



FRA Press Release

Vienna, 29 April 2014

Action needed to ensure that all people with disabilities can vote

People with disabilities are active citizens keen to participate in political life given the right opportunities. However, legal, administrative and accessibility barriers can still prevent them from taking part in elections finds the latest research on the rights of people with disabilities from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

“Political participation is a basic right that everyone should enjoy equally,” says FRA Director Morten Kjaerum. “Yet, FRA’s report underlines that many barriers can undermine the democratic rights of people with disabilities. With European elections around the corner, it is timely reminder that across the EU change is needed to allow all people with disabilities to have an equal say in the political life of our society.”

Together with the European Commission, FRA developed a set of human rights indicators on how the right to political participation, as described in the UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), is being respected, promoted and fulfilled across the EU.

The data which populate these indicators show that given the opportunity people with disabilities actively participate in politics through voting, political meetings and engaging with elected officials. However, the data also reveal that significant challenges remain which affect some people with disabilities more than others.

This led FRA to propose:

1. Lifting legal and administrative barriers:

- National disability action plans should address how to promote the political participation of people with disabilities. This includes amending laws depriving people of the right to vote based on their disability.
- Alternative forms of voting for people in long-term institutions, for example, and accessible ways to request support in voting should also be introduced so no one is excluded from taking part in elections.
- Complaint mechanisms about voting should also be more accessible. Here allowing disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) to bring complaints to court should help.

2. Making political participation more accessible:

- Polling stations should cater to the needs of all people with disabilities not just those with physical impairments. This includes offering appropriate support to all those who want to vote.
- Election information and campaign material should also be available in a wide range of accessible formats – e.g. Braille, national sign-language, easy-to-read, etc.

3. Expanding opportunities for political participation:

- Under the CRPD, consulting with and actively involving people with disabilities in decisions affecting them is an obligation. EU bodies and Member States should strengthen mechanisms to involve DPOs.



- Opportunities for people with disabilities to take part in public consultations, through the use of accessible communications, for example, should be promoted.
- Candidates with disabilities should also have equal opportunities to run for office by providing additional support where required, for example.

4. Increasing rights awareness:

- Election officials, political parties, public authorities and media providers need training and guidelines on how to cater to the needs of people with disabilities.
- Member States should also involve DPOs when producing such guidelines. This includes tackling inaccessible polling stations and campaign material.

5. Collecting data to measure political participation:

- Robust, comparable data needs to be collected at EU and Member State levels to help shape targeted measures that will improve political participation. This includes developing common approaches for capturing such data and guidelines for measuring accessibility.

For further information:

- Consult the [report summary](#) 'The right to political participation of persons with disabilities: human rights indicators', and its [related Q&A](#) and the [indicators online](#).
- Contact: media@fra.europa.eu / Tel.: +43 1 580 30 642

Notes to editors:

- See also FRA's earlier report on the [right to political participation of people with mental health problems and people with intellectual disabilities](#) and its report on [legal capacity barriers](#).
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which entered into force in May 2008 has so far been ratified by [25 EU Member States and the EU itself](#). This is the first legally binding international human rights instrument to which the EU is party. The CRPD requires parties, among other responsibilities, to guarantee people with disabilities political rights, including the right to vote, and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with everyone else.
- The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is mandated to provide evidence-based advice to EU and national decision makers, thereby contributing to more informed and better targeted debates and policies on fundamental rights.