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Political participation of people with disabilities Q&A

1. Why was this research carried out?

[Previous FRA research](#) showed that in a majority of Member States people with disabilities whose legal capacity has been restricted or removed are unable to vote. It also showed that many people with disabilities face barriers to participation in community life which affects the fulfilment of their rights, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Therefore FRA decided together with the European Commission to assess how the right of people with disabilities to equal participation in political life is fulfilled across the EU. This project contributes to the work of the European Union's CRPD Monitoring Framework, which is composed of: the European Parliament Petition's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs in cooperation with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; the European Commission; the European Ombudsman; the European Disability Forum; and FRA.

2. How was the research carried out?

FRA developed the relevant fundamental rights indicators in close cooperation with the European Commission and the Academic Network of European Disability Experts (ANED), funded by the Commission. They were further refined through consultation with stakeholders.

The indicators were populated with through desk research carried out by FRANET, FRA's multidisciplinary network of research contractors in each EU Member State, and ANED, the European Commission's Academic Network of Experts on Disability.

The data analysed are publicly available. Statistical data that are used in the report was extracted from existing EU-wide surveys including the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) and European Social Survey (ESS). Promising practices from across all EU Member States were also collected.

3. What did the research cover?

The project started by developing fundamental rights indicators on the right of people with disabilities to political participation. This right is guaranteed by Article 29 of the CRPD and is protected under EU law. The indicators follow the [model of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) of structure, process and outcome indicators. Broadly speaking, structure indicators relate to laws and policies, process indicators relate to efforts to turn laws and policies into reality, and outcome indicators relate to the results of these efforts.

4. What legal and administrative barriers do people with disabilities face?

People with disabilities face a number of legal and administrative barriers to political participation such as:

- legal restrictions on the right to vote for some people with disabilities such as those with psychosocial or intellectual impairments;
- cumbersome procedures for requesting support or assistance when voting;
- difficulties in complaining about problems when trying to exercise their right to vote. This includes the lack of accessible information about how and where to complain.

5. What are the accessibility barriers?

Most Member States have accessibility standards in place for public buildings, and many also have standards for polling station accessibility. However, the focus tends to be on physical disabilities

rather than all groups of people with disabilities, and there is often a lack of consistent criteria for assessing accessibility. In addition, election-related media and campaign material remain largely inaccessible. Where accessible material exists in Member States it is often inconsistent, provided by just one or two political parties and only in formats suitable for certain types of impairment.

Commitments to produce accessible campaign materials for European Parliament elections in 2014 have been linked to campaigns by disabled people's organisations (DPOs).

6. Do people with disabilities have opportunities to participate politically?

Under the CRPD, consulting with and actively involving people with disabilities in policy development and law making is an obligation. Although Member States are increasingly involving DPOs, this is not systematic and there is scope for improvement.

Regarding being elected to public office, there is very little known about how many people with disabilities have been elected to the European Parliament, national parliaments or to municipal administrations.

7. How aware are people about the right to political participation for people with disabilities?

There is a lack of training and awareness raising among election officials, political parties, public authorities and media providers about the right to political participation of people with disabilities. Training for election officials by law has to cover disability issues only in one EU Member State, Croatia.

In addition, the findings point to the need for information providers such as media outlets and political parties, as well as public authorities, to be made aware of the needs of people with disabilities and to tailor their information and services accordingly.

8. What does the research reveal about current data availability?

Data is largely missing for many of the indicators. When data exists, they are often not reliable nor comparable. This is due to: the lack of systematic data collection; the absence of standards and guidelines for measuring and comparing accessibility across Member States; and concerns about how the experiences of people with disabilities are captured.

9. What can be done to improve the situation?

The report contains a number of FRA opinions about what concrete measures could be taken to improve political participation. They are grouped around the following five issues:

1. Lifting legal and administrative barriers
2. Making political participation more accessible
3. Expanding opportunities for political participation
4. Increasing rights awareness
5. Collecting data to measure political participation

The FRA report also outlines a number of promising practices that could be rolled out in other Member States to help improve political participation. These range from enabling people living in institutions to vote (Finland) to developing accessible alternative forms of voting (Estonia), or setting standards for elections authorities and officials (UK).

FRA's work on disability issues and related publications can be found at:

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/disability>.

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