

The Right to Vote for Persons with Disabilities

An overview of the situation in Europe



The European Association of Service
providers for Persons with Disabilities



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List of Abbreviations

- DPO – Disabled People Organisations
- EASPD – European Association of Service providers for Person with Disabilities
- EU – European Union
- MS – EU Member States
- FRA - Fundamental Rights Agency (Europe)
- PWD – People with Disabilities
- UNCRPD – United Nation Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
- ANED – Academic Network of European Disability Experts
- GDRN – Global Disability Rights Now
- FAIDD - Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe



Introduction

The purpose of this paper by the European Association of Service providers for People with Disabilities (EASPD) is to provide an overview of the information on the Rights to Vote for people with disabilities (PWD) across Europe to our member organisations. To inspire and to encourage our members to take this information and use it to promote the voting rights of people with disabilities, as well as to provide examples of practical measures on how our members can support people with disabilities to vote.

This paper consists of two chapters; the first chapter will provide a comparative summary of five reports describing their critical findings on the topic of voting as well as presenting recommendations. These reports were considered for their Pan-European approach or for providing an experience of a person with disabilities in a recent election. Unfortunately, due to the lack of research in English, the extent of research papers that this report could report on was restricted.

The five reports are:

1. The right to political participation for persons with Disabilities: Human Rights Indicators. (2014); A report by the European Fundamental Rights Agency.
2. Real rights of persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections A report by the European Economic and Social Committee (2019)
3. Elections for everyone, Experiences of people with disabilities at the 8 June 2017 UK Parliamentary general election. (2017); by the Electoral Commission of the United Kingdom.
4. Persons with Disabilities and Ensuring their right to Participate in Political and Public Life. (2017); by OSCE office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
5. The political participation of disabled people in Europe: rights, accessibility, and representation. (2016); by University of Leeds.

In the second chapter this report will present models of best practice from different Member States (MS), where they have a campaign to promote rights of people to vote. It should be noted that this does not apply to looking at a MS legislation concerning this topic, rather a campaign such as getting political parties to increase their electoral material in an easy to read version.



Chapter One – Reports

The right to political participation for persons with Disabilities: Human Rights Indicators

A report by the European Fundamental Rights Agency (2014)¹

Introduction

The ANED and FRA report set out to gain an understanding of the levels of involvement and interest of people with disabilities in political life across Europe Member States. On the next page the reader will find two charts from the FRA report, which show firstly how their country compared to other MS when it came to the Right to Vote for people with deprived legal capacity. Secondly, the reader can again compare how their country fares when it came to parties that provided accessible manifestos.

Key Information

The reader of this report may find the following information useful in the development of their policy to inform their own members about the state of play in other MS concerning voting rights.

- The FRA report shows that people with disabilities have a high degree of interest in engaging with the political life of their communities.
- People with disabilities are still persistently hindered by barriers.
- Accessibility was still an issue.
- Data collection was difficult due to inaccessibility of polling stations.
- The severity or the type of disability can have an adverse effect on an individual's level of political participation i.e. persons with intellectual disabilities are often some of the people most isolated and excluded from political and social life.

Reported Barriers/Issues²

- **Legal capacity**
- **Accessibility** to buildings, polling stations
- Absence of **easy-to-read** electoral material
- Media outlets not providing **sign language or subtitles** for main debates and electoral ads.

¹ (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2014)

² (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2014)



- Inaccessible polling stations made it difficult to collect data on the levels of political participation among PWD and to populate other indicators.

The following two charts provide information on the state of play across the EU when it comes to two issues: Chart 1) Right to Vote regarding legal capacity, Chart 2) Did Political Party provide accessible manifestos?

Chart 1: Right to vote of people with deprived legal capacity in the EU:³

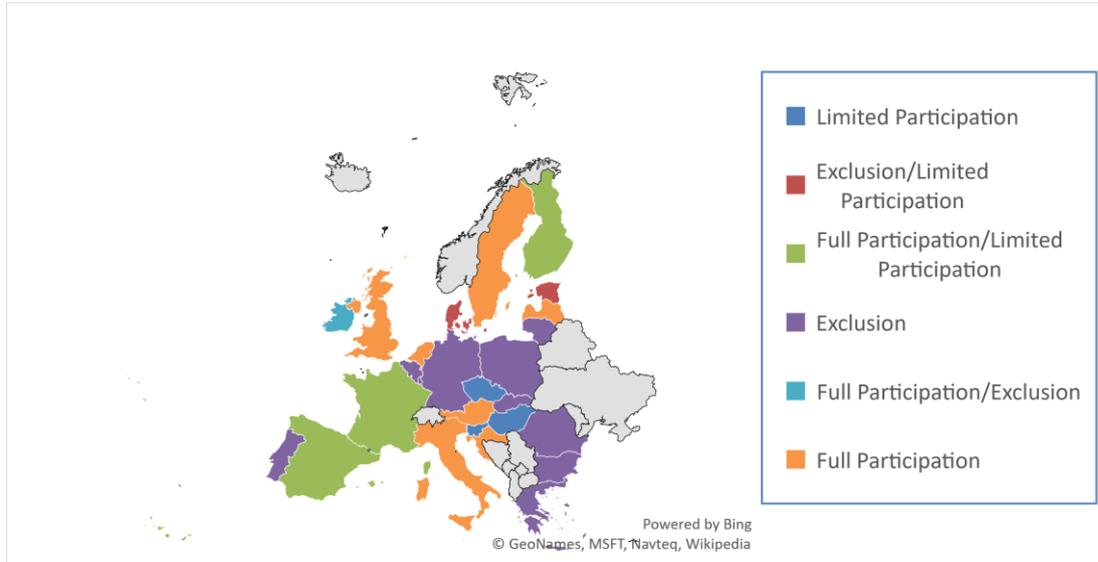
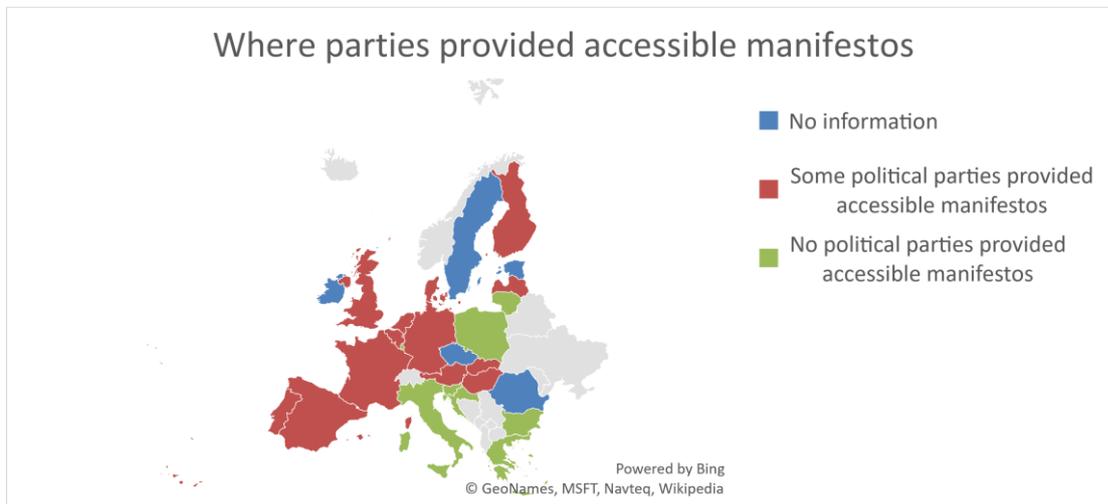


Chart 2: Countries where parties provided accessible manifestos:⁴



³ (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2014)

⁴ (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2014)



Regarding mechanisms to ensure consultation and involvement of DPO's in the drafting of legislation and policy that affects them, the report found:

- From 28 EU countries⁵
 - 13 – Yes, mechanisms **established by law**.
 - 11 – No mechanism established by law, **but systematic procedures in place**.
 - 4 – **No mechanism in place**.
 -

Suggested Solutions

The FRA key message in terms for solutions is for MS to develop and improve their systems of data collection regarding the issue of voting and PWD. It says providing adequate resources to ensure targeted and comparable data will go a long way in populating indicators and to help monitor the success of implementing PWD rights.

Quote from FRA report “Despite these encouraging signs, EU Member States still need to address significant challenges to the realisation of the right to political participation for persons with disabilities” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2014).

Real rights of persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections

A report by the European Economic and Social Committee (2019)⁶

Introduction

Readers of this report will find the following summary of the report by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) interesting as it provides further research into the topic of the implementation of the right to vote for PWD in the EU Parliamentary Elections. The research sample contained several hundred participants, and several different stakeholders from across the EU.

Key Information⁷

- All 27 MS have laws or organisational arrangements which exclude some voters with disabilities from participating in EP elections.
- About 500 000 EU citizens from 16 MS are, because of national rules, deprived of the right to participate in EP elections because of their disabilities or mental health problems. (PATER K. , 2019)

⁵ (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2014)

⁶ (PATER K. , 2019)

⁷ (PATER K. , 2019)



- In 12 countries, national legislation does not allow the designated polling station based on residence to be changed to another which can better accommodate the specific type of disability
- In 8 MS, anyone who cannot to get to a polling station is not able to vote, as they do not have the option of an alternative form of voting. Three of these countries offer the possibility of voting by proxy. However, such a solution cannot be regarded as an adequate alternative.
- In 18 MS, blind voters have no way of voting independently; they can only entrust somebody accompanying them to cast their vote on their behalf.

Reported Barriers/Issues⁸

- Legal Barriers – Deprivation of Liberty and Right to Vote
- Accessibility to polling stations, electoral material, information to how to vote.
- “No legal act touches upon real rights to vote, especially those of PWD”.
- Lack of data on the number of people deprived of their voting rights because of their disability.
- Environmental issues e.g. In the design of the polling centre layout, which makes the centre too small and crowded for some PWD.

Suggested solutions⁹

The report suggested the following solutions, when it came to legal barriers a change in attitude towards PWD is crucial in particular for people with ID or mental health problems. After the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) deliberated on the Alajos Kiss v. Hungary case, the report suggested that MS should align their legislation to the decision of the court.

The report also recommended that electoral material should be made accessible for all and that the design should consider the different types of disabilities among voters while also ensuring that public authorities cooperate with DPOs when designing electoral material.

Due to most polling stations in the EU not being fully accessible to PWD of various types, the report suggests a temporary measure is to allow PWD to change polling stations where feasible. It also goes on to suggest that PWD should be free to choose the person who assists them during elections at the polling stations.

To be further accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired, the report also reported simple solutions such as special covers for ballot papers, both marked using Braille and with easily readable text. Other simple solutions included Early Voting as well as improved Postal Voting systems where the PWD is not just sent a ballot paper but also information, which is accessibility according to their disability.

⁸ (PATER K. , 2019)

⁹ (PATER K. , 2019)



Elections for everyone, Experiences of people with disabilities at the 8 June 2017 UK Parliamentary general election

(2017) by the UK Electoral Commission ¹⁰

Introduction

This report examines the experiences of people with disabilities during the 2017 UK elections, which could help the reader to compare the experiences of PWD from their own MS. The report also looks at the various methods a PWD could vote in elections and the individual issues that arise with them. What the reader may find interesting is how the barriers/issues presented in the 2017 report are quite like the barriers/issues reported in the FRA report of 2014.

Key Information

From this report the reader could see that PWD in the UK share similar issues with other organisations in another EU MS, they could then use this information to equip themselves and work with their counterpart in other MS to tackle these issues at a European level.

- The authors found that there was still some confusion about who could accompany a PWD to the polling station and how the polling staff could assist them.
- The report found that PWD do not always find the information given by candidates/parties were easy-to-read or to understand.
- It was reported that PWD were not allowed to vote and were sent away or they were not able to get in. (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2014)
- The report also found that the environment of the polling station made some PWD feel uncomfortable.

Reported Barriers/Issues¹¹

- Uncertainty on who PWD can legally bring with them to the Polling Centre
- **Jargon** that is unfamiliar and complicated,
- **Poor font** in electoral material,
- **Accessibility issues**
- **Environmental issues** in the polling stations,
- **Confusing instructions** for voting by post

According to the UK report, PWD are still facing significant problems when it comes to voting, affirming that 5% of PWD still have difficulty getting into polling stations, and 35% of PWD vote by post (UK

¹⁰ (UK Electoral Commission, 2017)

¹¹ (UK Electoral Commission, 2017)



Electoral Commission, 2017). This means, having a set of clear instructions on how to do postal voting is vital.

Suggested solutions ¹²

When it came to the topic of solutions, the Electoral Commission's overarching message was that of practical measures except for changing legislation in regard to capacity, which can be put in place to help PWD to vote and make voting more accessible for everyone.

- Easy-to-Read election material, **bigger text, a picture that shows what to do.**
- Having a **Tactile voting template** available at polling stations.
- A "**Helpline which is really helpful**" (UK Electoral Commission, 2017)

- Bullet points, audial version
- Online information, such as a video to show someone where to vote. Links to **precise information** on Proxy and Postal voting.
- Improve **environmental concerns** by having quiet areas, good lighting, bigger pencils that are easier to hold.
- Having staff who are **trained in assisting** PWD to vote.
- **Alternative ways to vote**, i.e. voting on the weekend, mobile polling stations.
- Changing **legislation** regarding who can accompany a PWD to the polling station.
- More **information** is needed to **be available in care services** about how to register to vote and vote, but crucially information should be made available to care workers on how to support someone to vote.
- Provide **training** to the polling station staff on supporting PWD to vote.

The report found that having easy-to-read material is essential as it helps people to understand and make an informed choice. Equally important to ensure that easy-to-read material such as party manifestos are out earlier in time for PWD, so they have enough time to make an informed decision.

¹² (UK Electoral Commission, 2017)



Persons with Disabilities and Ensuring their right to Participate in Political and Public Life

A report by OSCE office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2017) ¹³

Introduction

This report from Poland by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, provides a further insight of the challenges that PWD face when it comes to participating in public life. The reader of this report could find the research by the OSCE useful as it reinforces the findings of the previous research papers mentioned in this report, therefore strengthening their policy positions when they are promoting the rights of PWD in their respective MS.

Key Information

- While disability terminology is evolving, there is still confusion over which terms to use among PWD and different organisations.
- The report upholds that by ensuring PWD play active roles in the political life of their societies, this will contribute to strengthening both respect for their rights and mainstreaming disabilities.
- The reports states that representation of PWD in political and public life remains disproportionately low across the OSCE region.

- As few countries collect disability disaggregated data, it is difficult to estimate the actual level of political participation of persons with disabilities in OSCE participating States.
- In some European Union MS the authors note that persons with disabilities are hardly visible on the political stage or taken into consideration in voting processes.
- Women and youth with disabilities or persons with disabilities belonging to ethnic or other marginalised groups face even greater barriers and obstacles in having their voices heard.

Reported Barriers/Issues¹⁴

- Outdated paternalistic approaches and prevailing social stereotypes
- Lack of access (physical, linguistic and infrastructural, as well as to information)
- Legal and administrative barriers
- Institutional segregation
- Lack of quality inclusive education
- Limited support and funding for participation
- Poverty
- Lack of comparable data

¹³ (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2017)

¹⁴ (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2017)



Suggested solutions

The authors provide solutions they believe are needed to ensure that PWD can participate in political life. They include having a political environment that is accessible, ensuring that electoral media is in easy-to-read formats, braille, and with subtitles as well as audio descriptions and sign language. While also improving access to public meetings, democratic institutions, and polling stations.

The report also goes on to state that the collection of data is crucial for measuring the progress of improving the voting rights of PWD and should be improved. In relation to removing legal barriers for PWD the authors of the report invite the states to introduce “supported” rather than “substituted” decision making, when it comes to Legal Capacity (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2017).

The report also highlights the importance of raising public awareness against negative stereotypes of PWD and how it is essential to increasing their public representation. To raise awareness the authors of this report have developed a ODHIR project called “Our Right to Participate - Promoting the Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Political and Public Life in the OSCE Region” (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2017) a brief description of this project will be provided in the next chapter.

[The political participation of disabled people in Europe: rights, accessibility, and representation](#)

A report by University of Leeds (2016)¹⁵

Introduction

Providing another systematic cross-national assessment of PWD political participation among EU MS in respect of the UNCRPD. The report findings suggest four key actions 1) lifting legal and administrative barriers; 2) raising awareness; 3) making political participation more accessible; and 4) expanding participation opportunities in public life. Readers of this report could use these and the following key information to further strengthen their argument on a National and European level.

What is also quite interesting is that this report also introduces the topic of disability as the missing social economic variable in the study of political participation, suggesting any future studies should include it as it makes the connection that people with low economic status tend to have a low voting rate.

¹⁵ (Priestley, et al., 2016)



Key Information

- The report states that disability is a missing socio-economic variable in political participation research. (Priestley, et al., 2016)
- Stating that inequality within European countries ‘magnifies the relationship between income and participation’ (Priestley, et al., 2016).
- There is lower voter turnout among PWD, despite the existence of non-discrimination legislation, this could be due to inaccessible polling stations, social isolation, lower economic status, and poor belief in the democratic process.
- Also, there are important insights of unequal participation and awareness of accessibility for PWD in the political process.

The main message that resonates from this paper is the argument that disability should be considered as a socio-economic variable in future political participation research (Priestley, et al., 2016). The reasons are that economic status is related to political participation, the lower your economic status the lower the rate of participation. PWD tend to have a lower socio-economic status and therefore have a lower rate of participation.

Reported Barriers/Issues¹⁶

- **Legal Capacity**
- **Inaccessible** electoral media
- Absence of **quality data** on the monitoring of the accessibility of electoral process
- **Low rate** of political participation
- **No specific legislation** for the training of polling centre staff in supporting PWD
- **Inaccessibility** of polling stations
- Low rate of **formal complaints** concerning the right to political participation

Suggested solutions

The report provided the following solutions to help alleviate the issues raised in the report, most crucially is that in future reports on political participation, disability should be included as a socio-economic variable¹⁷. It also states that if national parties receive state funding, they should be obliged to be inclusive and provide accessible election media broadcast platforms. In terms of the provision of sign language and audio description, it should be made mandatory for election broadcasts and important debates.

¹⁶ (Priestley, et al., 2016)

¹⁷ (Priestley, et al., 2016)



Chapter Two – Examples of Models

In chapter two, the reader will find useful information on the components of an effective message, which was compiled by Global Disability Rights Now (GDRN). This information could be used by the reader in the development of their message, and covers topics such as; Mainstreaming, Targeting, Sensational, and Accessibility.

The second part of this chapter includes examples of models of campaigns from member states that promote the voting rights of people with disabilities. The examples will include models from Finland, Romania, Spain, and Scotland to provide a cardinal view of the different models in Europe.

Key components of a message: ¹⁸

According to Global Disability Rights Now (GDRN), education about voting is crucial to make the process more inclusive for all people including those with disabilities, as such GDRN have provided the following examples of how governments and organisations can ensure that their messages can be informative and inclusive for PWD.

- **Mainstreamed** - Messages intended for the general-public, meaning for all people with and without disabilities, can be mainstreamed or integrate people with disabilities in their content. When materials meant for the general-public include images or information about people with disabilities, this can help reduce the stigmatisation of people with disabilities among non-disabled people. This helps raise the visibility of people with disabilities in public and political life. Making mainstream messages disability inclusive can also encourage people with disabilities to become involved with voting.
- **Targeted** - Persons with disabilities experience additional barriers while taking part in public life, including voting. One barrier to their inclusion is the lack of available information about where and how people with disabilities can vote. Developing an educational campaign is important to ensure that all voters know how to participate. Targeted messages might include information about the assistive devices that are available on Election Day, or the right of persons with disabilities to an assistant of their choice.
- **Sensational** - Voter education campaigns do more than share information with voters: they are powerful tools to empower people with disabilities to take part as citizens equal to others. Sensitisation campaigns are designed to target the general public and show the integration of

¹⁸ [Global Disability Rights Now, Inclusive Voter Education.](#)



persons with disabilities in public life. These messages are intended to reduce stigma and can serve to break down stereotypes.

- **Accessible** - To reach all voters with disabilities, information must be available in multiple formats. Messages are accessible when they are distributed using a combination of TV advertisements, radio, poster, and tactile or braille brochures in order to ensure that all voters have the opportunity to understand the messages. For example, using simple language and images also make messages accessible to persons with intellectual disabilities or persons with low literacy skills; including radio advertisements reaches voters who are blind or have low vision; and sign language interpretation helps reach Deaf communities.

Examples of Models in Member States by quarter

Quarter One

- Sinulla on ääni? (You have a vote)? – Finland¹⁹

The ‘Sinulla on ääni?’ (You have a vote)? campaign was run by our Finnish member, Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FAIDD). The campaign consists of two videos providing accessible electoral material for people with a disability and immigrant background, giving information in Finnish on how to vote.

According to FAIDD the videos have been viewed about 1300 times from their website and on their YouTube-channel. The videos were made in cooperation with the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Kuntaliitto).

In addition to their “Sinulla on ääni?” Campaign, FAIDD in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice prepares materials in easy-to-read brochures to be distributed for PWD before elections, this has proven to be very popular and is distributed to thousands of locations.

For the 2018 Finnish Presidential election, FAIDD provided an easy-to-read election brochure explaining in clear precise language the following:

- First section – The President
 - The Term of a Finish President (6 years)
 - Presidential Duties
 - Who can vote?
 - Who can you vote for?

¹⁹ (Kehitysvammaliitto, n.d.)



- Second section – General Information
 - One or two votes procedure
 - Home Voting for PWD
 - Advance Voting
- Third section – How to Vote?
 - Show ID to election Officer
 - Take the ballot with you and go to the polls.
 - Fold the ballot in the middle
 - Return to the election officer
 - Drop your ballot into the box
 - The election officer asks you to sign the form
 - Finally, the clerk closes the ballot box and the form
- Fourth section – Who can help? & Secrecy of the ballot

Quarter Two

- I vote, and I have the right to be heard – Albania

The project "I vote, and I have the right to be heard", which is being implemented by the MEDPAK association with funding from "Leviz Albania", aims to increase disability awareness on the importance of voting as an expression of real democracy in the Elbasan district. The goal is to raise awareness of PWD and their families in the pre-electoral period of the 2019 local elections, to implement local governmental law to improve local services for PWD.

The campaign developers started off by identifying the problems that result in the low participation rate of PWD in voting. The issues ranged from lack of knowledge on and information about voting rights for PWD to lack of accessible ballot papers for PWD and physical barriers.

From these issues the campaign created two objectives; firstly, to increase the capacities of 50 PWD and their parents in each local government to start awareness campaigns to increase voter output. Secondly, to monitor municipal council decisions to see how election promises are kept and what should be done to improve further legislation.

Because of this campaign, the voter preparedness among the PWD community increased to 90%, and awareness among the general community on voting rights for PWD has also improved. Within the local communities all PWD over the age of 18 are registered to vote for the local elections, while political parties have increased their transparency regarding programmes for PWD and social services have become part of their party manifestos.



- 'Vote SMART' campaign, Romania²⁰

The VOTE SMART campaign was organised by the Pentru Voi Foundation in 2008 with the aim to create a communication network between voters and candidates for County Council elections and administrative sectors in Bucharest. The campaign was established to enable people to vote in an informed way.

The VOTE SMART campaign took place from May to June 2008 and offered the opportunity for political candidates from 5 different counties in Romania (Timis, Giurgiu, Hunedoara, Mures and Sibiu) and 6 candidates from the Bucharest administration to present concrete ways in which they would promote the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities to voters. Their answers were made public in the central and local press and through the organisations involved in the campaign to inform the electorate and hold the candidates accountable for their answers.

Questions asked by the campaign:

- What are you planning to do with the institution from Gavojdia which doesn't respect the quality standards? Will you close it in the next 4 years?
- How many community-based social services, such as group homes, respite services, supported living programs, day centres do you intend to create in the next 4 years?
- In what way will they involve the persons with disabilities, their families and the organisations in the disability field in the creation, implementation and monitoring of the public policies in this field, on the grounds of the principle "Nothing for us, without us!"?

Quarter Three

- "Mi Voto Cuenta" (My Vote Counts) – Spain²¹

Plena Inclusion established "Mi Voto Cuenta" (My Vote Counts) which focuses on raising awareness about the right to vote and access to electoral proceedings. By bringing PWD to the attention of all political parties and Spain's central election committee, more than 1000 PWD have participated in election campaigns through information sessions and discussions with political parties as of 2018.

²⁰ (Inclusion Europe, 2011)

²¹ (Zero Project.org, 2019)



Developed in 2011 for the Spanish General Elections of that year, with the aim to empower and inform PWD and their families about voting rights, the campaign has since the 2014

European Elections been extended to all local and national elections in Spain. The Congress of Deputies, Spain's legislature lower house, has also passed a reform bill to amend existing election law to allow PWD to vote.

Fortunately, the campaign has enjoyed further success by being used in the development of other MS promotional voting campaigns. Finally, as another measure of success the lobby campaign along with other Spanish NGOs succeeded in lobbying for the National Electoral Law to be reformed so that some 10,000 PWD can now vote in the 2019 European, regional and local Elections.

Quarter Four

- The Access to Elected Office Fund (Scotland) ²²

This fund from Inclusion Scotland and supported by the Scottish Government provides financial assistance to PWD who have decided to run in the 2021 Scottish Parliament Election. The Fund provides financial support to pay for the additional impairment related costs that disabled people face when running for elected office.

The fund does not cover campaign costs but covers the cost for; transport, personal assistants, communications support, equipment and assistive technology that the candidate may need because of their disability.

In the 2017 Local Authority elections, there were 39 disabled candidates supported by the Access to Elected Office Fund pilot scheme. Of these candidates, 15 were elected, representing 4 different political parties in 12 different councils.

To find out further information, members can contact accesspolitics@inclusionScotland.org or call Ethan 07717 858 405.

- Down Syndrome Ireland My Opinion My vote (MOTE) Course

“My Opinion, My Vote” (MOTE) is a European Project which aims to empower people with learning disabilities through active citizenship and participation in political elections. From this project, Down Syndrome Ireland has developed a two-year educational programme for people with Down Syndrome.

²² (Inclusion Scotland , n.d.)



The course teaches students about the importance of voting and their political rights, how to form their own opinion, and how to vote. Topics provided across ten units include “What is Politics?”, “Voting Procedures, Electoral Lists”, and “What is Europe?”

If you would like more details, you can contact Lisa Martin at lisamartin@downsyndrome.ie. Alternately you can access Down Syndrome Ireland’s website: [My Opinion My Vote](#)

Links to Additional Models:

- [Pushing for changes in the electoral code’, Albania 2007 & 2009](#)

In 2009, Help the Life organisation was part of a working group to change the electoral code before the 2009 national election. One change was the introduction of assisted voting for people with intellectual disabilities.

Website: <http://www.helpthelife.org/>

- [Down Syndrome Ireland “My Opinion My Vote” \(MOTE\) Course](#)

Down Syndrome Ireland provides a two-year educational programme for people with Down Syndrome. The course teaches students about the importance of voting and their political rights, how to form their own opinion, and how to vote.

Website: <https://downsyndrome.ie/what-we-do/mote-my-opinion-my-vote/>

- [MENCAP Campaign UK](#)

Mencap campaign was centred around developing and providing accessible electoral material for people with disabilities, this material includes guides on how to support PWD to vote as well as providing easy-to-read manifestos.

Website: <https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/elections>

- [Disable Inequality – Disability Federation of Ireland \(DFI\)](#)

In 2016, DFI ran the Disable Inequality Campaign to strengthen the voice of PWD in Ireland by facilitating them to speak of their own experience of inequality. To achieve this, DFI provided media training to give people the support and confidence to speak in public.

Website: <https://www.disability-federation.ie/>



- Our Right to Participate

The ODIHR project “Our Right to Participate – Promoting the Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Political and Public Life in the OSCE Region” aims to raise awareness of and promote the political participation of persons with disabilities.

Website: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/340246?download=true>

- ‘Your vote is equal to others!’ project, Romania

The Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority project ‘Your vote is equal to others!’ aims to change electoral law to help PWD to vote.

Website: https://inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Good_Practices_EN.pdf

- Innovative Practice 2019 on Independent Living and Political Participation

Spanish accessibility firm Scytl, developed the iVote Core Voting System for New South Wales, in Australia. iVote is a system that allows blind voters and PWD to vote online by using its web-based platform or via a phone using the keypad.

- My community, My Voice - Albania

Is a YouTube video developed by Down Syndrome Albania to create awareness about the rights of people with disabilities to vote in the 2017 general elections.

Website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUnDvtwU9Dw>

Conclusion

The purpose of this report set out in the introduction was to provide an overview of the information that is available from across the EU Member States on the Right to Vote for People with Disabilities. In the hope that the information will provide inspiration to EASPD members and help in the development of campaigns to promote voting rights for PWD.

This research provided a summary of five reports, selected for their Pan-EU approach or their study of the personal experiences of PWD voting in a General Election.

The first was the 2014 FRA report looking at the levels of involvement and interest in political life across Europe among PWD. It found that there was a high degree of interest barriers that still exist for PWD to participate in political life. It also found that there was a common theme of poor data collection when it came to political participation among PWD. Lastly, the report stated that there was an adverse connection between the severity or type of disability and the level of involvement.



Next, we had a report by the EESC exploring the real rights of PWD to vote in the EP elections, in its research it found that there are still laws that exclude PWD to some degree from voting in all 27 MS. This results into approx. 500,000 EU citizens with disabilities not being able to vote in EP elections because of their national laws.

The third report was the UK's Electoral Commission's report into the experiences of PWD in the 2017 General Election. The report found that there was still confusion among PWD about who can accompany them to the polling station, another significant issue was the lack of accessible and easy-to-read electoral material from the candidates. There were also reported incidents of PWD being refused entry into polling centres.

The fourth report from the OSCE outlines the challenges PWD face while trying to participate in political life. Continuing the trend, the report found that the same issues were still present for PWD, challenges such as confusion about what terminology to use, legal capacity issues, and the lack of comparable data. The report also highlights the importance of political life yet how in some EU MS PWD are hardly visible on the political stage.

The fifth report also focused on political participation among PWD across the EU, their research concluded that disability should be a single social-economic variable in future political participation. Stating that inequality magnifies the problem of the relationship between income and political involvement, while also sighting issues of unequal participation and access to political life for PWD.

The second chapter looked at the various models from around Europe which focus on promoting the right to vote for PWD. By taking a cardinal approach, this report looked at examples of models from Albania, Finland, Romania, Spain, and Scotland and provided a detailed description of each one.

These models included providing YouTube videos explaining how to vote for people with disabilities and an immigrant background and providing Easy-to-Read brochures before general elections in Finland. From here the report looked at the campaign from Albania called "I vote, and I have the right to be heard" that focused on emphasising the importance of voting in the run-up to the 2019 elections.

Next the campaign "Vote Smart" from Romania, which worked on creating a network of communication between voters who had disabilities and candidates for election to the County Council and administration services in Europe.

From Spain, the report looked at the "Mi Voto Cuenta" campaign by Plena Inclusion, which focused on empowering and informing PWD as well as their families about voting rights. Also creating awareness about the importance of voting and bringing PWD to the attention of all political parties and Spain's central election committee.

Finally, the report looked at a campaign run by Inclusion Scotland and the Scottish government, providing funding for PWD who have decided to run for public office in Scotland. The report from Scotland stated that in the 2017 Local Authority elections, there were 39 candidates with a disability



supported by the Access to Elected Office Fund pilot scheme. Of these candidates, 15 were elected, representing 4 different political parties in 12 different councils.

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EASPD (European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities) is a European NGO network representing over 17.000 social and health support provider organisations across Europe and across disabilities, working towards the promotion of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

EASPD bases the development of social services on the human rights framework provided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). EASPD is accredited to the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UNCRPD has become the core of EASPD's policy strategy.

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