



Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities

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Acronyms

CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled persons' organization
EDF	European Disability Forum
EMB	Election management body
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
ISO	International Standards Organization
MP	Member of Parliament
NDI	National Democratic Institute
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Foreword

According to World Health Organization statistics, around 1 billion people in the world have some form of disability. However, persons with disabilities remain largely under-represented in democratic structures, parliaments and political parties across the OSCE region.

A number of significant obstacles negatively affect the engagement of persons with disabilities in political life. Among them are lack of access to parliaments and information on political issues, insufficient support, national laws permitting deprivation of legal capacity, and prevailing stereotypes about persons with disabilities and their possible contribution to political processes and decision-making. These all contribute to further exclusion and segregation of persons with disabilities. For women with disabilities it means facing additional challenges, as a result of persisting inequalities and discrimination based on both gender and disability.

Participation of persons with disabilities in political, public and social life is crucial to fighting existing stereotypes, prejudices and segregation. Exclusion of certain groups from decision-making processes creates not only more divided and potentially less peaceful societies, but also significantly weakens the excluded group's opportunities to defend its own interests. Ensuring that persons with disabilities take an active role in the political and public life of their societies, thus, contributes both to stronger respect for their rights and to more disability-mainstreamed legal and policy frameworks that better reflect the needs of all community members.

The right to equal political participation has a prominent place in the OSCE Human Dimension Commitments. The OSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document 1990 recognized “the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination.” In the 1991 Moscow Document, participating States agreed to “take steps to ensure the equal opportunity of persons with disabilities to participate fully in the life of their society and to promote the appropriate participation of such persons in decision-making in fields concerning them.” These commitments also reflect the approach taken by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). As a leading international treaty in the field of disability rights, it has been signed or ratified by most OSCE participating States.

To ensure that these obligations are met by all OSCE participating States, a number of challenges need to be addressed, including raising awareness about the right of persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life, recognizing the preconditions for effective participation, ensuring an accessible environment, information and infrastructure, and addressing prevailing stereotypes and prejudices.

The aim of these Guidelines is to assist participating States in ensuring that persons with disabilities can fully and effectively participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others. The Guidelines describe challenges that persons with disabilities face and provide guidance and concrete recommendations on what steps parliaments, political parties and civil society organizations should undertake to ensure that democratic institutions and decision-making processes are more inclusive and accessible for persons with various types of disabilities.

The Guidelines recognize that disability is an ever-evolving concept and, thus, do not place restrictions on what qualifies as a disability. They follow the CPRD definition of the concept, and are based on the human rights-based approach to disability.

We hope that these Guidelines will be a useful tool to a broad audience, including parliaments, political parties, public officials and civil society organizations, including organizations representing persons with disabilities. Finally, we wish to thank all the organizations and experts who contributed their expertise, suggestions and personal experiences to the development of these Guidelines.

Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir
ODIHR Director

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About the Guidelines

Based on standards established in international commitments, these *Guidelines to Promote the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities* are a practical resource for OSCE participating States to strengthen the ability of democratic institutions – namely, political parties and parliaments – to engage and empower persons with disabilities in political processes.

The good practices described in these Guidelines were collected through expert advice and recommendations provided during ODHIR expert meetings and conferences on political participation of persons with disabilities, held as part of the project “Our Right to participate – Promoting the participation of Persons with Disabilities in political and public life”, including events held in Helsinki (2016), Warsaw,² Skopje,³ Brussels,⁴ Bishkek⁵ (2017), as well as Vienna,⁶ Dushanbe,⁷ and Belgrade⁸ (2018).

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- 1 Expert Seminar “Our right to participate – promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life”, 31 October 2016, Helsinki, news item available at: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/278306>>.
 - 2 Discussion “Our right to participate – Enabling political activism among youth with disabilities”, 9 February 2017, news item available at: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/298901>>.
 - 3 Annual Meeting of Experts on Participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, 22 June 2017, Skopje, news item available at: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/324771>>.
 - 4 Thematic Meeting “Political parties and participation of persons with disabilities,” 8 November 2017, Brussels. news item available at: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/355416>>.
 - 5 Forum “Ensuring equal access to decision making processes,” 12 December 2017, Bishkek, news item available at: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/362301>>.
 - 6 Conference “Promoting the political participation of women with disabilities,” 16-17 April 2018, Vienna, news item available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/377986>.
 - 7 Annual Meeting of Experts on Participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, 27 June 2018, Dushanbe, news item available at: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/385995>>.
 - 8 Conference “Political and electoral participation of persons with disabilities,” 16-17 October 2018, Belgrade, news item available at: <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/400004>>.

The Guidelines are intended for the use of political parties and parliaments, including political party members and leaders, campaign staff, parliamentary leaders and administrative staff. Other audiences may benefit from the use of this handbook as well, including potential partners such as policy experts and disability rights organizations.

Reading the Guidelines

Readers who are new to disability rights will find useful context in the **Introduction** and **Persons with Disabilities** sections, which explain how disability is defined, lists key international standards and agreements governing the political participation of persons with disabilities, and identifies barriers for access to political processes.

The third section, **Political Parties**, focuses on the role of political parties in supporting voters, candidates and campaign staff with disabilities. The fourth section, **Parliaments**, explores good practices for engaging with public stakeholders and discusses administrative processes through the lens of disability inclusion.

Finally, there are two checklists on disability inclusion within the annex, one for political parties and one for parliaments. They are available as tools political parties and parliaments can use to identify areas of potential work for greater disability inclusion and access.

These Guidelines are not meant to be a definitive source of information but, instead, should be seen as providing suggestions on practices and tools. They are intended to be used in conjunction with the other resources listed below.

Complementary ODIHR Publications

- *Persons with Disabilities and Ensuring their Right to Participate in Political and Public Life* (2017)⁹
- *Handbook on Observing and Promoting the Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities* (2017)¹⁰
- *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation* (2011)¹¹

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- 9 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Persons with Disabilities and Ensuring their Right to Participate in Political and Public Life*, (Warsaw, September 2017), <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/340246>>.
- 10 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Handbook on Observing and Promoting the Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities*, (Warsaw, September 2017), <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/339571>>.
- 11 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation*, (Warsaw, May 2011), <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/77812>>.

Introduction

The World Health Organization estimates that 15 per cent of the world's population – more than one billion men, women and children – has a disability.¹² Persons with disabilities can be found in all religious, social, political and economic groups. They can be born with a disability, or they can acquire a disability later in life, for example through accident, genetics, age or armed conflict. Persons with disabilities are part of society in many enriching ways: they are parents, students, entrepreneurs, athletes, artists, teachers, politicians and much more.

However, persons with disabilities are also among the most excluded communities worldwide. For years, societies around the world have regarded disability as something to be feared, pitied or cured. Negative myths and stigmas about persons with disabilities are common, such as the belief that they are incapable of making positive contributions to society. As a result, persons with disabilities encounter significant barriers in their efforts to access their basic rights, including the right to political participation.

The right to participate equally in political processes – to be voters, candidates, campaign staff, observers, political candidates and elected leaders – is especially important for persons with disabilities. Engaging in political processes through political parties and parliaments is an empowering opportunity for men and women with disabilities to voice their opinions on issues that are important to them, and to become leaders themselves. Such engagement also creates ideal opportunities for political institutions to remove barriers and become more inclusive, accessible and truly representative of all citizens.

12 “World Report on Disability” World Health Organization, (2011)
<http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en/>.

Terms to Know

- **Accessible:** where a system, product, service or environment is easy for a person with a disability to use or participate in.
- **Disabled persons' organization (DPO):** an organization that is run by persons with disabilities themselves to support the rights of persons with disabilities.
- **Inclusion:** ensuring that persons with disabilities have equal opportunities to those of others and are represented on an equal basis with others in all parts of life.
- **Reasonable accommodation:** a necessary modification or support that ensures a person with a disability has an equal opportunity to enjoy and exercise a human right or fundamental freedom. The modification or support should be reasonable and not impose an undue burden on the provider. Examples include flexible working hours, a text-to-speech computer program, a service dog or a sign language interpreter.
- **Supported decision-making:** when a person with a disability makes their own choices about their lives, with support from people that they choose and trust. This differs from *substituted decision-making*, in which a legal guardian makes decisions for a person with a disability, a practice that does not align with a human rights-based approach.
- **Universal design:** when products, services and environments are designed so that they can be used by anyone regardless of age, disability or other status.

When could an accommodation cause an “undue burden”?

At least one of the four conditions listed below must be met before an accommodation request would qualify as an undue burden. An organization would not be under obligation to provide an accommodation if:

- 1.** It would place an impossible financial burden on the organization;
- 2.** It is too disruptive to the organization’s work (the organization could not perform its work if the accommodation was provided);
- 3.** It would threaten the health and safety of the person making the request; or
- 4.** It would threaten the health and safety of other people.

Nonetheless, in situations where an accommodation request might cause an undue burden, organizations – including political parties and parliaments – should still explore other options to facilitate accessibility.

Defining disability

One of the most widely used definitions of disability is found in Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which states that persons with disabilities “include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”¹³ The CRPD’s definition reveals two essential conditions when defining disability:

- First, “disability” includes persons who have a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment;
- Second, that impairment, combined with barriers (e.g., social, economic, political or environmental) that prevent a person’s full and equitable participation in society, adds another layer of disability.

It is particularly important to understand the second point, because the removal of barriers for persons with disabilities is a core principle of modern disability rights work.

Also, it is important to note that the CRPD does not place restrictions on what qualifies as a disability, since it recognizes that disability is an ever-evolving concept. Therefore, even if a disability type is not specifically named in the CRPD – as are diabetes, epilepsy and HIV – it can still fall under the CRPD’s definition and protection.

13 United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 1, 13 December 2006. <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>>.

Examples

Physical disabilities include any condition that affects mobility or physical movement. Sometimes, people with physical disabilities use a mobility device, such as a wheelchair, crutches or a mobility scooter.

Sensory disabilities refer to any conditions that affect a person's sensory system, such as hearing or seeing. This includes people who are blind, have low vision (partially sighted), are colour blind, are hard-of-hearing, are deaf, or are deafblind.

Psychosocial disabilities include any condition that affects mental or emotional health. Examples include people with anxiety, depression, agoraphobia, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Intellectual disabilities include conditions that lead to an increased difficulty in learning. A person is considered to have an intellectual disability if they have a below-average ability to learn and develop adaptive skills, and if the condition has been present since childhood or adolescence. Examples include people who have Down syndrome, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or (in some cases) autism.

Other disability examples include, but are not limited to, people who have dyslexia, little people, people who have diabetes, people who have traumatic brain injuries, and people who are HIV-positive or who have AIDS.

Note

Disability rights language is continually evolving. It is also possible that translations from one language to another will not accurately reflect the preferred terminology used by the local disability community. To ensure that the appropriate terminology is used, please consult with a local disability rights organization for guidance.

Understanding disability perspectives

Throughout history, there have been different views on disability. Although there are many perspectives (“models”) affecting persons with disabilities, scholars have identified four major models:

- **Charity Model** – The belief that persons with disabilities are suffering or helpless, that they lead sad lives, and that they deserve our pity and charity;
- **Medical Model** – The belief that disability is a problem that should be managed solely by health care professionals and that the goal should be to reduce or cure the disability, so that the person can appear as “normal” as possible;
- **Social Model** – The belief that disability is a result of interacting with an inaccessible environment and society. For example, if a person cannot access a presentation because there is no sign language interpreter, the “disability” is not the person’s deafness but the fact that there is no interpreter available; and
- **Human Rights Model** – The belief that persons with disabilities are equal to any other person, that they have the same human rights as anyone else and that states should protect these rights.

Persons with disabilities generally prefer perspectives based on the Social model and the Human Rights model, which emphasize the full inclusion and acceptance of persons with disabilities in society. Consequently, the establishment of the CRPD in 2006 signalled a major paradigm shift away from the medical model toward the social and human rights models. In alignment with the CRPD, these guidelines are grounded in the social and human rights models.

Section Highlights

- More than one billion people worldwide have a disability.
- Disability is defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) as those who have a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory condition and who may encounter barriers that prevent their full participation in society.
- Modern disability rights work emphasizes that persons with disabilities have equal rights to anyone else and that barriers should be proactively removed.



Persons with Disabilities and Political Processes

There has been growing public awareness in recent years of disability as an important component of equitable and inclusive political participation. Additionally, the right of persons with disabilities to participate in political processes is identified and protected by several international, regional and national documents. However, persons with disabilities are still significantly under-represented in political and public life, particularly as leaders, candidates or members of institutions, such as election management bodies, local governments, political parties and parliaments.

This section will explore some of the critical international agreements and commitments that support the right of persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life, as well as examine some barriers that persons with disabilities often have to navigate in order to do so.

International Legal and Policy Framework

OSCE Commitments and related recommendations

It is important to note that OSCE participating States have recognized on a number of occasions that equal access and inclusion for persons with disabilities in political processes is a priority.

In 1991, OSCE participating States affirmed their support for the political participation of persons with disabilities, noting in the **Moscow Document** that states should “take steps to ensure the equal opportunity of persons with disabilities to participate fully in the life of their society” and “to promote the appropriate participation of such persons in decision-making in fields concerning them.”¹⁴

In 2008, the **OSCE Helsinki Document** demonstrated the participating States’ recognition that “human rights are best respected in democratic societies” and support for “partnerships between different stakeholders in the promotion and protection of human rights”, both statements that underline the importance of human rights (including disability rights) and inclusion.¹⁵

The **25th anniversary of the Moscow Document** took place in 2016. On this occasion, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) partnered with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Finnish Human Rights Centre to organize a high-level expert seminar on promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life.

14 OSCE Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Moscow, 3 October 1991, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/14310>>.

15 OSCE Final Document of the Sixteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, Helsinki, 4 and 5 December 2008, <<https://www.osce.org/mc/36545>>.

Eight recommendations were developed,¹⁶ as follows:

- 1** OSCE participating States should create an accessible environment for the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life;
- 2** OSCE participating States should remove legal and administrative barriers preventing the participation of persons with disabilities;
- 3** OSCE participating States should create legal, policy and institutional frameworks enabling the participation of persons with disabilities;
- 4** OSCE participating States should provide inclusive education, civic education and take measures to raise public awareness of participation of persons with disabilities;
- 5** OSCE participating States should make efforts to increase the visibility of persons with disabilities;
- 6** OSCE participating States and inter-governmental organizations should ensure broad coalitions and co-operation to guarantee progress;
- 7** OSCE participating States should collect data about the participation of persons with disabilities and monitor the progress achieved; and
- 8** OSCE executive structures should implement measures to become more accessible to persons with disabilities.

16 A complete list of the full recommendations is available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/311076?download=true>.

Aside from the 8th recommendation, which focuses on the OSCE as an organization, the other 7 recommendations listed above were provided to all OSCE participating States and used as a foundation for these guidelines.

In 2018, the **Berlin Declaration** of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly observed that persons with disabilities “remain widely under-represented in parliaments across the OSCE region” and urged all OSCE participating States to ensure “participatory processes for persons with disabilities in all phases of developing legislation or policies in the spheres of political and public life.”¹⁷

United Nations Treaties

In 1948, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** was adopted by the United Nations. Among other rights, the Declaration notes that all people have the right to a voice in government. Article 21 affirms that “everyone has the right to take part in the government of his [or her] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives” and that “everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his [or her] country.”¹⁸ These rights are repeated in Article 25 of the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, a UN treaty that was adopted in 1966.¹⁹

17 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Berlin Declaration, Berlin, 7-11 November 2018, <<https://www.oscepa.org/meetings/annual-sessions/2018-berlin-annual-session>>.

18 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, <<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights>>.

19 UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner; ICCPR, 16 December 1966, <<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>>.

While these treaties established that all citizens have the right to participate in public and political life, it was recognized that further treaties were needed to clarify that traditionally excluded and under-represented communities were equally entitled to these rights.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In 2006, a landmark treaty called the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD) was unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. At the time of the publication of these Guidelines, in early 2019, 177 State parties had signed or ratified the Convention, including 54 of the 57 OSCE participating States.

Article 29 of the CRPD guarantees the political rights of persons with disabilities. It notes that states should ensure the right of persons with disabilities to “stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate.” Article 29 also specifies that states actively promote “an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs,” including in “the activities and administration of political parties.”²⁰

20 *Op. cit*, note 13, Article 29.

Other CRPD articles also influence the implementation of Article 29, notably Articles 6 and 12. **Article 6** of the CRPD acknowledges that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and that states “shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women” when implementing the other rights outlined in the CRPD. When measures are taken to support the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life, women with disabilities should be included in the conversation.

Article 12, on “Equal recognition before the law”, notes that “State Parties shall recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life.” Unfortunately, persons with disabilities who have limited legal capacity are often restricted or prohibited from exercising their political rights, a practice not in line with CRPD standards.

Lastly, it is important to note that many states have ratified other treaties protecting the rights of other under-represented communities, and that the rights outlined in those treaties apply equally to persons with disabilities who are members of those communities. For example:

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) protects the right of political and public participation of all women, including women with disabilities;
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples protects political participation of all indigenous peoples, including indigenous peoples with disabilities; and
- The International Covenant on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) protects political participation of all racial and ethnic minorities, including racial and ethnic minorities who have disabilities.

Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations. The SDGs are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,²¹ which aims to reduce poverty, combat inequality and address climate change globally.

SDG Goal 10, entitled “Reducing Inequality Within and Among Countries”, sets the following target: “By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic, and **political inclusion of all**, irrespective of age, sex, **disability**, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status,” [emphasis added].²²

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by poverty, inequality and conflict. As countries actively seek to address the root causes of these issues, it is vital to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to have an equal voice in their government and political structures – and to have a chance at changing these patterns for the better.

21 General Assembly of the United Nations Resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” 25 September 2015), <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E>.

22 United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 10 (2015), <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal10.html>>.

Regional and National Instruments

Finally, there are a number of regional and national instruments that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in political life. Many OSCE participating States are also members of the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe, both of which provide regional guidance on promoting the political and public participation of men and women with disabilities. For example, at the EU level, the leading human rights treaty is the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, more commonly known as the European Convention on Human Rights, is an important regional instrument for Council of Europe member states.

In addition, the Council of Europe has adopted a number of documents, emphasizing the importance of more inclusive societies. The Committee of Ministers' recommendation of 2011 calls for equal rights and opportunities, increased accessibility, including to information and voting procedures, and **non-discrimination in the exercise of legal capacity**.²³ Most recently, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution on equality and inclusion for people with disabilities²⁴ urging its member states to develop policies for persons with disabilities by closely involving them in the process. Finally, in January 2017, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of PACE issued a report "*The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue*," elaborating on the challenges and good practices in Council of Europe member

23 Council of Europe Recommendation CM Rec(2011)14 on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, 16 November 2011, <[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?Reference=CM/Rec\(2011\)14](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?Reference=CM/Rec(2011)14)>.

24 Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2039 (2015)1 on Equality and inclusion for people with disabilities, 12 December 2014, <<http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-EN.asp?FileID=21339&lang=EN>>.

states.²⁵ The report emphasizes that persons with disabilities are hardly visible on the political stage or taken into consideration in voting processes.

At the national level, many OSCE participating States have laws that establish and/or clarify the rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to access public buildings, public transportation and other national systems. Electoral laws sometimes include specific references to accessibility measures intended to support voters with disabilities. These national commitments are relevant for political institutions in their efforts to support greater inclusion of persons with disabilities.

25 Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of PACE report “The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue” Strasbourg, 2015, : <<http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-EN.asp?fileid=22226&lang=EN>>.

Obstacles to Equal Political Participation

Despite international standards, obligations and existing good practices supporting the right to political participation, men and women with disabilities still encounter numerous barriers to joining political parties or parliaments. While this section provides a brief overview of some of these barriers, it is important to remember that all the obstacles described can be resolved with strong support from political parties and parliaments, in co-operation with disability rights organizations and EMBs.

For those OSCE participating States that are members of the European Union, many of these barriers are explored further at a regional level in *The Right to Political Participation for Persons with Disabilities: Human Rights Indicators*, a publication produced by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).²⁶ Based on the structure-process-outcome indicators, the report provides data and analysis on the political engagement of persons with disabilities in the EU member states. The report notes that persons with disabilities are keen to be engaged in the political life of their communities, but that a number of barriers exist, including legal and administrative challenges that prevent their active engagement. Besides elaborating on the obstacles, the report also highlights some of the existing positive practice examples in place in some countries that can help in achieving positive change.

26 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), “The right to political participation for persons with disabilities: Human rights indicators”, (Vienna, 2014), <<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/right-political-participation-persons-disabilities-human-rights-indicators>>.

Lack of Societal Support

One of the most widespread obstacles for persons with disabilities in political life is a common belief that they are either uninterested in politics or that they are unable to participate in politics. Both men and women with disabilities are rarely encouraged to participate in politics at any level, whether as voters, party members, candidates, observers or elected officials. When they do express an interest in voting or running for office, they are often actively discouraged by friends, family and/or community members.²⁷

Education Gaps

Because it is often presumed that persons with disabilities are uninterested or unable to participate in political life, men and women with disabilities are rarely provided with opportunities to participate in civic or political education programmes, and materials for civic and voter education campaigns are often inaccessible. General education also continues to present accessibility and inclusion challenges, and many children and adolescents with disabilities struggle to gain an equal educational experience. These general and civic education gaps can lead to little or no understanding of the basics of democratic decision-making structures, policies, branches of power and mechanisms for creating legislation. As a result, it becomes more difficult to effectively engage in public or political life, and to build up the experience and qualifications needed for leadership roles.

27 IFES and NDI, "Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes" (Washington, 2014), p.34 <<https://www.ifes.org/publications/equal-access-how-include-persons-disabilities-elections-and-political-processes>>.

Restrictive Legal Framework

In many countries, the legal framework contains provisions that restrict or prohibit a citizen with a disability from participating in political life, including voting and candidacy processes. For example, provisions may contain terms such as “inability”, “illness”, “incapacity” or “competency” that could potentially be used to exclude or disqualify candidates with disabilities.

The term “legal capacity” refers to a person’s legal authority to get married, own property or sign any other legally binding contracts. In some countries, if you are a person with a disability and you have a legal guardian, you are automatically disqualified from exercising your political rights. This does not comply with the rights described in Articles 12 and 29 of the CRPD. Article 29 is clear that the right to political participation is protected for all persons with disabilities, while Article 12 commits states to recognizing that persons with disabilities “enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life”.²⁸ Article 12 of the CRPD also advocates for supported decision-making, rather than substituted decision making; in other words, a chosen person or team of people support the person with a disability in making their decision, rather than deciding **for** the person with a disability without their input. Legal capacity will be further discussed in the parliaments section of these Guidelines.

28 *Op. cit.*, note 21, Article 12.

Inaccessible Physical Environments

Many existing structures were built at a time when there were no architectural codes to support accessibility. Unless they have been retrofitted correctly, they are often physically inaccessible or difficult to navigate if using a mobility device, such as a wheelchair or crutches. Unfortunately, even some modern buildings have been built without fully assessing whether ramps, elevators, hallways, doorways or even nearby roads and sidewalks are safe and easy to use by persons with physical or visual disabilities. Furniture can pose difficulties if it is not set at the correct height or if it creates an awkward space for movement. Likewise, rooms are often not optimized for people who use hearing devices. If older buildings are used as locations for polling stations, town halls, debates, parliamentary meetings or offices for staff, it is essential to take physical accessibility into consideration, and to determine how architectural barriers could be mitigated or eliminated entirely.

Transportation is another common barrier. Many public transportation options and vehicles have not been designed with the needs of persons with physical, visual, intellectual or certain types of psychosocial disabilities in mind. Accessibility can also vary widely depending on location; rural or suburban areas are likely to have fewer accessible transportation options than urban areas.

Inaccessible Communication Methods

Persons with disabilities are rarely included in outreach strategies or civic education campaigns. Even when they are targeted, the communications methods are often both inaccessible and non-inclusive. This can pose several challenges for persons with disabilities. For example:

- If they are interested in joining a political party, but the website is inaccessible for screen readers (a technology commonly used by persons with visual disabilities), then finding accurate information is nearly impossible;
- If a video advertisement for a political candidate is shown on television or online, people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing will struggle to understand it if captions or sign language interpretation is not provided; and
- Easy-read materials are rarely available for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Also, if persons with disabilities are not shown or referenced anywhere in communications materials, it sends a signal to persons with disabilities that they are not regarded as part of the target group.

Low Incomes and Unemployment

Because of many of the obstacles already described, it is not unusual for persons with disabilities to be unemployed. With lower incomes, the expenses involved in running for office or becoming a member of a political party can be particularly challenging. The costs of reasonable accommodations can also sometimes be prohibitive, especially if it is an ongoing accommodation, such as sign language interpretation. This is a key area where strategic support from the state, political parties and parliaments can make a significant difference.

Inadequate Staff Training

Political party and parliamentary staff are rarely trained on how to thoughtfully interact with persons with disabilities or support their accommodation needs. At best, persons with disabilities are provided with inadequate and inefficient services; at worst, they are insulted or pushed aside. This contributes to an overall political environment in which persons with disabilities are given low priority or disregarded completely. Unclear accessibility and reasonable accommodations processes (e.g., understanding who fulfills accommodation requests) can also result in inefficient and unsupportive systems.

Multiple Layers of Discrimination

Aside from disability-specific barriers, it is important to be aware that there are often additional challenges for persons with disabilities who are also members of other under-represented communities. For example, women with disabilities may be concerned about childcare coverage or care for older parents. Youth with disabilities may be eager to participate in politics, but not have much guidance on how to navigate political institutions and systems. Members of indigenous communities, religious groups or ethnic minorities can encounter harsh discrimination based on their identities.

Ethnic Minorities with Disabilities

Ethnic minorities worldwide – including indigenous minorities – often encounter significant barriers when participating in political and public life. This is doubly so when a member of an ethnic or indigenous community also has a disability.

One such example is Roma and Sinti communities, which are present throughout the OSCE region but are predominantly located in Central and South-Eastern Europe. They constitute one of the largest ethnic minorities in Europe and share common cultural, linguistic and ethnic ties. Roma and Sinti communities have also been heavily persecuted throughout history and were victims of genocide during the Second World War. To this day, they remain deeply vulnerable to ethnic discrimination within social, economic and political systems.

Some of the many barriers that Roma and Sinti communities encounter include severe difficulties in obtaining quality education, finding safe and affordable housing, receiving non-discriminatory healthcare, and confronting stigma in employment. Roma and Sinti groups are also often the targets of hate crimes, harassment and negative public perception. These limiting factors make it challenging for Roma and Sinti to participate equally in political processes.

There is little information available on Roma and Sinti with disabilities, and this is both revealing and a matter for concern. Given that Roma and Sinti have less access to healthcare than other citizens, it is plausible that there is a statistically significant number of persons with disabilities among the Roma and Sinti population. Yet, if so, they appear to be largely invisible in data collection efforts and in the public perception.²⁹

29 European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), Michael Szporluk, *Not Even in the Margins: Where are Roma with Disabilities?* (2016), <http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/ECMI_Study__8_final.pdf>.

To illustrate the likely challenges for Roma and Sinti with disabilities, consider the obstacles that could occur with political participation. In a number of participating States, Roma and Sinti face difficulties in accessing identity documents. This can present a significant obstacle to registering as voters or as candidates (a barrier related to Roma or Sinti identity). Registration methods are rarely fully accessible for voters or candidates with disabilities (a barrier related to disability). Since Roma and Sinti persons with disabilities have twice the number of obstacles to registration, they are largely invisible in political parties or campaigns, which in turn could lead them to believe that it is not possible for them to be political leaders (a barrier related to both identity and disability).

Many of the barriers that Roma and Sinti communities experience are very similar to barriers faced by ethnic and indigenous minorities worldwide. As political parties and parliaments pursue opportunities to develop inclusive and accessible pathways to political life, it is beneficial to consider methods for supporting ethnic minority members who have disabilities as they work to overcome the barriers they face. For example, if devising an internship programme for indigenous community members, they should include language about providing reasonable accommodations and support to any interested indigenous youth with a disability – and ensure that recruitment and outreach practices make it clear that indigenous youth with disabilities are highly encouraged to apply.

Creating Inclusive Political Institutions and Processes

Persons with disabilities should have the same access and opportunities to participate in political life as any other empowered citizen. The removal of barriers not only benefits citizens with disabilities, but also society as a whole. As political parties and parliaments work to make their systems more equal for under-represented communities, they will find there are several advantages to becoming more inclusive.

Everyone Benefits

Universal design is when products, services and environments are designed so that they can be used by anyone regardless of age, disability or other status. It requires thinking about inclusion at the very beginning of a design process, rather than trying to make programmes or environments more inclusive at a later stage.

Persons with disabilities are not the only ones who benefit from a universal design approach. For example:

- Using visual images and easy-to-read language for voter-education campaign materials benefits persons with intellectual disabilities. It also benefits people who have low literacy, who are non-native speakers (which can include some deaf communities) or anyone who is quickly reading the document; and
- Providing a quiet room for parliament staff offers a private space where staff members who are diabetic can take their medication or staff with anxiety can take a moment to destress. It also offers privacy for nursing mothers and a space for any employee who needs a short break.

Adopting universal design principles will ensure that political parties and parliaments are inclusive from the start.

Responding to Recent Trends

International support for accessibility and disability rights has gained notable momentum since the passage of CRPD in 2006. Increasingly, it is expected that institutions, including political institutions, will strive to minimize and eliminate barriers to participation and leadership for all.

As political parties and parliaments build accessible pathways for persons with disabilities to participate in political life, they are aligning their work with international commitments. They are also clearly demonstrating their strong support for human rights, which is an encouraging attribute for voters, political party members, campaign donors and political leadership at both international and national levels.

Supporting Commitments

Proactively taking steps to ensure that persons with disabilities are included in political and public life is in alignment with international, regional, and national commitments that have been made to combat inequality. For example, including persons with disabilities in political life directly supports commitments and recommendations made through the SDGs, the CRPD and OSCE commitments.

Strengthening Democracy

Above all, the inclusion of men and women with disabilities in political life empowers and strengthens democracy itself. Equal political participation of everyone is a building block for ensuring that the members and leaders of political parties and parliaments better reflect the societies they serve. Greater diversity in a political community will also lead to a more robust understanding of the impact of laws and decisions on persons with disabilities, and safeguard against the invisibility of one of the largest under-represented communities in political life.

Section Highlights

- Most OSCE participating States have joined or ratified several commitments that protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including the CRPD.
- Persons with disabilities encounter many barriers to participating in political and public life, including lack of societal support, education gaps, restrictive legal frameworks, and inaccessible physical environments and communication methods, low incomes and unemployment, and multiple layers of discrimination. Parliaments and political parties are important allies in removing barriers. Many of these obstacles can be resolved with strong support from political parties and parliaments, in co-operation with disability rights organizations and EMBs.
- There are several benefits to supporting accessibility and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in political and public life: the whole society benefits; political organizations are seen as responsive to community needs; co-operative agreements and treaties are respected; and democracy is strengthened.



Political Parties

Political parties are critical stakeholders in efforts to support under-represented communities, since they are often regarded as the gatekeepers to political participation and representation within municipal assemblies, local governments and national parliaments. In this role, it is particularly beneficial for parties to pursue opportunities to engage persons with disabilities as voters, as party members, as observers (when parties field their own election observers) and as candidates. Though political parties may have different levels of resources – a larger political party is likely to have more funding and resources than a smaller one – there are many universal design strategies that any political party can implement.

The guidelines provided in this section are focused on the creation of an accessible environment within political parties, and how parties can promote accessibility in outreach and campaign efforts. While references are made to parties' work during the pre-electoral period, as well as the election period, readers seeking an in-depth discussion of the valuable role of election management bodies (EMBs) and DPOs in supporting electoral accessibility may wish to consult the *Handbook on Observing and Promoting the Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities* (2017), a guide produced by ODIHR.³⁰ Another beneficial resource is *Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes* (2014), a publication created by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI).³¹

For a discussion on legislation regulating political parties, please take a look at the ODIHR *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation* (2011).³²

30 *Handbook on Observing and Promoting the Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities*, *op. cit.*, note 10.

31 *Equal Access* manual, *op. cit.*, note 28.

32 *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation*, *op. cit.*, note 11.

This section will offer ideas for assessing political work and how to recruit and train a disability-inclusive party and campaign, as well as methods for engaging voters with disabilities and developing a disability-inclusive budget for the party. While the guidance provided in this section is only in the form of suggestions, it does help to establish a minimum accessibility standard that will assist political parties in demonstrating progress toward the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Potential Partners: EMBs and DPOs

Disabled Persons' Organization (DPO): A disabled persons' organization is an organization run by persons with disabilities, themselves, to advocate for and support the rights of persons with disabilities. Some DPOs are focused on one disability type, while others provide support to many disability types and are known as *cross-disability* organizations. It is common to have multiple DPOs in a given country or area. Although DPOs can be a valuable community partner for political parties, it is important to remember that DPOs are accountable to their members and are most effective if they are able to support accessibility measures for multiple political parties.

Election Management Body (EMB): An election management body is a politically impartial organization that is legally responsible for managing some or all the essential processes of an election, such as determining voter eligibility, conducting polling, counting votes and tabulating the votes. Depending on the EMB, other additional responsibilities may include registering political parties, providing oversight of campaign finance, and/or monitoring election media coverage.³³

33 For more information on electoral management bodies and their role in the electoral process, visit <<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-management-design-2014.pdf>>.

Accessibility Assessment

An accessibility and inclusion assessment of the party's internal structures, activities, and budget is an ideal first step. It can allow political parties to determine areas where they have made progress, and areas that may need work in the future. A checklist for political parties has been provided in the appendix of these Guidelines for this purpose. It is strongly recommended that political parties partner with DPOs to complete the assessment, as DPOs may be able to share anecdotal evidence or other data that would add valuable context to the assessment. While completing the assessment, it is beneficial for political parties to consider accessibility using an **intersectional lens** – that is, considering how people with disabilities from different backgrounds interact with the party. For example:

- Does the party have a gender balance among party members and candidates? In other words, are there equal numbers of men and women with or without disabilities?
- Does the party reach persons with disabilities in both urban and rural areas?
- Are persons with disabilities of all ages participating in the party's activities?
- Are persons with disabilities from ethnic minorities involved in the party?

Accessibility Policy

Political parties are encouraged to be proactive about addressing accessibility, rather than reactive. The latter often means that parties are dealing with access emergencies at the last minute, when challenges arise, rather than having a clearly defined system in place and guidance available when needed.

One proactive measure that can be taken is creating an accessibility policy or manifesto, ideally in the very early stages of a pre-electoral period. A well-crafted accessibility policy, developed with input from trusted DPO partners, can help establish and normalize the party's accessibility.

It is good to remember that accessibility means a system, product, service or environment that is easy for a person with a disability to use. For a political party, being accessible means that persons with disabilities have positive, inclusive experiences at every level of participation – from being a voter to being a campaign staff member or candidate; from local government to national parliament. It may be advantageous to pair an accessibility policy with a non-discrimination policy, emphasizing that all persons with disabilities are welcome, regardless of their social identity (gender, age, ethnicity, race, etc.). Accessibility can also be an excellent foundation for universal design. If party structures, protocols and policies are designed to maximize inclusion of men and women with disabilities, other members of society will benefit as well.

Budgets

Supporting Candidates with Disabilities

Lack of finances is one of the main obstacles that prevents men and women with disabilities from running for office. It is critical that political parties not only provide encouragement for qualified candidates with disabilities, but are also willing to provide or arrange for meaningful financial support.

This may mean that political parties provide direct financial support for reasonable accommodations for their candidates. For example, a political party in one OSCE participating State paid for personal assistants and transportation for one of their candidates with a disability. Other potential reasonable accommodations could include sign language interpretation, speech-to-text services, or offsetting any potential extra cost of hosting an event at an accessible location. If political parties choose to pursue this option, campaign staff and political party leaders should plan ahead and budget for reasonable accommodations that will allow a candidate to have a genuine opportunity to connect with voters and run a successful campaign.

Alternatively, political parties could work with parliaments and EMBs to organize a general election fund to support reasonable accommodation costs and other campaign costs of candidates with disabilities. This can be an effective method for addressing financial inequities in the campaign process and ensuring that candidates from smaller political parties receive as much disability-related support as candidates from larger political parties. For example, one country recently piloted a fund that provided financial assistance to candidates with disabilities from all political parties. Some of the candidates who had benefited from the fund confirmed in interviews that they would not have been able to run without the financial support.

If a general access to elections fund is developed, it is recommended that it should be established well in advance of an election and advertised widely among political parties and the disability community. Mentors, in particular, could encourage potential candidates with disabilities to pursue accessibility funding through the fund.

Ideally, parliaments and lawmakers should also ensure that laws on political campaign financing do not inadvertently disadvantage candidates with disabilities in relation to their reasonable accommodation costs. It may be worth reviewing election laws with an election and disability expert to determine if there are any potential legal obstacles to disability-inclusive financing.

Supporting Accessible Campaigns

Financing accessible campaigns is another important budgetary aspect for political parties to consider. This includes funds for accessible campaign materials and flexibility in choosing accessible locations for campaign activities. It also includes funds for campaign staff that have disabilities and may need reasonable accommodations.

Accessibility measures to reach voters with disabilities can include producing easy-to-read materials or choosing physically accessible locations. To fund them, political parties should ideally have financial resources or have previously worked with parliaments and EMBs to create a shared campaign accessibility fund. The fund could then be used by any political party to support accessibility as needed.

It is also worth noting that, generally, in the case of campaign staff or volunteers, it is recommended that political parties reserve financial resources for staff accessibility, including reasonable accommodations and choosing a work location that is accessible.

For more limited budgets, as in the case of smaller political parties, partnerships with DPOs and EMBs should be considered. They may already have some civic and voter education materials available in accessible formats that the party can help distribute further. Or, they may be able to negotiate a fair price for some types of reasonable accommodations, especially if the EMB and/or party can promise ongoing work for a period of time. For communications work, the use of social media and ensuring the availability of accessibility guidelines for campaign staff as part of the party's communication strategy are effective approaches.

As a final note, campaign staff and volunteers may need to be trained to understand that it is never appropriate to ask a person with a disability to finance measures to accommodate their disability.

Political Party Membership and Candidates

Recruitment

Using inclusive recruitment strategies broadens the reach of a political party's influence and helps to diversify its membership base and candidate lists. In turn, this may attract more voters as they begin to see people like themselves represented within a party and adds new perspectives to internal party conversations.

To engage persons with disabilities as members and candidates, a natural starting point is to connect with local DPOs representing different disability communities. DPO partners can share accessible information about political parties with target audiences.

DPO partners can also help facilitate networking opportunities. It is highly recommended that political parties work with DPOs and other civil society organizations that are committed to encouraging persons with disabilities from under-represented communities – including women, youth, and ethnic minorities such as Roma or Sinti people – to participate in party or campaign events and join in conversations with political party representatives.

Campaign or political party events should be hosted at accessible facilities, and it should be made clear that reasonable accommodations can be provided upon request. This is discussed in more detail in the “Engaging with Voters” section.

Political parties should also explore opportunities to connect with persons with disabilities elsewhere. For example, if political parties are hosting or presenting at leadership training programmes, or at camps or schools, this is an ideal opportunity to encourage participants with disabilities to become active in political processes, along with others.

Mentorship programmes are another effective strategy for recruiting and supporting candidates with disabilities. It is not unusual for qualified men and women with disabilities to have concerns about running for an elected position. A successful mentor or leader from their political party can help them envision a path forward and the steps that they would need to take to get there. It is especially helpful to foster mentorship connections between candidates – or potential candidates – in urban and rural areas, as well as at local and national levels.

When men and women with disabilities do run as candidates, it is vital that political parties demonstrate confidence and provide support to their candidates. If political parties appear to doubt their own candidates, those candidates and the party can also less convincingly reach voters.

Lastly, if a political party typically has a membership fee, another possible recruitment strategy is to consider a discounted or even waived fee for low-income families and individuals. As noted before, many persons with disabilities have fewer economic resources than their peers, largely as a result of low employment rates and additional costs related to their disability. Even small fees may deter persons with disabilities from enrolling.

Disability Quotas

Special temporary measures, such as quotas, are intended to more quickly resolve inequalities for persons with disabilities and increase their numbers in political party candidate lists and as members of parliament. The quotas can be either legislative or voluntary:

In addition, there are several different types of quotas:

- Reserved seats;
- Candidate quotas; and
- Political party quotas

Gender quotas have been in use for a number of years across the OSCE region, while disability quotas are relatively new and still few. If considering the use of a disability quota, it is important to engage in conversations with local DPO partners and disability rights leaders. Their input may affect which types of quotas should be used and when, and what percentage or number of persons with disabilities would be considered representative.

There are some key lessons that have been learned from the use of gender quotas and from disability quotas in other regions, namely:

- **Quotas need to have support from many stakeholders** – This includes different political parties, disability rights groups and members of parliament, and they should all agree on the rules and purpose of quotas;
- **Quotas need advance planning** – Political parties should avoid late selection of candidates, which can undermine the effectiveness of quotas;

- **Quotas need to be enforced** – If there is no method for enforcing quotas, then it is less likely that quotas will succeed,³⁴ and
- **Quotas could be more effective if paired with civic education** – Quotas are not about electing persons with disabilities only because they have a disability. Rather, quotas are ideally an opportunity for qualified candidates with disabilities to have an equal chance to run for office. Disability rights experts have suggested that pairing a quota with civic education or leadership programmes may be a stronger combination than a quota alone.

There are additional considerations for disability quotas that will need to be explored in a robust discussion with all stakeholders, including:

- **How is “disability” defined?** This can be a sensitive conversation, as there is not always agreement on how disability should be defined in the context of quotas. It is well worth meeting with several disability rights groups representing different disability types for their input. It is also suggested that groups use the CRPD’s definition as a starting point for conversations;
- **Who chooses the candidates or MPs to fulfil the disability quota?** Again, it is recommended that political parties work with election experts and disability rights groups (ideally those who have prior knowledge of quotas) to explore what solutions are both effective and inclusive, and that avoid granting too much decision-making power to one group; and

34 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women’s Political Participation in the OSCE Region* (Warsaw, 2016), p.32, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/224206>>.

- **How will the “single-issue” label be avoided?** When MPs are elected through a disability quota, it has been observed that others will often assume that the MP with a disability will now manage all disability-related initiatives. Therefore, it is not necessary for other candidates or MPs to work on disability rights. However, an MP with a disability may want to provide leadership on multiple issues, not just disability. Some education may be required as to the purpose of the quota.

Lastly, it is helpful to think of quotas as a tool, not as an end goal. When implemented effectively, quotas can accomplish their purpose, which is to increase the number of persons with disabilities in political parties and parliaments. However, quotas must be carefully designed to avoid other inequalities. For example, it defeats the purpose if only men with disabilities are added to candidate lists, or if ethnically under-represented groups are not included.

Enrolment Methods

Enrolment materials and methods to register as a member or as a candidate for a political party can be created with simplicity and accessibility in mind. Depending on how members join a political party in a specific region or country, political parties may need to co-ordinate registration methods and materials with EMBs or other bodies responsible for the registration of political parties. It is recommended that enrolment materials be written using clear, plain language and be offered in at least three formats – a paper version, a phone version and an electronic version.

A paper version with plain language and easy-read versions can be an ideal choice for persons with limited or no access to the Internet or computers. Paper versions can be distributed by mail, by persons who visit a political party office(s) – as long as the offices are in accessible buildings close to public transit – or by arranging a network of trained campaign volunteers to periodically visit residential and community centres to offer an option to enrol as a member of a given political party.

A phone version can be an effective alternative for persons with visual or intellectual disabilities. Campaign staffers or volunteers who answer phones will need to be trained on how to complete a membership application over the phone and arrange the signature of the person, should it be required. An electronic version, as long as it is compliant with web accessibility standards, offers another alternative for those who have regular access to the Internet and computers.

Volunteers may need to be informed that they cannot pressure or bribe voters to enrol. They should also be aware that, if needed, a voter with a disability can request assistance from a trusted person of their choice.

If visiting or servicing an area with a high number of deaf citizens, it is suggested that volunteers have either a short video in sign language (this could be played on a mobile phone) or bring a trained sign language interpreter in person to help explain the purpose of the distributed materials.

Women with Disabilities as Candidates

Women with disabilities compose a significant proportion of persons with disabilities. The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in every 5 women are likely to experience disability in their lifetime.³⁵ Their right to political participation is well-protected by the CRPD, CEDAW, the SDGs and OSCE commitments, among others.

A 2009 OSCE Athens Ministerial Council Decision recalls the OSCE commitments for the advancement of gender equality, non-discrimination and promotion of men's and women's equal right to participate in political and public life."³⁶ This includes women with disabilities at all levels of political and public life, from local to national.

Yet women with disabilities encounter multiple barriers to becoming candidates and elected officials, on the basis of both their disability status and their gender. Many of the disability-related barriers have already been explored above, including challenges with regard to transportation, access to information about political processes, and lack of finances. These barriers can and do overlap with gender-related barriers.

Other barriers are specifically related to gender. For example, women running for office often encounter prejudices concerning their abilities to contribute to politics, both on the part of their families and of potential voters; challenges in arranging adequate childcare or care for the elderly (despite advances in household equality, many women are still primarily responsible for overall household management);

35 "World Report on Disability," World Health Organization, (2011), p. 291, <http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en/>.

36 OSCE MC Decision No. 7/09 Women's participation in political and public life, Athens (2009). <<https://www.osce.org/mc/40710?download=true>>.

lack of resources or support from political institutions for running for elected office; and financial hardship.³⁷ These challenges can increase exponentially when combined with other factors, such as age, ethnicity, race and whether they live in rural or urban areas. For example, a Roma or Sinti woman with a disability living in a rural area would likely encounter several overlapping barriers to becoming a candidate or an elected official.

Support from political parties can be effective at overcoming some of the multiple sets of barriers a woman with a disability often faces when running for office. Targeted outreach and recruitment of women with disabilities allows parties to identify qualified potential candidates and leadership potential. Sometimes there are already national or regional networks that may make it easier to identify potential leaders, such as the Central Asia Network of Women with Disabilities or the European Disability Forum.

With accessible training and the support of seasoned mentors (including other women leaders with disabilities), women with disabilities can become skilful navigators of the political system. Financial support, including fundraising and budgeting guidance, can help women with disabilities expand their outreach and connections to voters. Lastly, political parties can also strategize on how to provide accessibility support – not only for women candidates with disabilities, but all candidates with disabilities.

³⁷ *Compendium, op. cit.*, note 34, p.32.

Communications and Campaign Materials

When developing a communications strategy for a party or political campaign, adopting a universal design approach from the beginning will ensure that campaign messages are understood by everyone. Including pictures or issues related to the rights of persons with disabilities will also demonstrate commitment to diversity and representing all members of the community.

Advance planning is crucial, as this will help political parties and their candidates avoid the common problem of not having enough time or funding later on for supporting accessibility in their campaign outreach.

The first section below briefly introduces the different types of accessible formats available for popular media types, such as print, radio and video. The second section provides guidance on how to review campaign materials from an accessibility perspective.

Accessible Formats

The chart below provides a quick overview of common accessible formats or features used for different communications media. There is also a glossary at the end of these guidelines describing key accessibility terms.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of accessibility formats, and not all formats are appropriate for all occasions. Local DPO partners are valuable resources and can offer additional assistance on how to implement accessibility formats for a specific region or country.

Media Type	Examples	Possible Accessible Formats or Features
Audio	Radio Podcasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcripts
Digital Print	Online articles PDFs Word documents Social media posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy-to-read • Formatted for screen readers
Spoken	Debates Speeches Town Halls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible spaces • Speech-to-text (live captions) • Sign language interpreters
Print	Banners Brochures Booklets Magazine articles Newspaper articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Braille or tactile • Easy-to-read • Consider offering accessible digital versions
Video	Online videos Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio descriptions • Sign language interpreter • Captions or subtitles

As a general rule, it should always be possible to access campaign information using either audio or visual formats. If producing audio information – radios, podcasts, television, speeches – there should be a visual version, such as captions or transcripts. If producing visual information – online articles, social media posts, videos – there should be an audio version, such as a podcast.

Another important point, as it is often misunderstood, is to note that some deaf and hard-of-hearing persons are not fluent in sign language, so they depend on live captions. Other deaf and hard-of-hearing persons rely on sign language for clear understanding, as it is their native language, where spoken language is a second or even third language. Therefore, providing only captions or only sign language interpretation is not always effective.

Disability Representation

To show that a political party represents all citizens, it is a good practice to include different people in campaign materials.

As photographs, videos, articles and other media are created for use during campaigns, it is a good idea to periodically review the materials from a diversity perspective. The goal is to have a variety of persons with disabilities from different backgrounds shown doing the same things as other people are doing, such as voting, working or being outdoors.

Periodically, the communications team of the party should look at all of the campaign materials that are being made and think through four questions:

- 1.** Do the materials show people with a variety of disability types, including people with visual, hearing, psychosocial, physical and/or intellectual disabilities?
- 2.** Is there a gender balance in the materials? In other words, do men and women with disabilities appear at roughly equal rates?
- 3.** Are both younger and older people with disabilities represented?
- 4.** Are there people with disabilities from under-represented racial or ethnic backgrounds?

If the answer to any of the questions is “no”, then a reminder should be given to content creators to look for opportunities to create media content that includes men and women with disabilities from different backgrounds.

Engaging with Voters

Policy Platforms and Manifestos

A well-written policy platform or election manifesto helps to explain a political party’s goals and interests to voters. It is an opportunity to promote accessibility and inclusion on a wide scale, both by creating accessible formats and by including issues of interest to persons with disabilities.

When developing a policy platform or manifesto, it is recommended that political party representatives consult DPOs and disability rights leaders, especially groups that include intersectional communities, such as women with disabilities, ethnic minorities with disabilities, or young people with disabilities. These groups can offer ideas for disability rights issues that would benefit from political support and legislative action, such as inclusive education initiatives, improvements to public transportation, increased healthcare support for veterans with disabilities, or the standardization of accessible technology. The issues will vary depending on the country and local needs.

Consider co-operating with other political parties to create a series of thematic leaflets or other documents targeting persons with disabilities. These can help outline key disability rights issues that political parties (and their candidates) are committed to supporting.

For voters who have low literacy skills or who have intellectual disabilities that make reading long texts difficult, it is advisable to offer an easy-to-read version of policy platforms and manifestos. DPOs that have experience working with persons who have intellectual disabilities or low literacy skills will be able to provide guidance on how to create easy-to-read documents.

Town Halls, Speeches and Debates

A town hall meeting, speech or debate is an opportunity to demonstrate support for issues that are of particular interest to persons with disabilities. For example, if discussing public education initiatives, candidates could include a statement about encouraging the full inclusion of children with disabilities, along with other under-represented communities.

There are two other key considerations when preparing for public presentations and speeches. The first is choosing an accessible location; the second is supporting communication access. These will be discussed in more detail below.

Choosing an Accessible Location and Time

First, the organizers should consider the location of town halls, speeches or debates. In some circumstances, such as debates, political parties may need to work together with EMBs and DPOs to choose an appropriate location. Here are some features of an accessible space:

- The location is within a 5-minute walk to public transportation;
- There is accessible parking close by;

- The entrance has a ramp with handrails or it is at ground level. It is recommended that staff check with a trusted DPO partner to determine if ramps are usable and meet the standards established by the International Standards Organization (ISO);³⁸
- There is an accessible bathroom in the building, with a door that can be easily opened with a gentle push or by using a button;
- The room where the town hall, speech or debate will be held is on the first floor, or if the room is not on the first floor, there is an elevator available that is large enough to hold a wheelchair or scooter;
- The doors to the room can be easily held open by an assigned volunteer or propped open; and
- There is an accessible seating area reserved for persons using mobility devices or who have service animals. The seating area should have an unobstructed view of the speakers.

In some cases, a little creativity may be needed to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to attend. For example, if accessible parking is not readily available, perhaps it is possible to reserve a row of “regular” parking spots for guests with disabilities. DPO partners can help provide additional ideas on how to facilitate accessibility at different locations.

The time of the event is also important. For example, is the event taking place at a time of day where public transportation is easily available? There are cities where public transportation has fewer buses or trains available in the evening, and in some cases has stopped altogether. Some family caretakers – usually women – may

38 International Standard Organization (ISO) access construction standards are available for purchase at <<https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:50498:en>>. A local DPO may also be able to give specific guidance.

also need a time of day where it is easier for them to arrange for childcare or care for older family members so that they can attend the event. The party might also consider organizing a childcare service for those coming with children.

Supporting Communication Access

Second, consider ways to mitigate communication barriers, both in advertising the event and as the event occurs. For advertising, it will be beneficial to review the Accessible Formats section above. In general, information about the event should be made available in both audio and visual formats that are accessible for men and women with disabilities.

It is recommended that event announcements include information on available accessibility measures, and that additional reasonable accommodations are available upon request. Contact information for a campaign staff person who has been trained to process accommodation requests should be included.

If the event in question is a debate between political party candidates, and particularly if it is televised, it is strongly recommended that both a sign language interpreter and live captions (speech-to-text) be provided to ensure full access for both deaf and hard-of-hearing communities.

Campaign Websites

Given that timelines are often short during a campaign period, it will be advantageous to work with a website developer and designer who already has experience with creating accessible websites. If hiring an outside consultant or contracting an agency, here are some potential interview questions to ask:

1. Are you familiar with any web accessibility standards? If so, which ones?
2. Have you developed websites using web accessibility standards? If yes, can you provide 1-2 examples?

The most widely used accessibility standards are the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.0, an initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).³⁹ Many regional and national web accessibility guidelines, including several from OSCE participating States, are based on the WCAGs.

Although the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) offer more specific details on accessibility features, there are some basic accessibility methods that are easy for most content creators to implement. Here are ten general guidelines for creating accessible website content:

³⁹ The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGs) 2.0 can be found at the following link: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>.

1. Use clear and simple language throughout the website;
2. Provide headings and sub-headings for webpages and articles;
3. Choose high contrast colours;
4. Avoid using colour as the only indicator of important information, such as links;
5. Avoid using terms such as “click here” or “more” as link titles. Use article names or the title of the destination webpage;
6. Include alternative text (“alt-text”) for illustrations, charts and photographs;
7. Add captions or subtitles to videos;
8. Add audio descriptions to videos;
9. Include a transcript for audio recordings such as radio spots or podcasts; and
10. Be careful when using tables. Simple tables are usually fine, but complex tables will need proper coding in order to be read correctly by a screen reader.

With websites in particular, it is critical that political parties work with a small group of test users who have different disabilities. There should be at least one person who uses a screen reader, at least one person who is fluent in sign language and at least one person who uses easy-to-read materials. They can test the website and provide essential feedback on what accessibility features or content can be improved. A DPO partner can recommend or gather persons who would be ideal for the task.

Campaign Staff and Volunteers

Training

It is a good practice to provide basic disability rights training for campaign staff, volunteers, and party officials on supporting and interacting with voters and candidates with disabilities. Part of the training could involve a conversation about bias and attitudes towards persons with disabilities. This type of training will be especially crucial for those who are involved in recruiting political party members and qualified candidates, or those interacting with the public.

It is recommended that political parties work with DPO partners to develop and lead appropriate disability-sensitive training for staff. For continued reference, it is also advisable to develop a concise guide on the appropriate disability terminology and etiquette to be used.

If political parties and campaigns have an accessibility committee, working group, or even accessibility officer(s), then those people will likely need in-depth training on the party's accessibility policy, the international and national regulations affecting disability inclusion, the different types of accessible measures available, and how to arrange for reasonable accommodations as needed. Consider working with DPOs and/or hiring a qualified person with a disability to be part of the campaign if possible. Partners or staff who are already familiar with the different disability communities and their access would not require as much training as someone new to disability rights.

Handling Reasonable Accommodation Requests

Although all best efforts should be made to promote accessibility from the beginning, it is recommended that political parties be prepared to efficiently handle requests for reasonable accommodations from both candidates and voters during a campaign period. To accomplish this, a clear system of protocols and responsibilities will need to be developed in advance.

It is a good practice to have an assigned staff member or team managing the reasonable accommodations process, preferably someone who has completed the party's disability rights training. Other campaign staff can assist as needed. Reasonable accommodations for candidates should be a high priority. Advertising for campaign events should always offer the option to request reasonable accommodations and provide contact information for either the Accessibility Officer or a designated staff person responsible for processing requests.

Note: Advertisements may need to note that all requests have to be received by a specific date, since many reasonable accommodations cannot be arranged at the last minute.

Once the request is received, the assigned staff person can contact appropriate service providers to procure reasonable accommodations. A list of preapproved service providers for different types of reasonable accommodations would be valuable for supporting an efficient system. If unsure where to source an accommodation, DPO partners are excellent resources and can often provide referrals or recommendations for high quality service providers.

A confirmation (if the accommodation is approved) or explanation (if it is not) should be provided to the person who made the request. If the accommodation cannot be processed due to restrictions related to time or budget, alternate options should be offered if possible.

Lastly, it is good practice for the staff person to follow up with the person who made the request after the accommodation is complete. Getting their feedback will be useful for improving the reasonable accommodations process, and perhaps planning ahead for accessible events in the future.

Accessibility Audits

An accessibility audit is an opportunity for political parties and disability rights partners to reflect on the disability inclusion work that has happened and identify areas for improvement in future work.

Ideally, accessibility audits are conducted by DPOs throughout a full electoral cycle, from the pre-electoral phase to election day and post-election. The results of the audit can be shared with political parties at the end of an electoral cycle, and recommendations can be used to implement improvements at the beginning of the next electoral cycle.

As part of this audit work, it would be helpful to have a physical audit of the building that serves as the party's headquarters. Auditing the party's building(s) will provide valuable information on whether persons with disabilities can arrive at, enter and use the party's headquarters with ease.

DPOs conducting the audit will likely need to have opportunities to conduct key informant interviews and perhaps focus groups with the party's members and leadership. They might also consider interviewing other stakeholders, such as voters with disabilities and EMB officials. This will allow DPOs to identify and review all existing resources and processes available for supporting accessibility. It will also enable them to pinpoint areas for improvement for the next election.

Section Highlights

- Political parties are important “gatekeepers” to participation and representation in the political process; as such, they are well-positioned to support greater inclusion of persons with disabilities in the political sphere.
- An ideal first step is conducting an **accessibility assessment**, which will help political parties identify areas in which they could become more inclusive of persons with disabilities. Partnering with a DPO is recommended.
- An **accessibility policy**, especially if created in the pre-electoral period, will allow political parties to proactively establish accessibility standards. This can be paired with a **non-discrimination policy** to support intersectional inclusion of persons with disabilities who are members of other underrepresented communities (e.g., women).
- It is important to strategize on **financial support** for parties in providing accessible measures. This is a possible area of partnership with parliaments and EMBs.

- Parties can explore opportunities to support **inclusive recruitment** of members and candidates with disabilities, including special temporary measures such as quotas.
- When producing **campaign materials** and hosting **campaign events**, it is important to ensure that voters with disabilities can access any party's communications and that they are represented in the party's messages.
- **Staff trainings** for party leaders and campaign staff will help facilitate the inclusion of underrepresented groups, particularly persons with disabilities.
- Finally, **accessibility audits** conducted by DPO partners throughout the electoral cycle will allow political parties to receive feedback on their accessibility work.



Parliaments

Inclusive and representative parliaments are crucial to ensuring just laws and healthy democracy. Legislative and policy work can have a tremendous impact on the lives of persons with disabilities, both articulating the rights that persons with disabilities are entitled to and providing a shield against discrimination in political, economic and social spheres. As the key democratic institutions, parliaments have a particular responsibility to serve as role models for society and to lead the way in creating a disability-responsive government at the national and local levels.

Many OSCE participating States already have a handful of Members of Parliament with disabilities, paving the way for other political leaders with disabilities and demonstrating the positive impact of diverse perspectives. Trained parliamentary administrative staff are key to supporting an equal working environment within parliaments, and thus they too have an important role to play in promoting a representative, disability-inclusive legislative process.

Accessibility Assessment

An accessibility and inclusion assessment of the parliament is an ideal first step. It can allow parliaments to determine areas that they have made progress on, and areas that may need work in the future. A checklist for parliaments has been provided in the annex of these Guidelines for this purpose. It is highly recommended that parliaments partner with DPOs to complete the assessment, as DPOs may be able to share anecdotal evidence or quantitative data that would add valuable context to the assessment. While completing the assessment, it is beneficial for parliaments to consider accessibility using an *intersectional lens* – that is, considering how people with disabilities from different backgrounds interact with the parliament. For example:

- Does the parliament have more men with disabilities than women with disabilities?
- Does the parliament reach people with disabilities in both urban and rural areas?
- Are older persons with disabilities and younger people with disabilities involved?
- Are persons with disabilities from ethnic minorities reached?

Developing Laws and Policies

In its lawmaking capacity, parliaments are well suited for implementing legal structures and developing funding mechanisms to empower persons with disabilities in political and public life. Laws affect every aspect of the society, from housing regulations to healthcare initiatives. If all laws and associated funding were consistently approached as opportunities to standardize accessibility and disability inclusion, it would have a transformative effect on the status and role of persons with disabilities in the society. This is the core principle of accessibility – laws and systems should be designed for universal access and to minimize the need for reasonable accommodations, which are reactive rather than proactive. It is important to emphasize that persons with disabilities should be closely consulted and involved in decision-making about matters affecting their lives. Such duty derives from Article 4 (3) and 33 (3) of the CPRD and are further explained in the CRPD Committee's General Comment No. 7 on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention.⁴⁰

40 United Nations, CRPD Committee's General Comment No. 7 on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, 9 November 2018, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/gc.aspx>>.

Building Partnerships

Working Group

To promote ownership of disability-inclusion efforts in parliament, one possible good practice is establishing a working group, intergroup or caucus for Members of Parliament (MPs) who are interested in supporting laws that advance disability rights. The working group could serve as a central point for disability issues and be a central liaison point for disability community partners. Several parliaments in OSCE participating States have established such groups that work actively with DPOs.

It is not necessary to have a disability to be an ally and supporter of disability rights. If such a group already exists, perhaps more MPs or their staff could be recruited to provide support, or maybe the role of the working group could be expanded to take on new projects. Interviewing existing group members and any partners they liaise with could bring fresh ideas on how to strengthen the group and its impact.

Disability Organizations and Communities

As parliaments develop new laws and revise old ones, or develop national action plans and strategies, it will be invaluable to have perspectives and input directly from persons with disabilities affected by those decisions. Consulting DPOs can provide unique and nuanced insight into many different types of laws, including laws that affect housing, transportation, education and elections. They are also ideal partners for developing laws, action plans and strategies that specifically mention or focus on disability rights. There can be different types of organizations of persons with disabilities, including umbrella organizations of persons with disabilities, cross-disability organizations, self-advocacy organizations, organizations involving family members and/or relatives of persons with disabilities, organizations of women and

girls with disabilities and organizations and initiatives of children and young people with disabilities.⁴¹

Since there are a wide variety of disabilities, it is crucial to work with cross-disability organizations or coalitions. For example, it does not make sense to partner with just one DPO that only focuses on physical disabilities. It would be best to work with a variety of DPOs, in which multiple disabilities and backgrounds are represented by multiple organizations, including DPOs that involve women, youth or ethnic minorities with disabilities. It is possible that DPOs will not always agree on their recommendations; in these instances, it is advisable to request that they work together to create one list of shared recommendations.

When meeting with DPO leaders and representatives, parliaments should be prepared to offer and provide reasonable accommodations as needed. For example, a DPO focused on the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities may need sign language interpretation or speech-to-text services. Materials may need to be provided in plain language, braille and audio versions. If the parliament has appointed an accessibility staff person or team, this could be one of the tasks that those individuals are responsible for managing.

Regional Collaboration

Consider connecting with parliaments in other countries to explore regional opportunities for collaboration on establishing accessibility standards. Having consistent standards helps to facilitate trade, foster inter-regional communication and the sharing of good practices, and ensures that citizens across the region have similar accessibility experiences.

41 *Ibid.*

Technology is one such example. Members of a given region could agree on minimum accessibility standards for technology products that are imported into the region. Another example is political processes, as different regional parliaments could decide to establish a regional set of common accessibility standards for political processes and procedures.

Legislation

Political Party and Electoral Legislation

Although there are many laws through which parliaments can support disability inclusion, there is a particular need for parliaments, in close consultation with DPOs, to examine political party and election legislation and, as needed, revise them to minimize or eliminate legal or policy barriers for persons with disabilities to participate in political and electoral processes.

Voting and candidacy provisions are a good place to start. Lawmakers should critically assess eligibility requirements for political participation and determine if there are any potential legal barriers. Election laws that include language referring to “capacity”, “inability”, “illness”, “incapacity” or “competency” should all be reviewed to ensure that persons with disabilities are not at risk of exclusion or disqualification from political and public life, ideally with the assistance of a DPO partner or disability rights consultant familiar with legal language and interpretations.

Aside from legal capacity laws, which are discussed in more detail below, parliaments may also wish to consider accessibility or inclusion measures described in the laws (or that are absent). For example, one suggestion is that electoral law(s) could contain a provision about the accessibility of polling stations. To promote equal opportunities and access to voting, all polling places, stations and materials (particularly voter instructions and ballots) should be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Parliaments may also want to consider developing and approving a general fund for accommodating the access needs of electoral candidates who have disabilities. At the same time, it is worth examining political party and campaign finance laws to determine if there are any unintentional barriers for candidates who have additional campaign expenditures (reasonable accommodations) related to their disability, such as restrictions on finance limits or on which organizations can provide funding. A good reference point is the *ODIHR Guidelines on Political Party Regulation*.⁴²

Legal Capacity

A limitation of legal capacity means that a person is deemed unable to make decisions in either all or some areas of their life, and this limitation can be partial or full. In these cases, a legal guardian is appointed to make some or all decisions on behalf of the person. This is known as **substituted decision-making**.

The CRPD does not support this approach. Instead, it focuses on ensuring that persons with disabilities are able to exercise their legal rights and make their own choices about their lives, with support from people that they know and trust. This is known as **supported decision-making**.

42 *ODIHR Guidelines on Political Party Regulation, op. cit.*, note 11.

In supported decision-making, a person with a disability may have a court-appointed person or team of people to help them understand the different choices available and the consequences of their choices. For example, a person with an intellectual disability might have a support person or team to help him or her understand how an election works, what voting is and why voting is important. A support person who is chosen to assist should be legally allowed to provide support to the person with a disability as they vote.

As noted earlier in this document, Article 12 of the CRPD affirms that states “recognize that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life.” A further statement notes that “States Parties shall take appropriate measures to provide access to the support they may require in exercising their legal capacity.”

In the CRPD Committee's General Comment on Article 12, the Committee emphasized that “it is important to recognize the legal capacity of persons with disabilities in public and political life”, meaning that a person’s “decision-making ability cannot be a justification for any exclusion of persons with disabilities from exercising their political rights, including the right to vote, [and] the right to stand for election...”⁴³

43 United Nations, CRPD Committee's General Comment No. 1, Article 12: Equal recognition before the law, 19 May 2014, paragraph 48, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/gc.aspx>>.

Additionally, a number of regional institutions, such as the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Council of Europe, have determined that persons with disabilities who have a court-appointed guardian or support person should still have the right to participate in political processes.⁴⁴ At the same time, it should be noted that the current Council of Europe position, including the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, does not fully reflect the approach of the CRPD. As earlier noted, the CRPD does not permit deprivation of legal capacity, but requires states to provide the necessary support in exercising rights.

Unfortunately, it is still common in many OSCE participating States to have electoral legislation that prohibits persons with disabilities who have a court-appointed guardian or support person from participating in political processes. It is recommended that parliaments review the legal capacity provisions in co-ordination with expert DPOs and remove legal barriers for persons with disabilities who have legal guardians to participate equally in public and political life.

44 For more reading on this topic, review the Venice Commission's *Revised Interpretative Declaration to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters on the Participation of People with Disabilities in Elections* (2011) at <[http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/CDL-AD\(2011\)045.aspx](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/CDL-AD(2011)045.aspx)> and the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights' paper *Who Gets to Decide? Right to Legal Capacity for Persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities* (2012) at <<https://rm.coe.int/16806da5c0>>.

Engaging the Public

Persons with disabilities are, first and foremost, human beings. Their interests in parliamentary and legislative work are as diverse as other citizens', and not limited to only the scope of laws with a direct impact on disability rights. Although there is a clear responsibility to ensure that persons with disabilities can easily access information regarding disability laws, there is an equal responsibility to ensure that interested citizens with disabilities can access news and information about other laws, including laws on education, transportation, healthcare, employment and housing.

As noted earlier, the duty to consult persons with disabilities is one of the underlining principles of the CPRD. Article 4 (3) of the CPRD requires states to closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities "concerning issues related to persons with disabilities." The CRPD Committee's General Comment No. 7 notes that it covers "the full range of legislative, administrative and other measures that may directly or indirectly impact the rights of persons with disabilities." Issues that indirectly affect persons with disabilities include constitution law, electoral rights, access to justice, the appointment of the administrative authorities governing disability-specific policies or public policies in the field of education, health, work and employment.⁴⁵ It is, thus, a very broad range of issues that can be of concern to any community member with or without a disability.

Engaging in meaningful public consultations when developing new legislation helps lawmakers get it right the first time thanks to:

- providing deeper understanding of the problem a proposed law is seeking to address;

⁴⁵ General Comment No 7, *op, cit.*, note 42.

- helping identify all available policy solutions and assessing their respective costs and benefits, including assessing whether specific solutions would be workable in the existing circumstances;
- helping find the right balance between opposing interests;
- helping understand the full impact of a proposed law, including its impact on different social groups and their human rights; and
- identifying unintended effects and previously unnoticed weaknesses of the proposed approach.

There are many ways in which public consultations can be conducted. They include written online consultations, public hearings, workshops, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The effectiveness of your consultation process will be determined by your choice of consultation tools. When deciding on consultation tools, it may be a good idea to seek advice from NGOs representing specific target groups or working on relevant issues.⁴⁶

Many accessibility provisions can be planned for in advance of public consultations. Parliamentary staff should be trained and authorized to:

- Reserve an accessible room in the parliamentary building for public sessions;
- If there are no immediately accessible rooms, work with others to remove or mitigate obstacles (e.g., rearrange furniture to create clear pathways, assign volunteers to open the doors if no push button is available);

⁴⁶ See more ODIHR Guidelines on public consultations in Ukraine. Available at: <<https://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/22238>>.

- Arrange for captions to be shown with any videos;
- Arrange for an audio description option for any videos;
- Advertise that reasonable accommodations are available for public meetings; and
- Process accommodation requests in an efficient and timely manner.

Consider providing live video streaming for public meetings if this is not already occurring. This can also be a way for citizens to participate from home. Videos should have live captioning and sign language interpretation, as well.

Parliamentary websites should meet web accessibility standards. Any Word or PDF documents posted online can also be created to meet accessibility standards. An Accessibility Officer and/or disability rights consultant can work with parliamentary staff to standardize online accessibility features.

Parliamentary documents should be accessible offline as well. Parliamentary staff could offer to provide documents in audio formats, large print, braille or easy-to-read versions upon request.

In speeches, public relations materials and public documents, it is especially crucial that appropriate language and terminology are used when referring to persons with disabilities. This is an area where local disability rights consultants or DPO partners can provide excellent guidance, especially as different languages will have different names for disabilities.

Staff and Administrative Procedures

Parliaments are well positioned to lead by example when it comes to accessibility and inclusion, particularly within their own administrative staff. There are four responsibilities that parliamentary administrative structures can prioritize as they work to become more inclusive and disability-friendly:

1. Having a designated staff member or team for disability-inclusion work at the parliament;
2. Meeting the accessibility needs of MPs, job applicants, staff members and visitors with disabilities;
3. Supporting non-discriminatory hiring practices; and
4. Training staff to be more disability-inclusive and responsive.

Accessibility Advisors

Regardless of the name, having a staff person, team or even committee of trained disability-accessibility experts will ensure that there is always at least one administrative staff person who is leading accessibility and inclusion efforts. If a country or parliament is particularly large, it would make sense to have a team or committee of at least two to three staff members to support MPs, staff members and visitors with disabilities. Some responsibilities of the accessibility staff person or team could include (but are not limited to):

- Establishing accessibility standards and measures for parliament operations;
- Establishing and implementing parliamentary policy and protocols for arranging reasonable accommodations as needed;
- Providing disability rights training;
- Creating accessible digital and print materials for public use;
- Welcoming visitors with disabilities to the parliament;
- Monitoring and tracking disability-related data, including the frequency and cost of reasonable accommodations;
- Partnering with DPOs to develop resources for staff use;
- Implementing and enforcing non-discriminatory hiring practices; and
- Setting up mentorship programs for interns and entry-level staff members with disabilities.

Accessibility Policy

Parliaments are encouraged to be proactive about addressing accessibility, rather than reactive. The latter often means that parliaments are dealing with access emergencies at the last minute, while the former means that parliaments have a clearly defined mandate and guide in place when needed.

A well-crafted accessibility policy, developed with input from trusted DPO partners, can help establish and normalize accessibility for MPs, visitors and parliamentary staff with disabilities.

Accessibility means a system, product, service or environment that is easy for a person with a disability to use. For parliament, being accessible means that persons with disabilities should have positive, inclusive experiences at every level of participation, from being a visitor to staff member to MP. Some ideas of accessibility measures for parliaments include ensuring that any refurbishment or rebuilding work meets modern accessibility standards and ensuring that materials made for public use are available in accessible formats, such as sign language, easy read and audio.

It may be advantageous to pair an accessibility policy with a non-discrimination policy, emphasizing that all persons with disabilities are welcome to visit or apply for a position at the parliament, regardless of their social identity (gender, age, ethnicity, race, etc.). Accessibility can also be an excellent foundation for universal design. If the parliament buildings, staff structures, protocols and policies are designed to maximize inclusion of men and women with disabilities, other members of the society will benefit as well.

Reasonable Accommodation Policy and Procedures

Although parliaments should make the best possible efforts to implement accessibility measures in advance, reasonable accommodations may still be needed. A reasonable accommodations policy would describe the overall staff approach and protocols for securing reasonable accommodations. For example, it could state:

- The parliament's commitment to complying with international and national law on disability rights;
- Its commitment to supporting equal employment and workplace opportunities for persons with disabilities; and
- Its assurance that reasonable accommodations will be arranged for MPs, staff members and visitors, provided that the requested reasonable accommodations do not create an undue burden for the parliament.

It is strongly recommended that parliamentary staff receive advice from experienced disability law experts and DPOs when developing a reasonable accommodation policy.

Reasonable accommodations policies could also provide specific guidance on procedures that offer:

- Steps for requesting and processing a reasonable accommodation for MPs;
- Steps for requesting and processing a reasonable accommodation for staff;
- Steps for requesting and processing a reasonable accommodation for visitors;

- Who is responsible for arranging reasonable accommodations;
- What to do if complications arise;
- How to handle complaints and appeals; and
- How to track data on reasonable accommodations.

In addition to developing policies and procedures, the accessibility staff member or team could work with DPO partners to proactively identify reliable and high-quality service providers for different reasonable accommodations. This list should be updated periodically and could even be shared with EMBs and political parties so that there is a consistent level of service across different electoral and political stakeholders.

Non-discriminatory Hiring Practices

Implementing non-discriminatory practices for recruiting and hiring parliamentary staff will provide more opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities to find meaningful employment in political institutions.

It is recommended that parliaments include the disability community as part of outreach and recruitment strategies when announcing new job opportunities. This can be accomplished by sharing job postings with disability rights leaders and DPO partners and asking if they can share with their networks. A staff person or team could also independently develop an email or contact group of persons with disabilities who are interested in employment opportunities.

It is worth examining and testing the application process itself to determine if it is accessible for job applicants with disabilities. For example, could a person using a screen reader (usually a person with a visual disability) navigate a job application form online, or is the form available in audio version or braille if printed?

When selecting job applicants to interview, the hiring staff can conduct an equality screening. This would involve reviewing the list of job applicants to see if qualified persons of different races, ethnicities, abilities and gender are represented. If the list only includes applicants from majority backgrounds, it is worth discussing why, and how future recruitment practices could be modified to reach diverse applicants.

To assist parliaments in understanding how representative their staff members are of the populations that they serve, a staff member or team may want to maintain data on how many job applicants with disabilities apply, how many of those applicants are hired, and how many existing employees with disabilities there are. It could also be worth looking at attrition rates – are employees with disabilities continuing to work for a while, or do they leave shortly after they are hired? Data can be useful in monitoring and evaluating disability inclusion efforts.

Training Staff Members

It is not unusual for workplaces and staff members to be unaware of the history, struggles and triumphs of men and women with disabilities. Many people may also have only heard sad or negative beliefs about persons with disabilities. Well-designed staff training can introduce the concept of disability rights to staff members and provide clear guidance on how to be thoughtful and respectful when meeting MPs, job applicants, colleagues and visitors with disabilities. It is important that, when possible, these training events are developed and led by men and women with disabilities. They will be able to provide unique experiences and expertise about disability rights approaches that others cannot.

The parliament should also conduct training on its accessibility policy, non-discriminatory hiring practices and the reasonable accommodations protocols for staff. Although the accessibility staff member or team will handle most accessibility measures and reasonable accommodation requests, every staff member should have a basic understanding of the accessibility policy and how to assist visitors and MPs in requesting reasonable accommodations, if needed.

Engaging Youth with Disabilities in Parliament

Young people are one of the primary drivers of social change, yet some research identifies their level of understanding or engagement with political processes as lower than that of other age groups.⁴⁷ As parliaments explore opportunities to engage youth in political processes, it is vital to build in opportunities for youth from under-represented communities, including youth from ethnic minorities, young women and youth with disabilities (or any combination).

In 2014, ODIHR convened a Youth Leadership Forum and worked with more than 100 youth leaders from OSCE participating States to develop recommendations for engaging more youth in political processes. A high priority was given to the use of technology to provide civic education and help youth understand the connections between political participation and their everyday lives.⁴⁸ Building on this concept, there is an ideal opportunity for parliaments to capitalize on social media and interactive web programming in accessible and inclusive ways. Staff members focused on accessibility or in a parliamentary disability working group could partner with young leaders with disabilities and youth disability groups to provide input on creating interesting and fun electronic learning opportunities. For example, perhaps young men and women with disabilities can interview MPs and create a video, news report or game to promote learning.

47 UN-DESA, *World Youth Report* (UN, 2016), p.63-64, <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report.html>>.

48 OSCE/ODHIR, "Promoting and Increasing Youth Political Participation and Engagement in the OSCE Region", (Warsaw, 2014), p17-18, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/155691?download=true>>.

Public consultation sessions targeted toward youth in general or youth with disabilities could provide opportunities for youth with disabilities and others to share their visions, ideas and concerns about the future with MPs. Another method for engaging young leaders with disabilities is to facilitate their participation in internship programmes and political leadership programmes. This can partly be accomplished by proactive outreach to and recruitment of young persons with disabilities, strongly encouraging them to apply and emphasizing that reasonable accommodations will be provided. It may also be worth partnering with a cross-disability DPO, experienced civil society organization and political parties to build an internship or civic education programme specifically targeting youth with disabilities.

Budgets

It would be good to consider not only the current needs for accessibility funding, but also anticipated future needs. With advance planning, parliaments can ensure that there is sufficient funding for any accessibility measures or reasonable accommodation requests from MPs who have disabilities, as well as visitors or staff with disabilities.

A central accessibility fund could potentially be designed to help pay the cost of other access improvements, besides individual reasonable accommodations. For example, it could be used to improve the accessibility of a parliament's website, provide tactile signs in the building or create easy-to-read tour guide documents.

Finally, the fund could also be used to support the work of DPO partners and disability rights consultants as they assist parliaments in becoming more accessible. Many DPOs are non-profit organizations that rely on outside support, and they may not have the financial capacity to provide ongoing support for free. Fair compensation for their work is another way for parliaments to demonstrate their support for the work that DPOs provide in making policies, procedures and cultures inclusive and accessible.

Section Highlights

- Parliaments are essential in ensuring that democracies are both inclusive and representative, especially as it pertains to persons with disabilities.
- An ideal first step is to conduct an **accessibility assessment**, as this will help parliaments identify critical areas of work. Partnering with a DPO is recommended.
- In its lawmaking capacity, parliaments will benefit from the development of internal **working groups** on disability inclusion, as well as input from **community partners**, such as DPOs.
- There is a need for parliaments to **review electoral legislation** in order to identify and mitigate barriers to political participation for persons with disabilities. In particular, parliaments should examine legislation that restricts or prohibits political participation for persons with disabilities who have a court-appointed legal guardian or support person.

- It is important to have **inclusive public consultations** and to provide **accessible media and events** when engaging the public.
- **Training for administrative staff** and perhaps even designating an **accessibility advisor** or similar staff position will facilitate inclusion of underrepresented communities.
- An **accessibility policy** will assist parliaments in proactively identifying measures and approaches to support inclusion. Pairing this with a **non-discrimination policy** (and using **non-discriminatory hiring practices**) will support persons with disabilities who are also members of other underrepresented communities, such as young people with disabilities.
- Finally, it is important to develop an **accessibility budget** to fund the parliament's accessibility measures. Both present and future access needs should be taken into account when budgets are created.



Conclusion

Since the adoption CRPD in 2006, there has been a significant wave of support for the inclusion of men, women and children with disabilities in social, economic and political spheres. However, there is still much more work to be done, particularly in advancing equal political participation and leadership opportunities for persons with disabilities.

As political parties and parliaments in OSCE participating States explore opportunities and build systems to facilitate inclusion, it will be especially critical to ensure that everyone, including persons with disabilities, is encouraged to join these processes. This includes women, youth and ethnic minorities (including indigenous populations) who have disabilities.

Partnerships between political parties, parliaments and disability rights groups can serve as a cornerstone for guiding new efforts in this area. In particular, DPOs and disability rights experts have unique expertise to provide and will be invaluable allies for the work that lies ahead.

At the same time, parliaments and political parties need to recognize the diverse interests of persons with disabilities, who wish to take part in parliamentary and legislative work on various issues, not only limited to the scope of laws and policies with a direct impact on disability rights.

Political participation is the engine that powers democracy. The participation of persons with disabilities from a multitude of backgrounds – young people, women, older people, men, ethnic minorities, such as Roma and Sinti, and other groups – is essential for thriving, legitimate and representative democracies. As more persons with disabilities from all backgrounds join political parties, engage with parliaments, run for elected office, and succeed in becoming political leaders and MPs, the more their voices and partnerships will lead the way into an inclusive, accessible and equitable tomorrow.

Annexes



Disability Inclusion Checklist for Political Parties

This checklist offers a quick method for identifying opportunities for political parties to support persons with disabilities in their work. Please note that this is a supplementary resource only. It is not intended to replace guidance from disability rights experts and DPOs.

Instructions

In co-ordination with party leaders and/or disability rights partners, answer each question as best as you can with “yes”, “no” or “not applicable (n/a)”. If needed, comments can be added to each section to clarify responses.

At the end, look over the responses to each question. A “yes” response indicates that disability rights work has already been done in that area. A “no” response indicates an opportunity to improve disability inclusion and/or accessibility. It is recommended that political parties work with disability rights experts and DPOs to address opportunities identified by “no” responses.

Party Membership

	YES	NO	N/A
1. If there are membership fees to join the political party, are there discounts or other financial incentives for persons with disabilities with low incomes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does the party's membership recruitment strategy include outreach to disability communities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does the party offer more than one format for party membership forms, such as phone, paper and online forms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Has the party considered a voluntary party quota for persons with disabilities, in consultation with disability rights organizations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does the party have a process for collecting data on how many party members have a disability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Party Candidacy

	YES	NO	N/A
6. If the party supports civic leadership or education programmes, does it proactively encourage the inclusion of participants with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. If the party has leadership or mentorship programmes available for potential candidates, do the programmes address the inclusion of men and women with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Does the party proactively identify both men and women with disabilities that could be candidates?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Does the party proactively encourage both men and women with disabilities to run for office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Does the party have a process for collecting data on how many candidates have a disability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Policies, Platforms and Manifestos

	YES	NO	N/A
11. Does the party have an accessibility policy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. If there is a policy, are party members, campaign staff and members of the public covered by the accessibility policy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. If there is an accessibility policy, have campaign staff and party members been made aware of the policy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. If there is an accessibility policy, is it available in easy-to-read format, sign language and as an accessible PDF or webpage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Does the party have a public platform or manifesto that clearly states at least one actionable item or goal related to the rights persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. If there is a public platform or manifesto, is it available in easy-to-read format, sign language and as an accessible PDF or webpage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Engaging the Electorate

	YES	NO	N/A
17. Does the party's communication strategy include outreach to persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Has the communications team created inclusive campaign materials that have text and photos representing both men and women with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Does the party have an accessible website that complies with level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Are the party's print campaign materials available in easy-to-read format?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Are Word documents, PDFs, Excel sheets and other similar electronic materials available online accessible for screen readers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Are captions and/or subtitles included with campaign videos?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Are audio descriptions included with campaign videos?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Do party speeches and candidate debates include references to persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Are there clear guidelines for ensuring that party speeches and candidate debates are accessible for live audiences?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO	N/A
26. Are there clear guidelines for ensuring that televised events (including party speeches and candidate debates) are accessible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Does the party have a process for confirming that physical locations for party events are accessible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Internal Operations

	YES	NO	N/A
28. Has the party proactively identified how it will fund accessible campaign materials and reasonable accommodations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Have campaign staff received basic disability rights training?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. When recruiting campaign staff and campaign volunteers, were disability communities invited to join the campaign?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Is there a clear procedure for receiving and processing reasonable accommodation requests from campaign staff and volunteers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Is there a clear procedure for receiving and processing reasonable accommodation requests from members of the public?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Have staff been trained on how to process a reasonable accommodation request?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. Does the party plan to have an accessibility audit done by a disability rights organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____



Disability Inclusion Checklist for Parliaments

This checklist offers a quick method for identifying opportunities for parliaments to support persons with disabilities in their work. Please note that this is a supplementary resource only. It is not intended to replace guidance from disability rights experts and DPOs.

Instructions

In co-ordination with parliamentary leaders and/or disability rights partners, answer each question as best as you can with “yes”, “no” or “not applicable (n/a)”. If needed, comments can be added to each section to clarify responses.

At the end, look over the responses to each question. A “yes” response indicates that disability rights work has already been done in that area. A “no” response indicates an opportunity to improve disability inclusion and/or accessibility. It is recommended that parliaments work with disability rights experts and DPOs to address opportunities identified by “no” responses.

Assessing Current Legislation

	YES	NO	N/A
1. Has the country ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is there at least one national law that clearly mentions and protects the political rights of persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is there a national political party and/or election law that specifically mentions persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. When reviewing national legislation regarding voter eligibility, are the phrases “incapacity”, “illness”, “inability” and/or “competency” either absent or clarified so that they do not exclude persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. When reviewing national legislation regarding candidacy eligibility, are the phrases “incapacity”, “illness”, “inability” and/or “competency” either absent or clarified so that they do not exclude persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Are persons with disabilities who have limited legal capacity still legally allowed to participate in political processes (e.g., to vote)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO	N/A
7. Is there a national law, ordinance, action plan or strategy that establishes a public fund for reasonable accommodations for candidates with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Is there a national law, ordinance, action plan or strategy that establishes a public fund for political parties to provide reasonable accommodations for members of the public?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. If there is no public accessibility fund available for candidates or political parties, are there political finance laws that provide support, exemptions or fewer restrictions for political parties and their candidates who will have to raise additional funds to cover the cost of reasonable accommodations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Developing Legislation

	YES	NO	N/A
8. Is there a parliamentary working group or committee that focuses on disability rights?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Does the parliament regularly consult with DPOs when developing new laws?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Is there an agreement or standard within the country's region (e.g., Europe, Central Asia) for disability inclusion and accessibility in political parties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Is there an agreement or standard within the country's region (e.g., Europe, Central Asia) for disability inclusion and accessibility in parliaments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Communications Strategy

	YES	NO	N/A
12. Does parliament have a communications strategy that includes outreach to persons with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Do the parliament's communications materials include text and photos of men and women with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Does parliament have an accessible website that complies with level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Are parliament's communications materials available in easy-to-read format?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Are Word documents, PDFs, Excel sheets and other similar electronic materials available online accessible for screen readers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Are captions and/or subtitles included with parliamentary videos?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Are audio descriptions included with parliamentary videos?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Parliamentary Visitors and Programmes

	YES	NO	N/A
19. Has parliament worked with a DPO to conduct an accessibility audit of its building(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. If an accessibility audit has been conducted, does parliament have a clear plan to fund and implement any necessary modifications to improve accessibility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. If tours or visits to parliamentary buildings are offered, are visitors notified that they can ask for and receive reasonable accommodations, such as a sign language interpreter?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. If parliament supports civic, leadership, internship or other public training programmes, does it actively encourage men and women with disabilities to apply for and participate in those programmes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Internal Operations

	YES	NO	N/A
23. Does parliament have an accessibility policy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. If there is a policy, are Members of Parliament (MPs), visitors to parliament, participants in programmes offered by parliament and parliamentary staff covered by the accessibility policy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. If there is an accessibility policy, have parliamentary staff and MPs been made aware of the policy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. If there is an accessibility policy, is it available in easy-to-read format, sign language and as an accessible PDF or webpage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Do parliamentary staff receive basic training in disability rights, including the use of appropriate language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Is there a central fund available to support reasonable accommodations for MPs, parliamentary staff and visitors with disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Are the criteria for accessing the fund made clear to MPs and parliamentary staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES	NO	N/A
30. Is there a clear procedure for receiving and processing reasonable accommodation requests from MPs and parliamentary staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Is there a clear procedure for receiving and processing reasonable accommodation requests from members of the public?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Does parliament have a non-discrimination policy that prohibits discriminating against qualified job applicants or employees because of their disability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Are qualified men and women with disabilities actively recruited and encouraged to apply for staff positions in parliament?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments: _____

Glossary

Accessible	A system, product, service or environment that is easy for a person with a disability to use or participate in.
Audio description	An additional sound track for videos that describes visual information that is not obvious in a video's dialogue. For example, if a character is not speaking but is moving across the room, the audio description might say "She stands up and walks to the door".
Braille	A writing system comprised of raised dots. Braille is usually made by embossing paper, although there are new technologies available that allow braille readers to use a refreshable braille display (also known as a braille terminal). Not all persons with visual disabilities can read braille, so it is important to work with a DPO partner to determine if braille is widely used in your region or country.

Captions Text that appears on a screen to help deaf or hard-of-hearing persons understand what is being said. There is an important difference between captions and subtitles: *subtitles* only include dialogue, whereas *captions* describe the dialogue and other important sound information, such as bells chiming, leaves rustling or footsteps. Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities prefer captions instead of subtitles. Captions or subtitles can be prepared in advance for videos and television programmes. They can also be produced “live” for events or speeches. Depending on the location, this is known as live captioning, speech-to-text, transcription or Communication Access in Real-Time (CART).

Disabled persons organization (DPO) An organization that is run by persons with disabilities and their families to support the rights of persons with disabilities.

Easy-to-read The purpose of easy-to-read formats is to make text both easy to read and easy to understand. This benefits persons with low literacy skills and adults with intellectual disabilities. When creating easy-to-read documents, it is important to consider both content and design, as many easy-to-read documents include photos or drawings to help clarify the meaning of the text. It is strongly recommended that political institutions partner with an experienced disability rights organization to develop easy-to-read materials.

Election Management Body (EMB)	A politically impartial organization that is legally responsible for managing some or all the necessary processes of an election, such as voter education, voter registration, polling and/or counting votes.
Inclusion	Ensuring that persons with disabilities have equal opportunities to others and are represented on an equal basis with others in all parts of life.
Intellectual disabilities	Refers to conditions that lead to an increased difficulty in learning. A person is considered to have an intellectual disability if they have a below-average ability to learn and develop adaptive skills, and if the condition has been present since childhood or adolescence. Examples include persons who have Down syndrome, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder or (in some cases) autism.
Physical disabilities	Includes any condition that affects mobility or physical movement, such as arthritis, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis or amputation. Sometimes people with physical disabilities use a mobility device such as a wheelchair, crutches or a mobility scooter.
Psychosocial disabilities	Any condition that affects mental or emotional health. Examples include persons with anxiety, depression, agoraphobia, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Reasonable accommodation A necessary modification or support that ensures a person with a disability has an equal opportunity to enjoy and exercise a human right or fundamental freedom. The modification or support should be reasonable and not impose an undue burden on the provider. Examples include flexible working hours, a text-to-speech computer program, a service dog or a sign language interpreter.

Screen reader Also known as text-to-speech. A computer program that reads text to a user. It can read websites, Word documents, PDFs and other digital print media as long as they are programmed to support text-to-speech functions. This technology is most often used by persons with visual disabilities.

Sensory disabilities Any condition that affects a sensory system, such as hearing or seeing. This includes persons who are blind, have low vision, are colour blind, are hard-of-hearing, are deaf or are deafblind.

Sign language interpreter A trained, professional interpreter who translates between a spoken language and a sign language. Since there are many different sign languages, it is important to choose an interpreter who is familiar with the sign language(s) that local deaf communities use. Deaf communities tend to prefer having an interpreter in person, although it is possible for interpretation to be done using a video calling program if the internet speed is fast enough. Interpretation can also be made available for televised advertisements or programmes; usually a video of the interpreters is placed at the bottom corner of a screen while the programme is being shown.

Supported decision-making	When a person with a disability makes their own choices about their lives, with support from people that they choose and trust. This differs from <i>substituted decision-making</i> , in which a legal guardian makes decisions for a person with a disability, a practice that is not supported by modern human rights perspectives.
Tactile	Raised letters, shapes or symbols. Tactile is not an effective option for large amounts of text (braille or audio formats should be used instead). However, tactile formats can be effective for signs or other visual displays, such as maps.
Text-to-speech	See “Screen reader”.
Transcripts	A written version of an audio recording. Transcripts should always indicate who is speaking and if there are any relevant background noises or sound effects.
Universal design	When products, services and environments are designed so that they can be used by anyone regardless of age, disability or other status.

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