typical definitions of male or female, such as sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal patterns and chromosomal structures.

As they seek to fulfil roles in electoral processes including as voters, candidates, political leaders, elected representatives, electoral administrators, activists and civil society members, LGBTI+ persons face barriers and obstacles that restrict and hinder the full exercise of their right to meaningfully participate in politics and elections. They often experience exclusion, lack of visibility, discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity and expression. Barriers to the political and electoral participation of LGBTI+ persons can be classified as structural, individual, organizational and violence-related, as shown in Table 1 below. From an intersectional perspective, LGBTI+ persons have a different experience of barriers in political and electoral processes depending on their gender, ethnicity, age, disability, migratory status and other characteristics.

Table 1. **Barriers to the political participation of LGBTI+ persons**

Structural	Organizational	Individual	Violence
Criminalization and persecution	Discrimination and exclusion from decision-making within parliaments, political parties, EMBs and other organizations	Ostracization from family and friends	Hate speech and incitement to violence in political processes, the media and the digital sphere
Social, economic and political exclusion		Internalized LGBTIphobia and lack of self-acceptance	
Social prejudice and discriminatory attitudes	Exclusion from party candidate lists	Fear to come out publicly	Physical, sexual and psychological violence against LGBTI+ candidates and elected representatives
Restrictive legal frameworks undermining human rights	Political parties provide less resources and fewer visibility opportunities for their own LGBTI+ candidates	Lack of information and knowledge about political processes	Harassment and violence within parliaments, political parties, EMBs and other organizations
Low political representation and lack of role models	Candidate and voter registration do not recognize gender identity and affirmed name of trans persons	Lack of access to economic resources and networks	Politically motivated violence, persecution and threats against LGBTI+ persons in the public space and the digital sphere
Stereotyped media coverage		Distrust in political institutions, EMBs and security forces	
Restrictions to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly	Voter disenfranchisement based on sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity or expression		
High cost of election campaign			

This table was developed based on information and perspectives from interviews conducted in the framework of this research.

1

LGBTI+ political leaders

1.
LGBTI+ political leaders

In recent years, openly LGBT leaders have become more visible and their representation in public office has increased around the world. Political representation of LGBTI+ persons in democratic institutions can contribute not only to the realization of their right to be elected, in line with Article 25 of ICCPR, but also to increasing visibility of their communities' realities, needs and interests and advancing their human rights through dialogue, public policy and law-making.

The growing participation of LGBTI+ persons in decision-making processes is part of a larger paradigm shift in political culture that places inclusion at the core of representation, contributing to extending citizenship rights to traditionally excluded groups and building more inclusive democracies.

The growing participation of LGBTI+ persons in politics is occurring alongside their increasing visibility as public figures. By showing to the world their sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity and expression, LGBTI+ leaders can express political identities and defy gender-based social norms and stereotypes. Giving visibility to gender and sexual diversity and ensuring a positive representation of LGBTI+ persons in decision-making positions can help to transform assumptions and therefore promote the meaningful participation in public life of the broad LGBTI+ community. Historically, visibility has been key to transform social attitudes and promote public acceptance of sexual and gender diversity. Nonetheless, LGBTI+ pioneers and frontrunners in the field of politics generally had to face enormous challenges, including backlash, violence, and rejection in many cases, and they paved the way for younger generations, opening the political space for other LGBTI+ leaders.

Although numeric representation of LGBTI+ persons in democratic institutions might not be sufficient by itself to ensure the adoption of progressive laws and policies in this area, evidence suggests that there is a strong link between the number of LGBT elected parliamentarians and the passing of key legislation for the recognition of the human rights of this group. In certain countries, LGBTI+ elected representatives have been able to effectively channel the priorities of their community throughout the political and legislative process, contributing to setting human rights agendas and achieving historical milestones in a number of areas, including decriminalization of same-sex relations, equality and non-discrimination legislation, legal recognition of gender identity, marriage equality, bodily integrity of intersex persons, expungement of homosexual convictions and the prohibition of the so-called conversion therapies, among many others. Straight and cisgender allies, especially in positions of political leadership, have also frequently played a key role in transforming mindsets, amplifying the voices of LGBTI+ persons and advancing their human rights in political and electoral processes.

Achievements and progress: examples of LGBTI+ political leaders and pioneers

⟶ In 2020 the parliament of **New Zealand** became the national legislature with the largest proportion of openly LGBTQ representatives ever recorded, at 11 percent. They contributed to the notable diversity of that session of the institution, in which 48.3 percent of parliamentarians were women, 20.8 percent were Maori (the Indigenous population), 9.2 percent were of Pacific descent and 1.7 percent were under 30 years of age.

⟶ As of January 2023, the parliament of the **United Kingdom** had 65 openly LGBT+ members of parliament (MPs) from five different parties.[2] It has been one of the legislatures with the highest number of openly LGBTI+ representatives worldwide in the past few decades.

⟶ In the **Netherlands**, Coos Huijsen came out as gay in 1976, becoming the first known openly gay member of a national legislature in the world.

⟶ In the **United States**, Harvey Milk won election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977, becoming the first openly gay elected official in California and one of the first in the country.

⟶ In **New Zealand**, Georgina Beyer was elected mayor of Caterton in 1995, becoming the world's first openly transgender mayor, and in 1999 she became the first openly transgender MP worldwide.

⟶ In **Iceland**, Jóhanna Sigurgardóttir, who became prime minister in 2009, was the world's first openly lesbian head of government.

⟶ In **Australia**, Tony Briffa became the world's first openly intersex mayor in 2011, when she took office in the City of Hobsons Bay, in Victoria.

⟶ In **South Africa**, Zackele Mbhele was elected to the national parliament in 2014, becoming the first openly gay black MP in Africa.

Recommendations for LGBTI+ political leaders seeking to increase the electoral participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons

1. Take all required security measures and precautions to ensure personal safety and be aware of reputational risks and potential attacks in the public space and the digital sphere.

2. Be open to continued learning, to improve knowledge and skills, and seek mentorship and leadership opportunities.

3. Take care to avoid burnout and stress, especially in contexts of hostility towards gender and sexual diversity.

4. When in office, promote inclusive laws and policies that improve the rights and lives of all people, including those of historically marginalized communities such as LGBTI+ persons.

5. Be as visible and open about your gender and sexuality as is comfortable, taking into account context and political and personal priorities.

6. Be aware of tokenistic practices, which give visibility to LGBTI+ persons in a symbolic role to create the impression of diversity and equality and hide lack of real change.

7. Value diversity within the LGBTI+ community and take into account the needs of different groups, considering gender, ethnicity, age, disability and other conditions.

8. Build a supportive network of friends and allies.

9. Promote positive change and the rights of LGBTI+ persons when the opportunity arises.

2

Political parties

2.
Political parties

Political parties play a central role in representative democracy. They articulate citizens' interests and demands and seek to translate them into political programmes and public policy, and they act as gatekeepers of political representation in terms of the access of persons and groups to elective positions in democratic institutions.

In practice, some political parties have directly or indirectly contributed to discrimination and violence against LGBTI+ persons and other traditionally marginalized groups. Yet in general, safeguarding human rights is key to the internal democracy of political parties. This entails refraining from depriving citizens and minorities of their basic human rights and avoiding discrimination based on gender, religion or ethnicity, among other grounds.[3] In line with these principles, political parties that acknowledge and accept basic standards of fair and just societies can engage in promoting and protecting the human rights of LGBTI+ persons, regardless of their ideological background and their place in the political spectrum.

Despite the centrality of human rights in democratic systems, in many countries party ideology is a strong influence on parties' commitment to the participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons. The protection of marginalized communities has been historically high on the agenda of left parties, and the ideology of left and socially liberal parties tends to be perceived as more open to the inclusion of persons with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.[4] Globally in early 2013, slightly more than half (59 of the 111) of openly LGBT national MPs were from social democratic, socialist, communist and green parties. Support from conservative parties for the rights and participation of LGBT persons is rapidly growing in various countries, with an increasing number of conservative and right-wing openly LGBTI+ MPs, following closely behind centrist and liberal MPs.[5]

Around the world, increasing numbers of parties from across the political spectrum contribute to promoting the rights of LGBTI+ persons and their participation in politics and elections both within internal party organization and throughout the electoral process.

At the internal level, political parties in different countries have developed inclusive foundational documents and internal norms ensuring the rights of LGBTI+ persons and have created and supported LGBTI+ groups and networks within the party or as associated entities. Through training and sensitization sessions, many political parties raise awareness of LGBTI+ rights among party members and support the development of a party culture that values and respects diversity. Some parties also encourage the participation of LGBTI+ leaders in governing boards and internal decision-making processes, which is a positive step towards the development and consolidation of inclusive political leadership.

In the pre-election period, candidate recruitment and nomination are key entry points for ensuring that candidate lists include leaders with diverse gender identity and sexual orientation. Adequate funding for LGBTI+ candidates can also be a strong factor that influences their chance of winning, especially in candidate-centred electoral systems. There are some examples of fundraising structures such as political action committees that endorse LGBTI+ candidates and support their campaign funding.

In the electoral period, parties can promote inclusive policies in their electoral platforms and highlight the visibility of their LGBTI+ candidates during the campaign. Also, in some countries LGBTI+ persons and the population in general can benefit from electoral codes of conduct banning discrimination or hate speech on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation, among other grounds.

In the post-election period, parties can engage in inclusive policy development processes promoting the rights of persons with diverse sex characteristics, gender identities and sexual orientation. Moreover, inter-party dialogue initiatives can be instrumental in building consensus across party lines, setting common agendas and advancing LGBTI+ rights.

Examples of good practice regarding political parties

→ In the **Philippines**, the LGBT political party Ang Ladlad won the landmark case Ang Ladlad v. Commission on Elections before the Supreme Court in 2010, which granted its registration as a political party and allowed its participation in the electoral process.[6]

→ In **Mexico**, a number of parties have internal groups dedicated to promoting the rights of the LGBTI+ community at the national level, including the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (MORENA)[7] and Revolución Democrática (PRD)[8] and, in the case of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) there is a local group in Mexico City.[9]

→ In **South Africa**, several parties have adopted policies to promote the participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons. The African National Congress (ANC) Women's League created an LGBTIQ desk in 2020[10] and activist Mmapaseka Steve Letsike was appointed as a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee in 2023, explicitly to represent LGBTI+ interests in the party's highest decision-making body.[11] The Democratic Alliance (DA) has long had the largest number of openly LGBT parliamentarians, and created the DA Rainbow Network as an informal network of party members willing to promote the rights of LGBTI+ persons.[12] The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party supports the rights of LGBTI+ persons in South Africa and across the African continent, and condemns laws criminalizing same-sex relations.[13]

→ Rainbow Labour is the LGBTIQ group of the **New Zealand** Labour Party.[14] It was created in 1997 to advocate for the needs of the broad LGBTI+ community within the party and more broadly. Since 2004, Rainbow Labour has had a representative in the party's governing body, which gives it some influence in ensuring diversity and inclusion in the party's policies and structures. Membership requirements include being a member of the party and belonging to

the LGBTI+ community, although the group also has supporters and allies who do not necessarily identify as LGBTIQ.[15]

→ Rainbow Rose is the LGBTI+ network "bringing together people from Socialist, Labour and Social Democratic parties across **Europe**".[16] In 2015, it obtained the status of associated organization within the Party of European Socialists (PES). The network's main goal is to influence European laws and policies to promote LGBTI+ rights, working with the PES and associated national parties as well as with the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats at the European Parliament and other institutions. The budget of Rainbow Rose is based on membership fees from national LGBTI+ political networks and it also receives contributions from PES.[17]

→ In **Ireland**, the Sinn Féin party developed Moving On: A Policy for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Equality. This policy includes a plan with a detailed calendar of educational measures to promote equality within and beyond the party. It foresees training sessions for full-time activists and elected representatives at national and council levels to raise awareness of concerns of lesbian, gay and bisexual communities.[18]

→ In **Thailand**, the Future Forward Party embraces the principles of gender and cultural diversity.[19] This principle is mirrored in the candidate recruitment and nomination process. The party's candidate list for the 2019 elections to the lower house of the National Assembly included transgender, non-binary and lesbian persons as well as candidates with disabilities and from diverse ethnic backgrounds.[20]

→ In **Peru**, the National Jury of Elections developed an electoral ethical agreement for different electoral processes to which political parties have been encouraged to adhere voluntarily to since 2015. The agreement for the 2020 parliamentary elections included provisions rejecting "any kind of discrimination against a person or groups

of persons based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, origin, religion as well as any kind of defamation or xenophobia undermining the dignity of any person." Signatory parties also committed to "promote inclusive and effective representation in our candidate lists, based on the principle of equal opportunity, the application of gender parity and alternance, as well as to prioritize the inclusion of youth, members of native and peasant communities, Indigenous peoples, Afroperuvian population, and other minority or historically excluded groups."[21]

→ In the **Russian Federation**, the Russian United Democratic Party ('Yabloko') opposes discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity as well as the stigmatization of LGBTI+ persons. This position is set out in programme documents and statements.[22]

→ In the lead-up to the 2016 national peace agreement referendum, the Observatory on Political Participation of LGBTI people in **Colombia** organized a two-day talk for political parties' representatives and LGBTI activists, aiming at discussing the implementation of LGBTI inclusion clauses in the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group. LGBTI groups recommended developing strategies to support the community's participation in political parties and government bodies and promoting educational and outreach initiatives to fight discrimination against the community.[23]

→ In **New Zealand**, the Cross-Parliamentary Rainbow Network and the Human Rights Commission reached an agreement in 2018 to organize twice-yearly meetings with the gender and sexual diversity community to discuss strategies to advance the human rights of members of this group. Some areas of interest include how to reduce discrimination, improve access to health care for trans and intersex persons, promote legal gender recognition, and improve the dignity and security of intersex persons.[24]

Recommendations for political parties seeking to increase the electoral participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons

1. Include provisions on non-discrimination and LGBTI+ rights in foundational documents and internal rules and develop effective mechanisms for resolution of discrimination cases.

2. Create and strengthen LGBTI+ networks within the party or as associated entities to help increase the influence and voice of members of the community and to ensure safe spaces.

3. Provide training and sensitization to party members and leaders to raise awareness of LGBTI+ rights.

4. Promote the participation of LGBTI+ leaders in governing boards and internal decision-making, and make sure that candidate lists include LGBTI+ leaders in winnable positions.

5. Ensure that LGBTI+ candidates get appropriate funding for campaign costs so that they can compete on a level playing field.

6. Include concrete policy measures in electoral platforms to advance the rights of LGBTI+ persons and communicate these directly to LGBTI+ persons and communities.

7. Support campaign activities of LGBTI+ candidates and ensure they receive good visibility.

8. Subscribe to electoral codes of conduct for political parties banning discrimination and violence against LGBTI+ persons.

9. Develop party policies and plans to advance LGBTI+ rights and create a culture of inclusion.

10. Engage in inter-party dialogue and build consensus to promote LGBTI+ rights through policy and legislation.

3

Electoral Management Bodies

3.
Electoral Management Bodies

EMBs have the responsibility of administering credible elections that genuinely reflect the will of the people, where all eligible citizens can fully exercise their right to vote and to be elected without harassment or discrimination.

Therefore, and in line with non-discrimination provisions under international law, inclusion can be understood as a key component of the mandate of EMBs. This means that EMBs can promote and aim to ensure the participation of commonly disenfranchised groups, which vary by context but often include women, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and LGBTI+ persons, among others. As International IDEA put it: "As upholders of democratic values, EMBs have behavioural and access responsibilities to the community they serve, even where these are not defined in the electoral legal framework. Some of these responsibilities relate to issues such as transparency, gender balance, sensitivity to customs and traditions, treatment of ethnicity, providing electoral access to marginalized groups and creating conditions that are conducive to fair electoral competition."[25] According to international good practice, EMBs have a role to play in helping establish conditions where all citizens are free to participate in the electoral process, regardless of their sex characteristics, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

EMBs do not work in isolation; they form part of a larger context where legal frameworks, institutional practices, social attitudes and cultural stereotypes may hinder the participation of LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections. Electoral institutions often reproduce social bias based on cisgender and straight privilege, leaving out the life experiences of historically excluded populations, including LGBTI+ and especially trans persons.[26] Especially in hostile environments where they openly experience discrimination and violence, LGBTI+ persons may feel disempowered and excluded from the political process, and this can result in low participation rates. Actual and not just perceived exclusion from the electoral process can occur for example in the case of trans persons, whose gender identity is not always formally recognized in official documents. In some cases, this leads to discrimination in polling stations, voter disenfranchisement and the impossibility of standing for election according to their own gender identity and affirmed name. By recognizing these challenges, EMBs can advance the political rights of LGBTI+ persons and enhance their participation and civic engagement.

A growing number of EMBs have been contributing to the promotion of the rights of LGBTI+ persons and their participation in politics and elections both within their internal organization and throughout the electoral process.

At the internal level, EMBs in various countries have adopted non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, which include general protections in recruitment and human resource management. Some EMBs also have developed specific policies to promote the participation of LGBTI+ persons in the electoral process and have integrated this priority in their strategies and action plans. Another possible entry point for EMBs is to mainstream electoral inclusion in their institutional departments to promote the participation of LGBTI+ persons and other underrepresented groups in the electoral process. Furthermore, internal training and capacity-building strategies for electoral staff and polling officers can raise awareness of the political rights of LGBTI+ persons and promote their access to the electoral process.

In the pre-election period, a growing number of EMBs worldwide have taken measures to ensure that candidate and voter registration are inclusive processes in which the gender identity and affirmed names of trans and non-binary persons are acknowledged and accommodated. Furthermore, EMBs in various countries reach out to LGBTI+ persons through civic and voter education and get-out-the-vote campaigns to promote their participation and civic engagement. Outreach campaigns can also be addressed to the general public to raise awareness of sexual and gender diversity. In some cases, EMBs also support training efforts to strengthen the capacities and leadership skills of LGBTI+ persons, especially in the framework of electoral processes.

In the electoral period, EMBs in a range of countries take specific measures to ensure inclusive voting procedures where LGBTI+ and especially trans citizens can exercise their right to vote in a safe environment without harassment or discrimination.

In the post-election period, EMBs can engage in post-election reviews to identify lessons learned on the participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons and commit to improving their work in this area.

Examples of good practice regarding electoral management bodies

⟶ In **Nepal**, the Election Commission's 2013 Gender and Inclusion Policy states that "the workplace and working environment shall be developed with a gender and inclusion perspective". In line with this strategy, the Commission commits to "develop an employee code of conduct that discourages discrimination" with sanctions for discrimination in the workplace. Another commitment contained in the strategy is to develop and regularly update a staff roster disaggregated by gender (including third gender), ethnicity/caste and disability.[27]

⟶ In **Mexico**, the National Electoral Institute adopted an internal protocol for trans staff in 2019 with specific measures to prevent discrimination and promote a safe working environment. The protocol establishes that gender identity specified by trans staff must be acknowledged within the organization even when not stated in official IDs, and it recognizes their right to be called by their chosen name and pronouns in their daily lives. The protocol bans discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression in working conditions, including selection, recruitment, training, professionalization, promotion, assessment, rotation and permanence.[28]

⟶ In **Myanmar**, the Union Election Commission's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy and Action Plan for the period 2019–2022 includes the commitment to promote the participation of women, men and other genders (LGBTQI) throughout the electoral process.[29]

⟶ In **Honduras**, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in 2018 released a guidebook with basic guidelines to facilitate the interaction with LGTB persons in the Honduran electoral processes. This guidebook includes reference to the main LGBTI+ civil society organizations in the country and to key international and domestic legal instruments relevant to the participation of LGBTI+ persons.[30]

→ In **Mexico**, the National Electoral Institute in 2017 adopted a measure to ensure the right to vote for trans people without discrimination. This legal instrument, known as the trans protocol, establishes guidelines aimed at promoting the effective participation of trans voters during election day, including transgender, transsexual and *travesti* persons. The document was developed through consultation mechanisms with trans people and LGBTI+ associations. The specific goals of this protocol include: a) concrete measures to guarantee that trans citizens have voting credentials and are registered as voters, b) measures in the Electoral Training and Assistance Strategy to guarantee equal treatment for trans voters on election day, c) information to sensitize electoral staff, political parties, independent candidates and polling officers, d) measures to eliminate all sorts of barriers that restrict in practice the right to vote of trans persons, and e) an outreach campaign to inform that trans citizens can update their data on the Federal Registry of Electors.[31]

→ In 2020, the National Electoral Council of **Colombia** adopted a protocol to promote measures guaranteeing the vote of trans persons in terms of equality and without discrimination. This instrument establishes various measures to protect the electoral rights of trans persons, including voter identification procedures on election day, voter registration procedures, training and sensitization efforts and institutional cooperation mechanisms.[32]

→ In **Bangladesh**, the electoral management wing of the Election Commission is responsible for ensuring the inclusivity of voting operations and making sure that polling officers allow transgender persons to exercise their right to vote without discrimination.[33]

→ In **Chile**, following consultations with civil society organizations, the Electoral Service (Servel) in October 2020 introduced a protocol to respect the gender identity of trans voters ahead of a national plebiscite held that year. The protocol was later updated in the lead-up to a follow-up national plebiscite in 2022. This protocol aimed to ensure the right to vote of both trans voters who updated their name and sex in the civic registry and the voter list in advance and those who did not update their data in the registry.

The protocol specifies as well that all staff and volunteers at polling centres are required to treat all trans voters in a dignified manner and use their affirmed names and preferred pronouns.[34]

→ In **Guatemala**, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal created two new units in 2013: the Department for Social Inclusion and the Department for the Political Promotion of Women.[35] The Department for Social Inclusion leads capacity-building initiatives addressed to the LGBTI+ community, among other underrepresented groups.

→ In **Costa Rica**, over 130 staff members of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal received training on equal and respectful treatment of LGBTI+ persons in 2018. A total of seven workshops for staff were organized in that year, covering a wide range of topics, including human rights, international and national legal frameworks, human sexuality, gender identity and expression, analysis of the Inter-American Court's consultative opinion, civil registry reform and guidelines for respectful treatment of LGBTI+ persons. In 2019 the Gender Unit developed a training programme on the respectful and equal treatment of LGBTI+ persons and organized six courses with over 200 participants.[36]

→ In **Brazil**, ahead of the 2018 general elections, the Superior Electoral Tribunal decided to allow transsexual and *travesti* voters to register with their gender identity and affirmed name. The tribunal established a one-month period for trans voters to register their affirmed names and to update their gender identity in the voter list, so that voter cards with the updated information could be printed. These measures were adopted to help ensure that they are treated with dignity on election day.[37]

→ In the 2014 presidential elections in **El Salvador**, polling officers were instructed to allow trans voters to cast ballots even when their physical appearance does not match their ID photograph.[38] This guidance, which is especially useful for trans voters, instructs poll workers to verify their physical features and make sure that the name, number and signature in the ID match voter registration details.[39]

→ In a 2011 landmark ruling, the Supreme Court of **Pakistan** instructed the Election Commission (ECP) to register transgender voters in more inclusive ways and requested the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to issue national identity cards for those who had not been registered yet. The commission conducts voter registration based on self-identification and citizens can express three different gender identity options in registration forms: male, female and transgender.[40] In 2017, however, only 1,456 transgender citizens were registered in the voter list out of a total of 97.02 million registered voters, which suggests (although in the absence of reliable data on the size of the transgender population in the country overall) that members of this population continue to face discrimination in practice despite positive legal developments.[41] In more recent years, the commission has made efforts to increase the representation of transgender persons in the voter list. In 2017, the commission and NADRA launched a campaign to promote women's access to national identity cards and voter registration, in partnership with civil society and UNDP. In only eight months there was an increase of over 4.5 million women obtaining their identify cards and therefore being able to vote. Since then, the campaign extended its scope to transgender persons, persons with disabilities and other underrepresented groups.[42]

→ The Election Commission of **India** includes the category of 'others' in voter registration forms, in addition to the categories 'male' and 'female'. As of 2019, the number of voters registered under the 'others' category throughout the country amounted to 40,000, which is a small share of the estimated total number of transgender persons in the country (for example, 487,803 transgender persons registered in the 2011 population census).[43]

→ In 2017, **Peru**'s National Jury of Elections supported the establishment of Empower, the School for LGBTI Political Leadership (launched in partnership with Promsex and the LGBTQ Victory Institute, with support from the European Union and Hivos). The school aims at strengthening the capacities of LGBTI+ leaders from different parts of the country and provide them with potentially useful skills and knowledge for the upcoming electoral process.[44] A follow-up course from the school took place in 2020, ahead of the 2021 general elections. It was conducted online due to COVID-19 pandemic considerations and had a three-month duration. Some of the topics covered by the training programme included safety, organization building, political advocacy and public speaking.[45]

Recommendations for electoral management bodies seeking to increase the electoral participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons

1. Establish anti-harassment policies and ban discrimination based on sex characteristics, gender identity and sexual orientation in recruitment and personnel policies to ensure safe spaces.

2. Ensure that all internal policies, strategies and action plans support the participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons and create a culture of inclusion.

3. Mainstream LGBTI+ rights into the work of different units within the secretariat and consider creating specific institutional mechanisms to facilitate the participation of LGBTI+ persons.

4. Provide training and sensitization to electoral staff, polling officers and other field staff to raise awareness of gender and sexual diversity, the rights of LGBTI+ persons, and identification procedures for trans and non-binary voters that meet their needs.

5. Partner with LGBTI+ groups to identify barriers to their participation in the electoral process, and jointly design strategies to promote the participation of LGBTI+ citizens.

6. Allow trans, non-binary and intersex candidates to register with their affirmed name and, to the extent permitted by law, with their gender identity.

7. To the extent permitted by law, allow trans, non-binary and intersex voters to register with their gender identity and affirmed name and issue voter credentials that match their preferences.

8. To the extent permitted by law, establish regulations allowing trans and non-binary candidates to have access to gender quotas according to their gender identity.

9. Strengthen the capacities and leadership skills of LGBTI+ persons and organizations.

10. Conduct civic and voter education campaigns to promote the engagement and electoral participation of LGBTI+ citizens and to raise awareness of sexual and gender diversity among the public.

11. On election day, make sure that polling stations are a safe environment for LGBTI+ persons and ensure that voting identification procedures are respectful of trans, non-binary and intersex voters.

12. Assess the participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons in post-election reviews through quantitative and qualitative methods, and identify lessons learned on this matter.

4

Parliaments
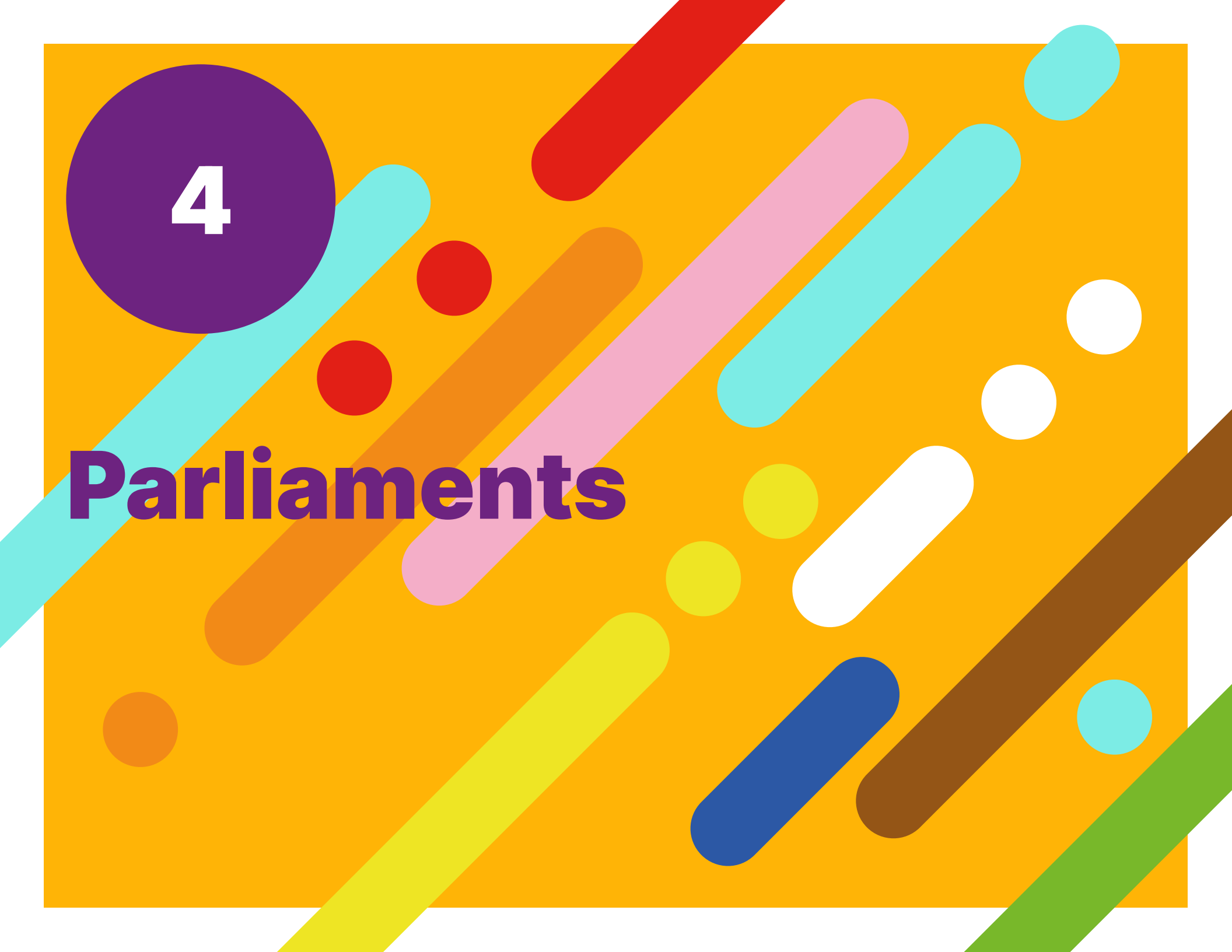
4.
Parliaments

Parliaments play an essential role in the promotion and protection of human rights through their core functions of representation, law-making and government oversight, as well as through relations with civil society and citizen outreach.[46]

Promoting and upholding the rights of all, including LGBTI+ persons, therefore is an integral part of the mission of democratic parliaments. Another important characteristic of parliaments is their ability to reflect and represent equal opportunities across a range of social and political diversity. As elected representatives, LGBTI+ legislators have the potential to promote diversity within parliaments and make them look more like the people they represent.

In various countries, parliaments contribute to advance the human rights of LGBTI+ persons through internal organization arrangements and the execution of core parliamentary functions. **At the internal level**, some parliaments establish institutional mechanisms for the protection of LGBTI+ rights and make efforts to ensure a safe working environment. The number and influence of LGBTI+ MPs in parliaments have increased in recent years, which has helped to give visibility to the community and amplify its voice. Through their **legislative function**, it is increasingly common that parliaments integrate the needs and interests of LGBTI+ persons in law-making processes and pass specific laws in favour of LGBTI+ rights. They also contribute to the **oversight of the executive branch**, scrutinizing the impact of governmental programmes and policies on LGBTI+ persons. Furthermore, parliaments build bridges with LGBTI+ organizations and movements and **outreach** to citizens raising awareness about LGBTI+ rights.[47]

Key resource

'Advancing the human rights and inclusion of LGBTI people: a handbook for parliamentarians' is a joint publication by UNDP and Parliamentarians for Global Action that was recently updated in 2022 and translated into several languages. It highlights the role of MPs in promoting inclusion of LGBTI persons in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and offers practical tools and tips for parliamentarians willing to promote the rights of LGBTI persons through their work.

The full publication is available online.
https://www.undp.org/publications/advancing-human-rights-and-inclusion-lgbti-people-handbook-parliamentarians-0

Examples of good practice regarding parliaments and legislators

→ In **Thailand**, in 2019, four newly elected MPs from the Future Forward Party with diverse gender identities succeeded in prompting the parliament to revise its sex-based dress code, which allowed them to dress according to their gender identities.[48]

→ In the **United Kingdom**, ParliOUT is a network aimed at creating "a supportive and inclusive working environment by providing support, guidance, educational and networking opportunities to all staff and Members of both Houses of Parliament."[49]

→ In the National Assembly of **South Africa,** a large number of portfolio committees can take action to promote and protect LGBTI+ rights within their area of competence.[50]

→ In **Mexico**, the Commission on Youth and Sexual Diversity was established as a standing committee in the Chamber of Deputies in 2018, following the general election and the formation of the new parliament.[51] The commission engages in a wide range of actions to promote the rights of LGBTI persons, including contributions to the law-making process, governmental oversight and relations with other institutions and civil society, among others. One of the major achievements was the inclusion of the right to sexual education in the Constitution during the 2019 constitutional reform process. Regarding the oversight of government policies, the commission made efforts to ensure sufficient funding in the 2020 budget for HIV treatment medication. The commission also called for the passing of same-sex marriage laws in Mexican states that had not yet introduced or passed such legislation. Furthermore, members of the commission often deliver speeches and take part in sensitization workshops about youth and sexual diversity in high schools, local government and other institutions.[52]

→ In **North Macedonia**, a number of MPs joined together and created an informal inter-party group on LGBTI+ rights in February 2018. It was the first parliamentary intergroup of this type in the Western Balkans region.[53] The inter-party group, whose mandate lasted until the 2020 parliamentary elections, was formed by 14 members of the national legislature from different parties who were supporters of LGBTI+ rights. The group supported the passing in 2019 of the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, which extended protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The inter-party group works in close collaboration with civil society and its members often attend and participate in debates, conferences and events organized by civic organizations.[54]

→ In **Brazil**, LGBT+ parliamentarians and the civic organization VoteLGBT launched a LGBT+ parliamentary intergroup in July 2023. A total of 23 LGBT+ parliamentarians signed a manifesto announcing the creation of the group, which aims to focus on fighting attacks against LGBT+ rights within parliaments at the national and sub-national levels in Brazil, building a legislative agenda for the recognition of LGBT+ rights with adequate budgetary allocations, working with political parties on priority issues, and building support networks to respond to anti-LGBTI+ discrimination and violence, among other issues.[55]

→ In **Poland**, there is a Parliamentary Intergroup for Equality of the LGBT+ Community in the Sejm, the lower chamber of parliament. In 2023, the composition of the intergroup includes 26 deputies from different parties and one senator. Its scope of action includes driving the debate on government recognition and upholding of rights and freedoms of LGBT+ persons, working with LGBT+ civil society groups, developing legislation in favour of LGBT+ rights, promoting equality and non-discrimination, fighting hate speech and cooperating with parliamentary groups in other countries.[56]

→ In **New Zealand**, the Parliamentary Rainbow Network is one of the cross-party groups in the parliament. In the 52nd parliament, which ran from 2017 to 2020, it brought together members of the House of Representatives from four different parties to promote the rights of LGBTI persons.[57] In 2019, the network supported the reopening of the refurbished Parliament's Rainbow Room, also known as Select Committee Room 11, which recognizes and celebrates the contributions of the rainbow community to society. The remake of the Rainbow Room included representative flags, photographs of current and former LGBTI+ members of parliament and six important bills.[58]

→ In the **United States**, the Congressional LGBTQ+ Equality Caucus was created in the House of Representatives in 2008, following the model of other successful caucuses such as the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus that help to move forward legislation and raise awareness around issues important to their communities. With over 160 members in 2020, the LGBTQ+ Caucus is one of the largest in the US Congress. Its work focuses on promoting human rights equality, repealing discriminatory legislation, fighting against hate violence and improving health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people.[59]

→ The **European Parliament**'s Intergroup on LGBTI rights is an informal forum for members of the European Parliament who wish to advance the rights of LGBTI+ persons. With over 130 members from nearly all political groups in 2020, it was the largest intergroup within the European Parliament. Its work consists in "monitoring the work of the European Union; monitoring the situation of LGBTI+ people in European Union (EU) Member States and beyond; and liaising with civil society groups to relay their concerns at the European level."[60] There are two types of membership: full members, whose names are publicly displayed on the intergroup's website, and supporting members, who prefer to remain anonymous.[61]

→ In **Argentina**, the Gender Identity Law was adopted in 2012. It recognized the right of trans persons to be treated according to their self-perceived gender, allowing them to have their IDs registered with their name and gender, and ensured the inclusion of all medical treatments for transitioning in the compulsory medical programme.[62] This pioneering piece of legislation contributed to shift the paradigm on gender identity towards the depathologization of trans identities, centring the recognition process around self-perceived identity and avoiding unreasonable requirements such as medical certificates.

→ In **Pakistan**, the 2018 Transgender Persons Protection of Rights Act establishes the legal recognition of the self-perceived gender identity without medical or diagnostic requirements as well as its registration in government records and documents.[63]

→ In 2019, lawmakers in **Taiwan** passed a bill legalizing same-sex marriage, following a ruling of the Constitutional Court that legal provisions restricting marriage to heterosexual couples were unconstitutional. Taiwan was the first place in Asia with marriage equality.[64]

→ In **Malta**, the 2015 Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act[65] prohibits sex assignment treatment and surgery on the sex characteristics of minors when it is possible to postpone these interventions until a time when they can provide informed consent. The law provides clear and human rights-based terminology as well as legal consequences for violations.[66]

→ In **Ecuador**, the ban against 'conversion therapies' relies upon provisions of a 2012 government policy that prohibits such practices in rehabilitation centres as well as the 2014 amendment of the penal code, which adds an aggravating circumstance to the crime of torture when it is committed with the intention of changing the sexual orientation or gender identity of a person.[67]

→ In **North Macedonia**, members of the parliamentary inter-party group on LGBTI rights work in close partnership with NGOs and LGBTI+ groups, including organizations belonging to the National Network against Homophobia and Transphobia. In June 2019, members of the intergroup attended the first 'pride' parade in Skopje, showing their support to the LGBTI+ organizations and movement, and the intergroup coordinator gave a speech.[68]

→ In October 2022, a side event was held to discuss the role of parliaments in protecting the rights of LGBTI+ people in Africa and around the world, in the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) General Assembly in Kigali, **Rwanda**. The side event was organized by UNDP and the IPU 12+ group and was attended by around 70 MPs from different countries.[69]

Recommendations for parliaments and legislators seeking to increase the electoral participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons

1. Include protections for MPs and parliamentary staff in standing orders, codes of conduct and other internal rules.

2. Establish anti-harassment and anti-discrimination internal policies that consider sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity as protected characteristics, and provide MPs and parliamentary staff with training and sensitization.

3. Mainstream LGBTI+ issues into the work of all committees.

4. Create and strengthen inter-party groups and caucuses on LGBTI+ rights.

5. Address the participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons in parliamentary regional and international forums.

6. Initiate and participate in efforts within parties ahead of candidate selection to ensure that parliament mirrors society as closely and fairly as possible in terms of representation of different population groups, including LGBTI+ persons.

7. Integrate the needs of LGBTI+ persons in the general law-making process and pass targeted laws to promote and protect the rights of LGBTI+ persons.

8. Use available institutional mechanisms to review and examine government policies that particularly affect LGBTI+ persons.

9. Welcome LGBTI+ organizations to participate in the legislative process through committee submissions and public hearings.

10. Build partnerships with LGBTI+ organizations to promote dialogue, community and movement building, and awareness raising.

11. Conduct outreach campaigns to raise awareness of LGBTI+ rights among the public.

5

Civil society organizations and movements

5.
Civil society organizations and movements

In political and electoral processes, citizen organizations can promote the full participation of LGBTI+ persons and, from a broader perspective, use existing political and institutional mechanisms to channel their human rights claims.

A wide range of strategies are used by civil society organizations and movements, including civic and voter education initiatives focusing on gender and sexual diversity, training and capacity-building workshops for LGBTI+ leaders, election observation with a focus on the participation of LGBTI+ persons, advocacy campaigns to promote inclusive policy and law-making, strategic litigation for the recognition of LGBTI+ rights, and collaboration with United Nations human rights mechanisms and bodies, among other approaches.[70] Furthermore, LGBTI+ groups and activists around the world have sought to strengthen citizen organizations and networks internally, efforts that have contributed to community and movement building and to the security and wellbeing of LGBTI+ persons.

More welcoming and supportive political and public environments for LGBTI+ rights have developed over the past few decades in some countries. However, in many places LGBTI+ activists, organizations and movements face severe restrictions and enormous challenges in law and practice, often in a context of shrinking civic space and generalized human rights violations.[71] Challenges and barriers may include laws or rule-based measures that limit the work or influence of civil society actors, arbitrary actions on the part of governments, and extra-legal harassment, intimidation and reprisal.[72] In 2020, more than one quarter (26 percent) of UN Member States had legal barriers for the registration of civil society organizations working on gender and sexual diversity despite clear evidence that such barriers undermine freedom of association obligations under international law.[73] At that time, 22 percent of UN Member States had legal barriers to freedom of expression on sexual and gender diversity issues,[74] including "anti-propaganda" laws,[75] as part of an effort to silence LGBTI+ voices and limit open, public discussions on these topics. Furthermore, 'pride' marches and LGBTI+ demonstrations and public gatherings in various countries are often banned or obstructed in practice, which is at odds with the right of peaceful assembly, and organizers and participants often experience violence, threats, acts of intimidation and excessive use of force.[76] Moreover, human rights defenders, and particularly LGBTI+ defenders, often experience backlash and violence. In 2020, at least 331 human rights defenders were killed around the world, and six of them were trans women from the Americas.[77] Although most defenders are at risk of aggression and human rights violations, the risks are often greater among LGBTI+ human rights defenders and activists due to additional stigmatization, threats and discrimination based on their sex characteristics, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.[78]

Examples of good practice regarding LGBTI+ civil society organizations and movements

→ In 2016, OutRight Action International organized a training workshop on security and safety for 18 LGBTIQ+ activists from the **Southern Africa Development Community** (SADC) region in Johannesburg, South Africa, with funding from Dignity for All LGBTI Assistance Program.[79]

→ In 2022, three civic organizations from the **Dominican Republic**, Trans siempre Amigas (TRANSSA), the Human Rights Observatory of Trans Persons in the Dominican Republic and the GLBT Dominican Volunteers, released a primer and a handbook on the security of LGBTI+ persons in the framework of the regional project Being LGBTI in the Caribbean, led by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by UNDP.[80]

→ In **Lebanon**, where same-sex relations are criminalized, the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality launched a voter education campaign ahead of the 2018 general elections that was aimed at informing voters as to the candidates' stances towards the human rights of LGBTI+ persons. This campaign included a series of videos that were posted on social media networks and a website profiling the candidates' positions.[81] This effort helped ensure that for the first time, some important LGBTI+ issues were openly part of the country's public debate, with numerous candidates calling publicly for the decriminalization of homosexuality.[82]

→ In the framework of the 2018 **Colombian** legislative and presidential elections, several LGBTI+ groups coordinated to launch the voter education campaign Vote for Equality 2018, whose main goals were informing voters on candidates' positions on equality and non-discrimination and giving visibility to openly LGBTI+ candidates. Civil society groups that launched this initiative included Caribe Afirmativo, Colombia Diversa, Santamaría Fundación, EgoCity and Sinsetiido.[83]

→ In **Serbia**, domestic civil groups Queeria and Izadji (Come Out) developed a voter education project in 2012 that focused on monitoring statements of candidates and political parties on LGBTI+ issues and informing citizens about their positions on them. In the framework of this project, a website called Pink Ballot (Roze Listici) was launched to provide this information. The website also served as the main entry point for an online survey conducted to assess policy priorities within the LGBTI+ community.[84]

→ In **Haiti**, the organization Kouraj worked in partnership with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in 2016 and 2017 to promote LGBTI+ civic engagement and participation in the electoral process. A number of awareness workshops were organized for persons with diverse genders and sexualities, including those with *Massissi, Madivin*, *Makomè*, *Monkopè* and *Miks* identities, which are installed in the Haitian tradition and culture and have been reappropriated and vindicated by LGBTI+ activists and organizations. Over 400 LGBTI+ persons participated in these get-out-the vote sessions. Furthermore, the initiative included the development of a poster to promote LGBTI+ participation in the electoral period, which pictures two same-sex couples going towards a polling station and contains the following message: "Gay and lesbians, we are Haitian men and women, let's vote to fulfil our civic duty."[85]

→ The LGBTQ Victory Institute offers candidate and campaign training in the **United States** to present and future LGBTQ candidates, in order to provide them with tools to conduct quality electoral campaigns and enhance their skills in the fields of funding, communication and strategic planning. Furthermore, in the framework of the organization's international leadership programme, a series of leadership trainings for LGBTI+ activists have been conducted around the world, through partnerships with local civil society

groups. In the **Dominican Republic**, the Victory Institute and Diversidad Dominicana created the LGBTI Political Leadership School in 2016. In **Colombia**, the Institute and Caribe Afirmativo "have trained a total of 104 LGBTI leaders [...] since 2012, of whom 24 ran for office and 4 were elected." In **Honduras**, over 35 leaders were trained, in collaboration with Somos CDC. In the Balkans, 19 leaders from across the region received training from the Victory Institute and the Serbian organization Labris. In **South Africa**, the Victory Institute partnered with the organization Triangle Project in 2016 to enhance participation of LGBTI community members through training and capacity building.[86]

→ In **Ecuador**, the civil society group Esquel organized four trainings for young LGBTI leaders in 2018, in the framework of the project 'Por una democracia diversa', with support from the Canadian Embassy. This initiative's goal was to strengthen leadership capacities within the community, including by providing participants with tools and skills they could later use as potential candidates in the 2019 local elections and beyond.[87]

→ In the second round of the 2015 presidential elections in **Guatemala**, two organizations (Citizen Action and the Multicultural Network of Trans Women) deployed election observers in Guatemala City and some neighbouring municipalities to identify any obstacles that restrict trans women's participation in the process. Their report contained concrete recommendations to promote the effective electoral participation of this community.[88] Four years later, the Multicultural Network of Trans Women observed the 2019 general elections and highlighted in its report mockeries and attacks against trans voters in polling stations. The report's recommendations include the development of communication strategies to encourage transgender individuals to vote as well as strengthened training efforts for electoral officers.[89]

→ In the framework of the 2017 legislative elections in **France**, a group of LGBTI+ associations conducted an advocacy campaign addressed to candidates, asking them to subscribe to an engagement charter on the human rights of LGBTI persons to fight discrimination and violence against the community. The organizations supporting this initiative included Inter-LGBT, Caelif, Mag Jeunes and Glup.[90]

→ Ahead of the 2019 elections to the **European Parliament**, ILGA-Europe developed a 'come out' pledge for candidates from different parties to show their support for the human rights and equality of LGBTI persons in the EU and beyond. The pledge included commitments to strengthen protections of LGBTI persons in European law and policy, support LGBTI organizations and human rights defenders, be an ally to amplify the voices of LGBTI people, endorse the EU LGBTI Strategy, and use the influence of their positions to advance the human rights of LGBTI persons.[91]

→ In **Nepal**, the Blue Diamond Society undertook advocacy efforts to promote LGBTI rights and push for the implementation of the 2007 Supreme Court ruling in the case *Sunil Babu Pant and Others v. Nepal Government and Others*, which recognized full rights for sexual and gender minorities and determined that gender identity should be based on self-identification, thus creating a 'third gender' category, in addition to 'male' and 'female'. According to the organization, its advocacy efforts helped influence the Election Commission of Nepal's decision to include a third gender category in its voter list form, thereby complying with the Supreme Court's ruling.[92]

→ In **Brazil**, in 2022 and 2023 the civil society group VoteLGBT+ requested the Superior Electoral Tribunal to map and collect data on the sexual orientation and gender identity of registered candidates. This request was part of an advocacy effort to develop evidence-based public policies that could increase the community's political representation. According to the data generated, for the 2022 general elections there were 304 candidacies of openly LGBT+ persons, accounting for 1 percent of all candidacies, which suggests relatively low representation for the community overall.[93]

→ In **Seychelles**, the citizen organization LGBTI Sey met with the country's president in 2022 and briefed him on some priority issues for LGBTI+ persons, including the implementation of a bullying policy against homophobia and transphobia in schools, the decentralization of HIV prevention and treatment services, hate crimes legislation, the need for clear guidance from the Ministry of Health regarding hormone treatment therapy for transgender persons, the legal recognition of the gender identities of transgender persons, and the recognition of same-sex couples married abroad, among other issues.[94]

→ In **Paraguay**, the Network Against all Forms of Discrimination was established in 2007. The network includes more than 20 civil society organizations and its current coordination team includes representatives from the LGBTI+ movement, youth groups and disability activists. Its main goal is advocating for the development of legislation prohibiting all form of discrimination, in line with Article 46 of the Constitution. The network has conducted lobbying with parliamentarians and developed education initiatives and communication campaigns to sensitize citizens about the negative effects of discrimination and the need for adequate legislation. Since its founding, the network has supported the presentation of a number of bills against discrimination in the national parliament, none of which have passed.[95]

Recommendations for civil society organizations and movements seeking to increase the electoral participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons

1. Take all required security measures and precautions to make sure activists are safe, especially in contexts of hostility and violence against LGBTI+ persons.

2. Strengthen LGBTI+ communities and movements in the long term through education initiatives, dialogue, activism and public gatherings, including 'pride' marches.

3. Engage in voter education and information campaigns during the electoral process and in broader civic education efforts to promote the participation of LGBTI+ persons and sensitize the public about LGBTI+ rights.

4. Look into the possibility of supporting LGBTI+ leaders and candidates through training and capacity-building initiatives.

5. Consider engaging in election observation initiatives with a focus on gender and sexual diversity to assess the participation of LGBTI+ persons in the electoral process.

6. Advocate for the recognition of LGBTI+ rights and the adoption of inclusive laws and public policies that take into account the needs and interests of LGBTI+ persons.

7. When appropriate, engage in litigation strategies to promote the recognition of LGBTI+ rights through court decisions.

8. Engage with UN human rights mechanisms and bodies and follow up on their recommendations dealing with sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity and expression.

6

Journalists and the media

6.

Journalists and the media

Although there is a wide range of codes of ethics for media self-regulation with diverse approaches,[96] journalistic ethics and standards generally include the principles of truthfulness, impartiality, accuracy and fairness.[97]

Journalists and the media therefore have the professional responsibility to offer impartial and inclusive coverage, particularly in political and electoral processes, and to make efforts to reflect the realities and opinions of diverse social and political groups.[98] However, media around the world often ignore or violate those principles by minimizing or ignoring coverage of LGTBI+ issues or presenting negative or hostile representations of gender and sexual diversity based on common stereotypes and misconceptions.[99] It goes without saying that the quality of media coverage regarding LGBTI+ content is highly context-specific. Whereas in some countries there has been a positive evolution of LGBTI+ media representation over time, in others hatred and violence against the population is actively promoted through the media by politicians, opinion leaders and citizens.

In political and electoral processes, current trends in media representation often translate into limited and stereotyped coverage of LGTBI+ politicians and candidates, which goes against the principles of equity and non-discrimination in access to the media by contending parties and candidates. In this framework, the principle of pluralism in reporting is also important, since the right of citizens to obtain accurate and impartial information implies that all political stakeholders have the opportunity to express their views, including LGBTI+ persons and groups. Some of the LGBTI+ politicians and elected representatives interviewed for this research have denounced limited coverage and stereotypes in media representation as well as personal attacks, defamation, hate speech and disinformation campaigns in traditional and social media, especially in hostile environments. Another common challenge in election campaigns is lack of information regarding issues of particular interest for LGBTI+ persons, which is at odds with the right to be informed.

Between 1992 and 2023, a total of 2,225 journalists and media workers were killed for their work worldwide; in 2020 alone, 274 journalists were imprisoned and 65 were went missing.[100] The risk of these and other consequences is especially high for LGBTI+ journalists or journalists who cover LGBTI+ issues, especially in hostile environments, since in many cases they face significant challenges, threats and violence.[101] Despite the importance of free press in democratic processes, restrictive legal frameworks and governmental censorship may undermine the right to freedom of expression and information for various reasons, including gender identity and sexual orientation. An increasing number of States have passed laws banning 'propaganda of homosexuality' to criminalise sharing information or ideas about LGBTI+ issues, which restricts press freedom and prevents journalists from offering accurate, fair and inclusive coverage.[102] In addition, in certain contexts journalists find it difficult if not impossible to report on LGBTI+ issues for a number of reasons, including discriminatory working environments; pressure from owners of media outlets, managers, editors and colleagues; prejudice against LGBTI+ persons; and lack of knowledge about the realities and complexities of gender and sexual diversity. Ultimately, fear from reprisal and security concerns sometimes leads to self-censorship, which contributes to the lack of visibility of LGBTI+ persons and topics.

Examples of good practice regarding journalists and media organizations

→ In **China**, the 2018–2019 Media Monitoring Report, undertaken by LGBT Rights Advocacy China, collected 762 original media coverage pieces from 2018 focusing on LGBTQIA issues, 14 percent of which were in print media and 86 percent in digital media. The leading topic was 'LGBTI and celebrities' accounting for 19.8 percent of coverage, followed by 'LGBTI rights, anti-discrimination and LGBTI organizations' with 16.5 percent, and 'commentary on LGBTI culture and relevant work' with 14.2 percent. Several other topics each accounted for less than 10 percent. Out of the total sample, 37 percent of the pieces focus on the LGBTQ community as a whole, 33 percent on gay men, 17 percent on transgender persons, 11 percent on lesbian women, 2 percent on bisexual persons and 1 percent on intersex persons.[103]

→ In the **United States**, GLAAD has conducted a number of initiatives to monitor the representation of LGBTQ characters and topics in the television and film industries. For example, the publication 'Where we are on TV' (2019) assessed diversity in primetime scripted series regulars on broadcast networks and the number of LGBTQ characters on cable networks and streaming services for the 2019–2020 TV season. Out of the 879 regular characters expected to appear on broadcast scripted primetime programming in that season, 10.2 percent were identified as LGBTQ, which was the highest percentage detected by this report in the previous 15 years. There has been an increase in ethnic diversity, with 52 percent of persons of colour as LGBTQ characters on broadcast television and 47 percent of all series regulars on broadcast scripted television.[104] Furthermore, the Studio Responsibility Index (2020) analysed the diversity of LGBTQ characters in films released by eight major motion picture studios in 2019.[105]

→ In **Colombia**, Sentiido was created in 2011 as a blog and later in 2013 legally constituted as a non-profit organization to generate and spread knowledge on gender and sexual diversity. As a digital independent media, Sentiido explores different genres and digital tools to produce rigorous journalism focused on gender, diversity and social change.[106]

→ In **Italy**, the 2021 Diversity Media Report, conducted by Diversity Lab and Osservatorio di Pavia, monitored TV news from different channels during the preceding year and concluded that out of the 48,854 analysed news pieces, only 102 were related to sexual orientation, accounting for barely 0.2 percent of the total sample.[107] Comparison with previous reports shows that there had been a decrease in LGBTI media representation in the previous few years, although the previous findings also indicated extremely low coverage overall. The 2018 Diversity Media Report, for example, observed that a total of 291 out of 50,803 analysed news pieces covered LGBTI topics, persons or events, accounting for 0.57 percent of the total sample.[108]

→ In **Tunisia**, Shams Rad was created in 2017 as the first gay radio station in the Arab world. The station plays music and LGBTI+ issues are discussed in depth, with many regular opportunities to give visibility to sexual and gender diversity, defend human rights and denounce social and institutional discrimination and violence.[109]

→ In **Brazil**, Gênero e Número ('Gender and Number') is a social enterprise focusing on data journalism and analysis on gender and ethnicity. One of its main areas of reporting is LGBTQIA+ rights and politics, with several articles addressing topics such as pro-LGBTQIA+ bills, the criminalization of LGBTIphobia, equal marriage rights in Latin America and quotas for trans persons in the labour market, among other issues.[110]

→ In **Latin America**, Agencia Presentes has conducted face-to-face and online training for more than 400 students, professionals and newsrooms on inclusive journalism and reporting of LGBTI+ issues, following a gender and human rights approach. Since 2016 the organization has also organized workshops on communication strategies for more than 200 LGBTI+ activists from Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Mexico.[111]

→ Since 2003, the Association of LGBTI journalists (AJL) in **France** has gathered together journalists from TV, radio and written and digital press, seeking to monitor and improve media coverage of LGBTI+ issues, contribute to an enhanced visibility of LGBTI+ persons, offer sensitization and training on gender and sexual diversity, and support journalists who experience discrimination based on their sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity or expression.[112]

→ In **Sri Lanka**, Equal Ground launched a media sensitization programme in 2017. Since then, the organization has run at least five media workshops for journalists to promote fair coverage of LGBTI+ issues.

→ In **Nigeria**, the Bisi Alimi Foundation established the Media Justice Fellowship to provide training and mentorship to Nigerian journalists and lawyers in order to strengthen their knowledge of LGBTI+ issues. This fellowship aims to introduce positive stories and reporting about sexual and gender diversity in the media and legal settings in the country. Its goals include increasing the number of media houses engaging with fair, accurate and inclusive reporting of LGBTI+ issues and developing a database of lawyers who can provide legal assistance to LGBTI+ organizations and individuals in need.[113]

Recommendations for journalists and media organizations seeking to increase the electoral participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons

1. Integrate LGBTI+ issues and topics into journalistic work, following a human rights approach.

2. Give visibility to LGBTI+ persons and organizations and consult them as information sources.

3. Avoid reproducing negative stereotypes against LGBTI+ persons and try to reflect the realities and complexities of gender and sexual diversity, as part of efforts to pursue accuracy and breadth in reporting.

4. In political and electoral processes, give voice to LGBTI+ politicians and candidates and give visibility to LGBTI+ issues during election campaigns.

5. Use gender-sensitive language and avoid expressions of prejudice and hate speech against LGBTI+ persons, women, persons with disabilities or other groups.

6. Educate the public on gender and sexual diversity, taking care to counter stereotypes and promote the rights of LGBTI+ persons.

7. Put in place strategies and action plans within media organizations to support an inclusive working environment and to prevent, counter and sanction discrimination based on sex characteristics, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

8. Consider joining, supporting, or creating a network of LGBTI+ journalists.

9. Promote sensitization, training and capacity-building initiatives on gender and sexual diversity for journalists and media professionals within media organizations and more broadly, following a human rights approach.

10. Build bridges with LGBTI+ organizations and consider supporting activists through training and capacity-strengthening initiatives on communication skills and media relations.

11. Monitor comments on online portals and social networks to prevent and remove attacks against LGBTI+ persons, including those containing hate speech and incitement to violence.

12. When appropriate, consider conducting or engaging in media monitoring initiatives with a gender and sexual diversity perspective to assess the quantity and quality of media coverage given to LGBTI+ persons and topics.

7

International electoral assistance and election observation

7.
International electoral assistance and election observation

International cooperation can contribute to strengthening democracy and promoting the human development of societies. International electoral assistance and observation, one aspect of such efforts, focuses on supporting and promoting the conduct of credible, transparent, and inclusive electoral processes.

National ownership and the respect of domestic legal frameworks are underlying principles in the provision of international electoral assistance and the deployment of international election observation missions (EOMs). Another cornerstone is the consideration and prioritization of gender equality and electoral inclusion, since credible elections often involve the meaningful participation of all citizens, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, LGBTI+ persons and other underrepresented groups. Only in recent years has international electoral support begun addressing gender and sexual diversity as an emerging issue. Now, in line with the principle of non-discrimination, international electoral assistance projects as well as EOMs can address the participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons and other underrepresented groups. In this way, they can contribute to more inclusive political and electoral processes, which in turn may lead to stronger democracies.

Some of the actions international electoral assistance projects can undertake to promote the participation of LGBTI+ persons in the electoral process include technical support in the fields of capacity building, voter education and information, dialogue efforts, voter registration and identification procedures during the voting process, among other possible interventions. The participation of this community can be addressed throughout the project cycle, from the needs assessment to project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Based on specific contexts, international electoral assistance practitioners may look to assess the broader political landscape and involve local LGBTI+ activists, organizations and movements in the design and implementation of activities seeking to promote the community's participation. All efforts need to ensure national ownership, avoiding further harm towards LGBTI+ persons, in line with the 'do no harm' principle.

Engagement options by international EOMs include analysing the barriers to the participation of LGBTI+ persons and progress made in this area in the framework of a broader assessment of the electoral process, and in line with international human rights principles and the domestic legal framework. Election observers can meet with LGBTI+ activists and organizations to gather information on the participation of LGBTI+ persons and the obstacles they face. Furthermore, they can address the community's participation in findings and recommendations of their election observation reports. Through an assessment of the broader context, international election observers can understand better how and to what extent they can integrate the issue of the political participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons in the content of their public reports. This type of careful consideration is important to anticipate negative reactions and avoid doing more harm than good to LGBTI+ persons and communities, according to the 'do no harm' principle.

Examples of good practice regarding international electoral assistance and observation

→ The report of the EU EOM to **Colombia** in 2022 referred to an increase in racist, sexist, xenophobic and LGTBIphobic hate speech against candidates. More positively, the election observation report highlighted the guidelines issued by electoral authorities to ensure a respectful treatment of trans voters by polling staff to guarantee their right to vote, and the fact that the national citizen organization Misión de Observación Electoral deployed 95 election observers from the trans community to observe the implementation of the adopted protocols.[114]

→ The OSCE/ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) EOM to **Bulgaria** in 2021 referred to a country report of the Council of Europe's Commissioner of Human Rights highlighting many candidates' intolerant statements and comments regarding minority groups, including Roma people, Muslims, migrants, asylum-seekers and LGBTI persons. The mission's report also mentioned a violent anti-LGBTI attack committed by a presidential candidate during the election campaign, which was condemned by four political parties and some other presidential candidates. Furthermore, the report also highlighted that none of the political parties included LGBTI issues in their electoral platforms, and that many LGBTI candidates avoided referring to their sexual orientation during the campaign due to safety concerns and fear of adverse public reactions.[115]

→ The Organization of American States (OAS) EOM to **Peru** in 2021 highlighted the adoption by electoral authorities of a protocol for ensuring the right to vote in elections for trans persons. That protocol introduced guidelines for how polling station members should address trans persons, clarified that significant differences in the appearance of trans persons and their ID photos should not be a reason to prevent them from voting, and forbid comments on physical appearance, clothing, and gender expression of trans voters. Furthermore, the mission recommended that awareness-raising campaigns be undertaken for the broader public on the inclusion of all persons with diverse identities.[116]

→ **UN electoral guidelines and policies** also address the inclusion of underrepresented groups in electoral assistance. Although LGBTI+ persons are not specifically mentioned in these documents, they are often considered to be in that category. Therefore, UN initiatives in the field of electoral assistance have institutional support for specifically addressing the challenges, opportunities and needs of the LGBTI+ community in terms of electoral participation. According to the Policy Directive on Principles and Types of UN Electoral Assistance (2021), one of the key principles in this field is the promotion of inclusiveness, including the involvement of underrepresented or marginalized groups. In practice, this means that when providing electoral assistance, the United Nations should try to respond to the needs, requests and demands of different stakeholders, including underrepresented groups, in all aspects of electoral processes.[117] Furthermore, in line with the Guideline on United Nations Electoral Needs Assessment (2012), the human rights situation and the participation opportunities for women and underrepresented groups are key assessment areas for consideration, and recommendations in this regard can be included.[118]

→ In **Pakistan**, the UNDP project Strengthening Electoral and Legislative Processes (SELP) in 2017 supported the Election Commission of Pakistan and the National Database and Registration Authority in the development of the nationwide initiative 'Women's national identity card and voter registration campaign'. As a result of this process, 4.3 million women were added to the voter list in the lead-up to the 2018 general elections. At a later stage, this campaign also contributed to the registration of transgender voters. Additionally, in advance of the 2018 elections, UNDP contributed to the organization of a series of conferences where transgender organizations and activists could share with Election Commission officials their main concerns regarding their participation in the electoral process. Following this consultation process, a set of recommendations were prepared and submitted to electoral authorities.[119]

→ In **Nepal**, the UNDP Electoral Support Project (ESP) offered technical support to the Election Commission of Nepal in the development of its Gender and Inclusion Policy in 2013 and its Gender and Inclusion Strategy for the period 2015–2020, which contain measures to promote the participation of third gender voters and candidates.[120] Furthermore, the project supported the commission in voter registration procedures, which included a specific gender category for third gender voters.[121]

→ In the lead-up to the 2018 local elections in **Peru**, International IDEA supported a dialogue process to identify policy priorities with 50 organizations representing Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, Afro-descendants and LGTBIQ persons. Following these consultations, International IDEA assisted the organizations' advocacy efforts to promote a common human rights-based agenda among candidates for mayor in Lima, a process that involved asking all candidates to sign a pledge. The elected mayor was a signatory to this pledge and, as a result of this advocacy effort, a municipal by-law forbidding discrimination was adopted in the country's capital. In addition, International IDEA supported the civil society group No Tengo Miedo ('I am not afraid') in its efforts to observe voting conditions for trans persons in 2016, and shared the findings with the country's EMB, urging electoral administrators to establish guarantees for trans voters as well as institutional procedures to prevent and counter discrimination based on gender identity. Furthermore, ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections, in the framework of its broader civic education efforts, International IDEA supported a theatre troupe in the production of a play on diversity and respect for others.[122]

→ In the **Middle East and North Africa** region, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in 2016 began supporting a cross-regional group of 15 young LGBTI+ activists from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia through network-building and capacity-building efforts. The programme included face-to-face advocacy training workshops in Lebanon and Morocco as well as awareness-raising events against hate speech.[123]

→ In **Myanmar**, NDI issued a mini-grant to a local LGBTI+ organization to support its domestic election observation efforts ahead of the 2018 by-election. The local partner offered training to election observers on the legal framework, the political context and election observation methodology. A total of 26 observers representing the LGBTI+ community were deployed in 10 municipalities on election day. During a post-election conference, observers shared their findings regarding the access of underrepresented groups to the electoral process, including LGBTI+ persons, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities.[124]

→ In **Haiti**, IFES partnered with the LGBTI+ organization Kouraj in 2016 to develop voter education posters and organize civic and voter education sessions to encourage the participation of LGBTI+ voters. Furthermore, IFES invited Kouraj members to participate in other activities that aimed to support and strengthen the capacity of civil society, including a workshop on civic and voter education.[125]

→ In **Guatemala**, IFES supported the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in the development of a training manual for polling staff ahead of the 2015 and 2019 general elections. This manual contained a specific section on the participation of LGBTI+ persons and identification procedures for trans voters on election day. IFES also contributed to strengthening ties between LGBTI+ civil society organizations and electoral management authorities, including by supporting the signature of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the LGBTI+ civic group SOMOS and the tribunal in the lead-up to the 2019 electoral process. That same year, IFES also offered a training course to key tribunal staff as part of an effort to promote capacity building on gender equality and inclusion of underrepresented groups, including LGBTI+ persons.[126]

Recommendations for international organizations engaging in election observation seeking to increase the electoral participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons

1. Forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity and expression, and develop protocols against workplace harassment, in line with the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers and the policies of the main international organizations conducting election observation.

2. In trainings for election observers, provide guidelines on how to observe the participation of LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections and share standards of conduct, in line with the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers.

3. Meet with LGBTI+ civil society organizations and public authorities to gather information on the participation of persons with diverse genders and sexualities in the political and electoral process.

4. Include findings and recommendations on the electoral participation of LGBTI+ persons in election observation reports, in line with international human rights principles.

5. Develop election observation methodologies and guidelines to gather and analyse information on the political and electoral participation of LGBTI+ persons.

Recommendations for international organizations providing electoral assistance seeking to increase the electoral participation and rights of LGBTI+ persons

1. Identify barriers, risks, and areas of opportunity regarding the participation of LGBTI+ persons in the political and electoral process.

2. During the project design phase, consider, as appropriate, including specific activities to promote the participation of LGBTI+ persons and other underrepresented groups, and allocate adequate resources.

3. Consult with LGBTI+ activists and organizations to identify priorities, where appropriate, in the design and implementation of potential activities.

4. Invite LGBTI+ organizations to participate in activities with civil society, where relevant, such as training workshops, conferences, and dialogue processes, among others.

5. Work with EMBs and other key stakeholders to promote the inclusive participation of LGBTI+ persons in the electoral process, based on need, request and demand.

8

Violence against LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections

8.
Violence against LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections

All over the world, LGBTI+ persons and groups often experience discrimination and violence based on their sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity and expression.

LGBTIphobic violence is found in many forms and kinds, including physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence, both online and offline. Hate speech and hate crimes directed toward members of the community not only harm individuals but also tend to promote a climate of fear and distrust that can negatively affect the participation of LGBTI+ persons in the overall democratic process and restrict their human rights more broadly.

LGBTIphobic violence is often linked to political dynamics, especially in countries with authoritarian governments that seek to repress gender and sexual diversity, in contexts where there is a strong and vocal public opposition to progress on LGBTI+ rights, and in highly polarized electoral contests where anti-LGBTI+ messages and political agendas are significant components of campaigns.[127] In certain countries, individual political leaders and party supporters have been responsible for spreading hatred and inciting violence against LGBTI+ persons through the media and social networks. There is a growing consensus on the fact that LGBTIphobic speech in the political sphere often leads to an increase of violence against LGBTI+ persons in practice. This development in turn often restricts their ability or interest in fully participating in the political and electoral process as citizens, voters, party supporters, candidates, elected representatives, social leaders, activists and election administrators, among other roles.

Lack of data and research is one of the main challenges when it comes to understanding the type and extent of political and electoral violence against LGBTI+ persons. This phenomenon is generally understood as an identity-based form of violence motivated by sexual orientation, sex characteristics, or gender identity and expression, as a result of the intersection between political and electoral violence, on the one side, and LGBTIphobic violence, on the other. Furthermore, violence against LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections can often be understood under the perspective of hate crimes and hate speech, which are being codified in the legal frameworks of a growing number of countries to ensure adequate investigation, prosecution and sanctions against perpetrators. Recent theoretical developments and field research on violence against women in politics and elections and other forms of gender-based violence offer a solid knowledge framework that contributes to a better understanding of the violence faced by LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral processes, and from an intersectional perspective they throw light on specific violence faced by LBTI+ women.

Observations and evidence from many contexts indicate that trans and non-binary persons, and especially trans women, are frequently one of the most affected groups by LGBTIphobic violence and often face denial of their rights in political and electoral processes. For example, trans persons often experience substantial threats to their ability to vote due to invasive identification procedures and harassment at polling stations. Trans candidates and elected representatives are often subjected to particularly harsh verbal and physical attacks, both online and offline.

Political and electoral violence can harm LGBTI+ persons in many ways and undermines their human rights, including the right to participate in public affairs. States therefore have the obligation to protect citizens and the public from violence, regardless of their sex characteristics, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Furthermore, other stakeholders involved in political and electoral processes, such as citizens, political leaders, candidates, political parties, civil society organizations and the media, have the responsibility to respect the human rights of LGBTI+ persons and contribute not only to the conduct of elections free from violence but also, more broadly, to peaceful coexistence.

Examples of good practice regarding the monitoring, prevention and countering of violence against LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections

→ The Trans Murder Monitoring project systematically collects data of homicides of trans and gender-diverse persons **worldwide** from 2008 up to date. In 2020, the country with the highest number of registered murders of trans persons was Brazil (157 registered murders), followed by Mexico (64) and the United States (37).[129]

→ In **Brazil**, findings from research conducted by Gênero e Número ahead of and immediately after the 2018 general elections included that 51 percent of LGBT+ interviewed persons reported experiencing violent behaviour during the last six months of 2018, with 56 percent of trans and *travesti* interviewees saying they experienced violence on at least three occasions during the 2018 elections and 49 percent of bisexual interviewees agreeing that violence against them increased considerably over the course of the electoral process.[130]

→ Also in **Brazil**, the platform TRETAqui registered 564 anonymous complaints by citizens during the 2018 elections regarding hate speech spread by different candidates or used to attack candidacies. According to the platform management, there was a connection between hate speech disseminated by candidates and the rise of cases of violence against women, LGBT+ persons and leftist activists and party members in the framework of the electoral process.[131]

→ Research undertaken by the civil society group VoteLGBT+ during the 2020 city council elections nationwide in **Brazil** showed that 54 percent of LGBT+ candidates who experienced violence sought support from their political parties, but in 56 percent of those cases the parties did nothing. Furthermore, 26 percent of LGBT+ candidates who experienced violence reported attacks from people from their own political parties.[132]

→ In **South Africa**, the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development established a national task team in 2011 to lead a national strategy to address violence associated with sexual orientation and gender, by engaging with government bodies, institutions and civil society. Since the launch of the task team, efforts have been made to increase cooperation among government departments, form provincial task teams to implement the strategy at the local level, monitor open cases of violence against LGBTI+ persons, and conduct awareness-raising campaigns on violence against the community.[133]

→ In **Seychelles**, the civil society group LGBTI Sey and the international NGO Dignity Trust in 2023 held a two-day workshop titled 'Responding to LGBT hate crime in Southern Africa: legislative options and perspectives'. The workshop gathered around 25 representatives from civil society organizations and human rights institutions from 11 southern African countries to facilitate exchanges and mutual learning. The Seychelles government committed in 2022 to passing legislation against hate crimes, which if successful is expected to be applicable to offences against the LGBTI+ community and other specific populations.[134]

→ The **Bosnia and Herzegovina** Central Election Commission in 2020 imposed sanctions against a candidate of the political party Democratic Front, who said on her Facebook page that 'pride' parade is shameful and that LGBTI+ persons should be brought back into an acceptable pattern of behaviour. The commission sanctioned her on grounds of hate speech, but an appeals tribunal accepted her argument based on her hate speech taking place outside the campaign period – and according to the Election Law, sanctions for hate speech can be imposed only during the campaign period.[135]

Recommendations to prevent and counter violence against LGBTI+ persons in politics and elections

1. Promote both civil society and government-led initiatives to collect data on, analyse and monitor violence against LGBTI+ persons, especially in political and electoral contexts.

2. Promote and lead the consideration of possible legal reform to include hate crimes and hate speech in the legal framework, ensuring adequate investigation, prosecution and sanction mechanisms are specified.

3. Support and provide sensitization training to police and security forces and criminal justice personnel to promote a better understanding of hate crimes and provide dignified treatment to victims.

4. Promote and provide adequate support to victims of LGBTIphobic hate crimes, including health care and psychological assistance, legal support and shelter when needed.

5. Promote and conduct civil society and government-led awareness-raising campaigns to sensitize the public about gender and sexual diversity, human rights and the need to counter LGBTIphobic violence.

6. Promote and conduct civil society and government-led campaigns to inform LGBTI+ persons about reporting procedures, assistance and resources for victims in cases of LGBTIphobic violence.

Conclusion

Building strong democracies requires the commitment and meaningful participation of all members of society, regardless of their sexual orientation, sex characteristics and gender identity and expression.

LGBTI+ citizens have a constructive role to play in political and electoral processes, and their engagement and voices can lead to more pluralistic political representation and the adoption of inclusive policies and legislation that ultimately benefit society overall. The scope and quality of their involvement are dependent on full acceptance and upholding of their rights. International law recognizes the rights of LGBTI+ persons to be free from discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, to vote and be elected, to have access to public service, and to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, among other human rights that are key to the credibility of elections and stability of political systems. From a development perspective, the 'leave no one behind' principle means that LGBTI+ persons should have the same opportunities as all citizens to participate in political and electoral processes without discrimination.

Despite such international human rights principles, which many countries have committed to honour or support in various conventions and declarations, LGBTI+ persons continue to face discrimination and violence in most societies, including throughout electoral processes. The participation of LGBTI+ persons in roles as citizens, voters, candidates, activists, political leaders, elected representatives, electoral administrators and civil society members, among others, in politics and elections is often hindered by a wide range of barriers. Obstacles to political participation may include discriminatory legal frameworks and institutional practices, social ostracism and other forms of violence.

The persistence of such obstacles lends urgency to the central question of how to overcome social prejudice, discrimination and violence towards LGBTI+ persons and promote their meaningful participation in political and electoral processes as well as democracy strengthening. There are no easy and simple answers, but the following observations point to potential priority approaches to achieve the desired improvements:

⟶ The advancement of knowledge and education throughout a society can lead to a shift in social attitudes, including positive trends in acceptance and understanding of gender and sexual diversity.

⟶ It is important to be aware, when promoting the political and electoral participation of LGBTI+ persons, that stereotypes and discrimination in this area reflect much broader social dynamics, including legal, institutional and public policy frameworks as well as social attitudes.

⟶ Taking notice of internal power dynamics within LGBTI+ communities and movements can help empower and give visibility to marginalized groups within the community and promote an intersectional perspective, which calls for considering the impact of gender, ethnicity, age, disability status and other characteristics in the realization of political and electoral rights.

⟶ Although progress in recent times is the result of the struggle for human rights led by LGBTI+ activists, organizations and movements, straight and cisgender allies are also key to building inclusive societies where the human rights of all are respected. All relevant stakeholders have a shared social responsibility to promote the inclusivity of political and electoral processes.

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Annex I.

## About the author and the review board

About the author

Lluís Juan Rodríguez is an expert in democratic governance, electoral affairs and human rights. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and a Bachelor's Degree in Political Sciences from the University of Valencia, as well as a Master's Degree in European Constitutional Law from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, a Postgraduate Degree in Electoral Assistance and Observation from the University of Valencia and a Postgraduate Degree in Technopolitics and Human Rights in the Digital Age from the University of Barcelona. As a technical expert, Lluís has taken part in electoral assistance and democracy strengthening projects with UNDP, International IDEA, UN Women, IFES and other organizations in various countries, including Paraguay, Guatemala, Mexico, Haiti and Madagascar. His main areas of expertise include gender equality and the participation of women, youth, LGBTI+ persons and other underrepresented groups in political and electoral processes. In recent years, Lluís has contributed to the development of leading publications and knowledge products in the field of gender equality and electoral inclusion, including the Gender and Elections Topic Area of the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network.

About the review board

When the first draft of the publication was ready, it went through a thorough independent review process. The review board was composed of a diverse group of renowned independent experts in the fields of LGBTI+ rights and political and electoral affairs. Its composition aimed to be gender balanced and include engagement of trans and intersex experts.
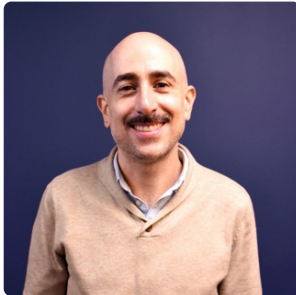
Luis Abolafia joined the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI) in November 2020 as a Senior Program Manager in the Latin American and Caribbean Division. Since June 2023, he is the Senior Technical Advisor on Gender, Equity, Safeguarding, and Social Inclusion for ABA ROLI's Global Programs Division. Luis has over 15 years of experience working on human rights, democracy, gender, and LGBTQI issues across the world. Before joining ABA ROLI, he served as Director of International Programs at the LGBTQ Victory Institute. There, Luis oversaw several initiatives that focused on increasing civic and political engagement of LGBTQ people in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Balkans, Southern Africa, and India. Prior to this, he coordinated several projects focused on women's economic empowerment and migration in Colombia, with Asociación Candelita from Spain. He has also worked for Fundación Triángulo in Spain, overseeing human rights and advocacy projects working with LGBTQI communities across Latin America. Luis graduated from the Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain) with a Law degree and holds a Master's degree in Applied Human Rights from the University of York (UK). He is fluent in English and Spanish and has an intermediate command of French.

Gabrielle Bardall Ph.D. is the founder and principal of Herizon Democracy consulting group and a Visiting Professor with the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) at the University of Ottawa. She has worked in over 60 countries worldwide for a variety of UN agencies and international organizations, including UNDP, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), UN Women, IFES and the Carter Center. She specializes in democracy assistance, especially promoting women's political rights in post-conflict and authoritarian states. Gabrielle holds degrees from McGill University, Sciences-Po Paris and l'Université de Montreal. She received the American Political Science Association's Congressional Fellowship and the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Doctoral Scholarship for her work in the area of violence against women in politics.
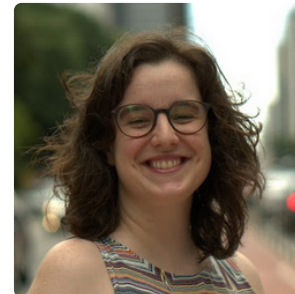
Evorah Cardoso is a scholar and activist with expertise in legal sociology. Holding a Ph.D. and Master's degree from the University of São Paulo, she also teaches International Relations at FECAP and coordinates research and advocacy at VoteLGBT, an NGO that aims to overcome LGBTQIA+ underrepresentation in Brazilian politics. Recently, she published a comprehensive report on Brazilian LGBTQIA+ politics, *"The State of Brazilian LGBT+ Politics: Between Power and Obliteration"*. Evorah is a longstanding researcher focusing on political representation and social mobilization for rights advocacy. With over 20 years of experience, Evorah has addressed critical social issues like gender equality, racism, child welfare, business and human rights, strategic litigation and pro bono advocacy, contributing to both Brazilian state entities and civil society organizations. Evorah's work has been recognized through scholarships from FAPESP, CAPES, and DAAD, and she has conducted research in Argentina, Colombia, and Germany. As an activist, she co-founded the NGO #MeRepresenta, where she served as director. Her impactful contributions earned her a spot in the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program on "Civic Activism in Democratic Process" in 2019.

Gina Chirillo is an expert in gender equality and women's political participation around the world with more than a decade of experience. Previously, she served as the senior global gender specialist at IFES, where she provided technical assistance to work empowering women in politics, advancing LGBTQI+ inclusion around the world, and promoting inclusive elections and democratic processes. She has authored gender analyses in Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Iraq and Ukraine and served as the program manager and co-author of IFES' global framework for gender-sensitive indicators for early warning of violence and conflict. She also led a research initiative to improve women's access to electoral justice. Gina holds a master's degree in public policy with a concentration in women's, gender and sexuality studies from the George Washington University, where she received a full-tuition fellowship and an award for feminist leadership, and a bachelor's degree in political science and French from Emory University.

Lina Cuellar is Director and co-founder of Sentiido. She holds a PhD in History from the University of Los Andes, a Master's degree in History and a Professional Degree in Literature from the National University of Colombia. Lina teaches, writes and develops projects related to sexual diversity, gender equality, strategic communication, leadership and creativity, the latter as a powerful tool for social change. She is a leadership and diversity coach and Fellow of Acumen Colombia 2021.

Luisa Rebeca Garza López is a Founding Member of QuereTrans SC, Coordinator of the Trans* Studies Center of QuereTrans SC, former Advisor of the INMUJERES Advisory Council (2021-2024) and first trans woman to hold a position in said Council, Member of the Observatory of the Political Rights of Trans* Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean, second generation Member of the Méxicos Posibles Project, and Honorary Member of the Free Chair of Trans* Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). Rebeca has 21 years of experience as an electoral official specializing in the integration of polling stations and the promotion of civic education with a gender perspective and an intersectionality approach. She was born in Veracruz, Mexico, in 1978 as a trans woman within an internal migrant family. She graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Administration from the Autonomous University of Nuevo León (UANL) in 1999 and holds a Master's Degree in Electoral Institutions and Procedures from the INE-UANL, with the thesis *"Gender violence and electoral political participation of trans* people in Mexico since 1990 within the Mexican electoral system"*, for which she obtained a honorable mention in 2017.

Dr. Irena Hadžiabdić is currently serving as a member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Central Election Commission (BiH CEC) and has been the commission's president twice (2010–2011 and 2017–2018). She graduated from the Belgrade Faculty of Law. She holds a M.S. in European Union Policy, Law and Management from Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen and a Ph.D. in Juridical Science. She has spent the past 26 years in the field of election management, first with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), then as Executive Director of IFES in Bosnia and Herzegovina and as the Executive Director of the Association of Election Officials in BiH (AEOBiH). In the period from June 2011 to September 2012, she was president of the Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO); she represented the BiH CEC in the Executive Board of the ACEEEO; and until October 2016 she also represented the BiH CEC in

the Oversight and Audit Committee of the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB). She is also a member of IFES Board of Directors. In 2013, she received an International Electoral Award for outstanding achievements in election management. In May 2019 she received the "person of the year" award for public administration and in June of 2022 she received IFES' Joe C. Baxter Award for excellence in election administration.

James Karanja, an intersex person, is the co-founder and the Executive Director of Intersex Person Society of Kenya (IPSK). James, who is a degree holder in Political Science and Sociology from the University of Nairobi, in 2016 wrote the intersex petition that was tabled in the Parliament for the first time. In 2017, he organized the first intersex national day in Kenya to celebrate the intersex Human Rights Day. Other responsibilities and achievements include: In 2017–2018, serving as a member of the Government of Kenya Intersex taskforce as mandate by the Attorney General of Kenya; in 2018, helping to mobilize the intersex community in demanding the inclusion of the third code in the 2019 Government of Kenya census, an effort that succeeded; in 2019, serving as a member of the Government of Kenya Intersex Persons Implementation Coordination Committee (IPICC). Also in 2019, James' expertise on intersex issues was sought by the Senate in the writing of an intersex bill that aims to amend the Registration of Persons Act and allow intersex persons to easily change their legal documentation. That same year, he was selected to the steering committee and appointed as the secretary of the Africa Intersex Movement (AIM) in the region.

Jan Logie was a Green Party member of the New Zealand Parliament from 2011-2023. She held the newly-created position of Parliamentary Under-Secretary Justice (Sexual and Domestic Violence Issues) from 2017-2020. In this role, amongst many other things, she engaged with diverse communities and established funding for tailored responses to prevent violence by and for indigenous, LGBTQIA+, disabled, migrant and young women. She has a background in gender equality and in working to end patriarchal violence. In parliament she initiated and co-chaired Aotearoa-New Zealand's first cross party rainbow caucus and began the political work to provide self-determination of gender identity on birth certificates. She has also been a proud member of the Trade Union Out at Work network, advocating for inclusive workplaces. Her work has centered the experiences of marginalized women and communities, including trans and non-binary people, challenging systemic oppression.

Therese Pearce Laanela leads the Electoral Processes Unit at International IDEA, a democracy-focused intergovernmental organization based in Stockholm, Sweden. She has 28 years of experience working with elections on the field, headquarters and policy levels. She served as a founding staff member at International IDEA. Through work with IFES, The Carter Center, UNDP and IDEA, Therese has been deeply involved in the development of a variety of seminal publications, networks, evaluations, databases and training curriculum on electoral administration. These include the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network and the BRIDGE election management course package. She began her elections work in Cambodia in 1992 as a District Electoral Supervisor for the UN-sponsored first multi-party elections, and then with UNDP and the Mozambican Electoral Commission to organize the first post-war elections of 1994. She has since served in dozens of international election observer and electoral assistance missions. Her doctoral studies at the Australian National University examine issues relating to trust in electoral institutions,

while her Master's Degree from the University of Stockholm focused on the links between political financing, corruption and electoral systems in Japan.

Tarek Zeidan is a sexual and bodily rights activist from Lebanon advocating for the rights and protection of LGBT communities in the MENA region. He is the executive director of Helem, the first LGBT rights organization in the Arab World, founded in 2001. His expertise lies in global LGBTIQ advocacy, digital rights, economic justice, and political participation. Tarek is an Ashoka Foundation global changemaker, a Ford Foundation global fellow, and a fellow at the Harvard Center for Public Leadership. He has previously worked as the head of communications and strategic planning for the MENA region at the Brookings Institution and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He obtained his MA in human rights advocacy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He lives in Beirut, Lebanon.