

# IMPROVING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

POLICY PAPER SUMMARY



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Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform is an association of local and international non-commercial legal entities registered in Georgia, aiming to promote and implement the goals set by the Joint Declarations of the Prague, Warsaw and Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summits and the EU-Georgia Association Agreement of European Neighborhood Policy and other joint events.

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## Summary

Involvement of citizens in local municipality decision-making is one of the most acute issues in Georgia today and it plays an important role in the self-government reform.

Particularly noteworthy is Chapter XI of the Local Self-Governance Code, namely the new mechanism for citizen participation – the organization of town hall meetings as practical implementation of the provision is still on the agenda.

Georgia is still underperforming in terms of citizen involvement in the process of local self-government at the regional level and the issue of civic participation in the self-government is inadequately regulated by the Code. Separate norms still require further refinement to reflect the reality in various villages/settlements/communities.

Renewal of the existing legislative base and inclusion of civic participation mechanisms in the code clearly indicates the readiness of the state to empower citizens and actively involve them at the level of self-governments.

Civic participation in local decision-making is one of the core principles of democracy. Civic involvement in partnerships between local governments and civil groups is only achievable if high quality of cooperation takes place. The system for regional development must be based on the principle of decentralized management and the establishment of real self-governance will ensure democratic regional development, establishing and promoting democratic values nationwide.

The legal provision in the Code does substantially transcend the reality of Georgian villages and communities, as not only citizens in villages and communities, but also the responsible parties, are nihilistic about the prospects of civic engagement. This is true for the representatives of local municipalities as well, who believe that the implementation of such mechanisms must be preceded by an in-depth study of the situation on the ground and only then adequate and effective mechanisms can be designed.

Georgia must start preparing the legal groundwork based on decentralization, resulting in budget independence and empowered local self-government bodies, to effectively implement a civic engagement mechanism, to increase the participation of local population in self-governments, and to ensure that local issues are decided in a timely fashion. Currently, civic engagement and their effective participation in local problem-solving should be a priority, especially considering the country has signed the Association Agreement, which focuses on empowering local self-governance and which states that local population involvement in local self-government is crucial. Various European countries are focused on the active participation of its citizens and have increased their role in the local decision-making processes.

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This report aims to explore the present state of affairs in terms of civic involvement and proposes solutions. During recent years, European countries have created new forms/instruments for citizen participation, such as citizen panels, which are used to reach citizens. Citizen committees have been created at local levels, which self-mobilize and discuss locally important issues together with their elected representatives, involving them actively in the decision-making process.

In order to increase citizen involvement at the regional levels, legislative amendments are not enough. They must be accompanied by effective mechanisms implemented in practice, which serve a broader goal of regional empowerment and which increase civic participation in the decision-making process.

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