



Good Practices for Accessible Elections in Europe

Produced as part of the project “Accommodating Diversity
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Inclusion Europe



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Introduction

All European citizens should have the right to vote and participate in elections. Yet in many cases, people with disabilities, as well as other vulnerable groups are hindered by barriers which prevent them from exercising this fundamental right. These barriers range from a lack of awareness about the right to vote, to inaccessible information about elections and physical barriers at polling stations which prevent people with disabilities from voting. In order to remove these barriers, practices which improve access to voting and electoral participation must be implemented.

In December 2009, Inclusion Europe launched a project with the aim of improving the accessibility of elections for the following groups of citizens:

- People with intellectual disabilities
- Elderly people facing age-related illnesses which hinder their participation
- Other groups of citizens who may face language barriers

It is highly encouraging to see the large number of good practices which are already in place in many European countries to ensure greater accessibility for the above-mentioned groups to elections, and much can be learned from these practices in implementing accessibility measures in other European countries.

Inclusion Europe promotes the exchange and uptake of these practices and hopes that they will provide concrete examples and inspiration to facilitate and improve access to voting for all European citizens.

Maureen Piggot
President
Inclusion Europe

Voting for All!

Project ADAP (Accommodating Diversity for Active Participation in European Elections) was led by Inclusion Europe, and was undertaken together with self-advocates from Inclusion Europe's member organizations ENABLE Scotland, Nous Aussi (France) and SPMP (Czech Republic), who gave invaluable input into the project and played a very active and important role in selecting best practices for this brochure.

Inclusion Europe collected good practices on accessible measures for elections for the above-mentioned groups through research and questionnaires sent to its member organizations in Europe and to national electoral commissions or government departments responsible for organizing elections in the Member States of the European Union (EU).

Inclusion Europe received responses from member organizations in 25 countries¹, as well as replies from electoral commissions or government departments responsible for organizing elections in 18 EU countries². In total, information on 29 European countries was gathered.

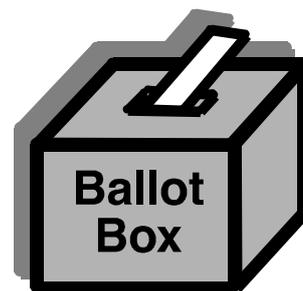
¹ Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Sweden, UK.

² Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden.

This brochure gives statistical data on good practices across the different countries, to provide an overview of accessibility measures across Europe, as well as presenting more detailed examples of good practices in 5 different areas: awareness-raising, surveys on accessibility, accessible information, training and access to voting.

As part of the ADAP project, Policy Recommendations, as well as a Guide to Campaigns for More Accessible elections for national associations in easy-to-read language were produced. These can be downloaded from the project website: **www.voting-for-all.eu**.

Project ADAP was undertaken with funding from the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme of the European Commission from December 2009 to June 2011.



Good practices

1. Awareness-raising

Many people with disabilities are not aware of their right to vote or the electoral and voting process is not accessible for them. Additionally, polling station staff as well as politicians and the general public are often not aware that people with disabilities should be allowed to vote and require specific accessibility measures to be put in place in order to facilitate their participation. Inclusion Europe's research revealed a number of awareness-raising initiatives across Europe to highlight accessibility issues and raise awareness about the importance of the right to vote for people with disabilities, the elderly and non-native citizens of the country.

Awareness-raising initiatives at European level

Several initiatives have been undertaken in recent years to raise awareness about the importance of voting and participation in political life by people with disabilities at European level.

Project ADAP, Inclusion Europe

As part of the ADAP project, the three self-advocates working on the project organized meetings with national politicians, their national Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) as well as representatives from their national electoral bodies to raise awareness about the difficulties faced by people with intellectual disabilities and to demand improved accessibility for the next

national and European elections. They addressed issues such as:

- Disenfranchisement of the right to vote for people with intellectual disabilities due to limitations imposed by legal capacity measures.
- The need for assistance in the polling booth for people with intellectual disabilities by a person of their choice whom they trust.
- The importance of providing easy-to-read information about voting and the elections to facilitate understanding among people with intellectual disabilities about elections and how to vote.



Meetings were also organised at national level with groups of self-advocates to discuss the importance of voting and to find out more about the difficulties encountered by people with intellectual disabilities when voting and to share ideas about how to take action and campaign for more accessible elections in their country. A guide for national associations on how to campaign for more accessible elections was produced in easy-to-read language giving concrete ideas on how to launch an awareness-raising campaign for more accessible elections.

The final conference of the project in May 2011 gathered national politicians, representatives from national electoral bodies or departments responsible for elections in the different EU Member States, as well as representatives from the EU institutions, the Council of Europe, organisations for people with disabilities and the elderly and other relevant stakeholders to discuss concrete accessibility measures for the 2014 European elections and future national elections.³



‘Disability votes count’⁴, European Disability Forum

For the 2009 European elections, the European Disability Forum launched a campaign to encourage people with disabilities to take part in European elections and to combat discrimination.

The campaign highlighted the increasingly low turnout for European elections. The main objectives of the ‘Disability Votes Count’ campaign were to:

- Encourage citizens with disabilities to exert their rights to vote and to participate in the 2009 European elections.
- Promote free and equal access to electoral debates and procedures for citizens with disabilities.
- Invite candidates to the elections to engage with the demands of 50 million disabled citizens within EU policies and legislation.

³ ADAP website: www.voting-for-all.eu.

⁴ ‘Disability votes count’ website: www.disabilityvotescount.eu.

The campaign website provides information about:

- The impact of the EU in the daily lives of persons with disabilities.
- The EDF Manifesto: nothing about us, without us which contains the TOP 10 demands to make disability discrimination history, calls on politicians to assure equal access for voting and participation in electoral campaigns and for a European Parliament for all. The EDF invites the political leaders to endorse the Manifesto and also to integrate its principles in their parties’ campaigns. The manifesto was produced in easy-to-read by Inclusion Europe and is available in all 23 EU languages.



It also provides a checklist for electoral authorities on accessibility, as well as goals and achievements set out for the next European elections to political parties and candidates.

‘My Opinion, My Vote’⁵

The ‘My Opinion, My Vote’ project was launched in 2009 and was undertaken with funding from the Lifelong Learning Programme for European Education of the European Commission.

⁵ ‘My Opinion, My Vote’ website: www.myopinionmyvote.eu.

The general objectives of the project included:

- Educating people with intellectual disabilities about their political rights.
- Encouraging people with intellectual disabilities to form and express an informed opinion or decision in local, national and European elections and referenda.
- Raising awareness among those who are in a position to facilitate people with intellectual disabilities in exercising their political rights (including relatives and carers of people with intellectual disabilities, politicians and public authorities).



As part of the project, the partners undertook research to discover how many people with intellectual disabilities were aware of their voting rights in the six partner countries (Italy, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Malta and Hungary). They also developed and tested an educational programme addressing issues such as 'Forming a Personal and Independent Opinion', 'What is politics?' and 'Political Parties and Electoral Programmes'. They launched a campaign to raise awareness among people with learning disabilities, their families and carers, as well as professionals, decision-makers and political parties.

Awareness-raising initiatives at national level

Inclusion Europe's research revealed that the electoral commissions or relevant government ministries in 13 European countries undertook activities to encourage all citizens to participate in the 2009 European elections⁶. Of these, 7 countries undertook specific activities to encourage people with intellectual disability, the elderly or any other vulnerable groups to vote⁷. Several electoral authorities stated that they did not undertake awareness-raising activities due to the fact that they are not permitted to influence voters.

In the Netherlands, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations provided brochures and posters for the elderly to encourage their participation in the most recent national elections. In Ireland, an advertising campaign to check if people had registered for the European elections in 2009 was undertaken, as well as newspaper advertising. In Estonia, a young and 'first-time voters' campaign was undertaken by the Electoral Commission in the most recent national elections.



The VOTE SMART campaign was organised by the Pentru Voi Foundation (member of Inclusion Europe), the Institute for Public Policies and Inclusion

⁶ Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania.

⁷ Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Portugal.

Romania. It aimed to create a communication network between voters and candidates for County Council elections and administrative sectors in Bucharest, which aimed to enable people to vote in an informed way.

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

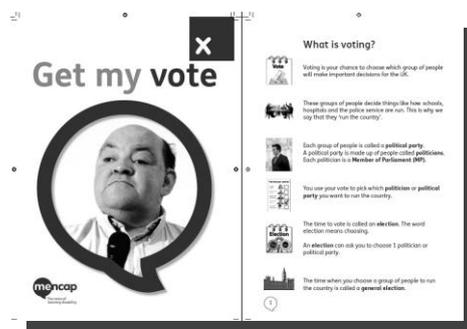


Research carried out by United Response (a national UK charity supporting people with intellectual disabilities) in May 2008, showed that only 16 per cent of people with intellectual disabilities whom they surveyed voted in the 2005 general election. In a recent Mencap study, 45 per cent of people said the reason they didn't vote was because they didn't understand the information produced by political parties.

In light of this, for the general election in 2010, Mencap launched the 'Get my vote' campaign to make sure people with a

learning disability had the opportunity to get their voices heard.

The campaign achieved a high level of engagement with MPs and parliamentary candidates. It ensured that all three of the main political parties (and two smaller parties) commissioned Mencap to produce their manifestos in easy-to-read to reach voters with intellectual disabilities. As a result of the campaign, the number of people with an intellectual disability who voted doubled from 16% to 31% (shown by a survey of over 1100 people with a learning disability) compared with previous elections.



In addition to these successes, Mencap has also ensured 145 MPs from across the political spectrum signed an agreement which called for local authorities, political parties and central government to produce accessible material in relation to electoral matters, and called on all prospective parliamentary candidates to make their election material easily accessible for people with a learning disability. Additionally, 56 MPs in the new parliament have supported the accessibility agenda giving a good basis on which to engage these MPs.

⁸ For more information, go to: www.mencap.org.uk.

'Accessibility of the electoral process for people with disabilities'⁹, France

The guide 'Accessibility of the electoral process for people with disabilities' is aimed at electoral candidates and was produced by the French Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment in 2009.

The guide tells political candidates how to make their meetings, documents and websites more accessible for people with disabilities. It highlights important issues including:

- Accessibility of meeting venues and non-discrimination (for example, ensuring that provisions for people who are deaf, blind or in wheelchairs are available).
- Accessibility of information (for example, the use of Braille, audio, subtitles, simplified language in all documents and on websites).
- Provisions for accessibility set out in national legislation (for example, making polling stations accessible for people with different types of disability, providing accessibility measures which allow people to vote as independently as possible).

'Reaching Disabled Voters', Scotland

The 'Reaching Disabled Voters' guide is aimed towards political candidates and provides advice on how to adapt their campaigns towards people with disabilities. It was produced by 'Disability Agenda Scotland', an alliance of Scotland's major disability organisations.

⁹ The guide can be found at: http://www.csa.fr/upload/publication/memento_candidats.pdf.

It highlights the large number of existing voters with disabilities in Scotland. It then provides guidance on issues such as:

- Protocols and language (for example, allowing more time for discussion, addressing the person with a disability directly and not their assistant, using appropriate terms when referring to disability issues).
- How to provide accessible information (for example, using alternative formats including simple language, Braille or audio).
- Ensuring inclusion of people with disabilities at meetings (for example, ensuring the meeting venue is accessible and easy to reach by public transport).
- Communication (such as using clear language and having a sign language interpreter).

The guide also addresses issues such as polling station accessibility and the need for the provision of assistance for voters with disabilities.

2. Surveys on accessibility

Surveys on the accessibility of elections can be used to discover how many people with disabilities take part in elections and what problems may hinder their participation in order to see how these issues can be addressed. In the UK and Belgium, surveys on the accessibility of elections were carried out to find out the number of people with disabilities who vote or get involved in politics and how accessible polling stations were.

‘Every vote counts’¹⁰, UK

United Response launched the ‘Every Vote Counts’ campaign in 2007. This three-year project, funded by the Electoral Commission, aimed to raise awareness and promote the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in campaigns and in every aspect of the democratic process.

Research by United Response, an organisation which supports people with intellectual disabilities, mental health needs or physical disabilities to live in the community in the UK, has shown that while 80% of people with intellectual disabilities are registered to vote, only 16% of them voted in the last 2005 UK General election and 20% in their last local elections. The research highlighted a number of barriers to accessibility, including a lack of easy to understand information about political parties and policies.

‘Voters with reduced mobility’ booklet, Belgium

The booklet on ‘Voters with reduced mobility’ explains the problems which people with disabilities often encounter because polling stations are not accessible. It refers to two surveys which were conducted about the global accessibility of the regional and European elections in 2004, and the commune and provincial elections in 2006. It was written as a joint effort by 20 different associations in the Walloon region of Brussels in Belgium. It was conducted by

¹⁰ For more information, go to: www.everyvotecounts.org.uk.

surveying 294 people in 6 different regions of Belgium.

The surveys highlighted the many recurrent problems faced by people with physical disabilities when going to the polling station, including: lack of accessibility for people in wheelchairs, people with visual and hearing impairments.



Letters have been sent to the different communes in this area to raise awareness about the problem and to encourage them to put in place adequate measures for better accessibility at the polling station. For the 2009 elections, they called for measures such as:

- Adapted transport on election day for people with disabilities.
- Awareness-raising among polling station officials about the needs of people with disabilities.
- Larger characters and Braille on ballot forms for people with visual impairments.
- Easy-to-read texts about elections on electoral websites.

3. Access to information about elections

Improved access to information about voting and the electoral process is vital for people with intellectual disabilities and other groups of citizens facing difficulties in understanding complex information related to all aspects of the voting process, including how to vote, when and where to vote, how to find information about the different political parties and different types of elections and how to find out the election results.

Inclusion Europe's research showed that there was information in at least one accessible format (including easy-to-read, Braille, audio and video) about at least one aspect of the voting process in 18 European countries¹¹. It also revealed that information produced by political parties was produced in at least one accessible format (including easy-to-read language, Braille, audio, video) in 4 countries¹².

In several countries, state funding is provided towards accessibility measures to facilitate participation of people with disabilities in elections, such as in Finland, Lithuania and Sweden.

Easy-to-understand information



Inclusion Europe's research showed that in 14 countries, there is information in easy-to-read language about at least one

¹¹ Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, UK.

¹² Germany, Latvia, Sweden, UK.

aspect of the electoral process¹³. In Sweden, our member reported that they have easy-to-read information throughout the whole electoral process, including information about local, national and European elections, the national political system, when the elections are held, where to go to vote, filling in the ballot form and the election results¹⁴. In Belgium, the Ministry of the Interior asked the AFRaHM (French Belgian Association for people with intellectual disabilities) to produce an easy-to-read version of official instructions to be put up at polling stations in the last elections.

Easy-to-read guides on voting and the elections

European elections 2009 brochure in easy-to-read¹⁵, Inclusion Europe

In the run-up to the European 2009 elections, Inclusion Europe produced a leaflet in easy-to-read language about the European elections for people with intellectual disabilities translated for use in 14 different European countries¹⁶. The brochure explains for example: when the European 2009 elections took place, what the European Parliament is, what an election is and who can vote, how to vote and find out the elections results in easy-

¹³ Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, UK.

¹⁴ Swedish Electoral Commission website www.val.se.

¹⁵ To see the easy-to-read brochures on the European 2009 elections, go to: <http://www.inclusion-europe.org>.

¹⁶ Austria, the Czech Republic, England, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain.

to-read language. The leaflet was widely distributed through Inclusion Europe's membership to raise awareness about the European 2009 elections and to encourage greater participation among people with intellectual disabilities.

'How to vote' pack, Germany

The 'How to vote' pack contains one booklet about how to vote in national elections and one booklet on how to vote in European elections. The booklets are provided in a voting pack. They explain, using easy-to-read language, pictures and diagrams both for national and European elections:

- Why voting is important.
- The German parliament and the European parliament.
- How to find out about the different political parties.
- Who can vote.
- How to vote at the polling station and by post.
- How to find out the election results.

The pack was compiled by a number of German disability organisations including Bundesvereinigung Lebenshilfe (also a member of Inclusion Europe) and Aktion Mensch. It was published by Karle Finke, Government Representative of Nordrhein-Westfalen.

'Use your vote' pack, Scotland

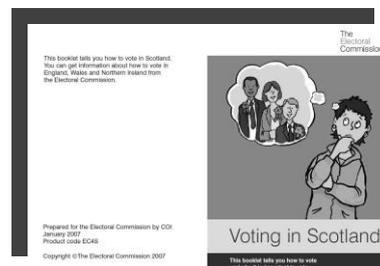
The 'Voting in Scotland' booklet was produced within the framework of a European project in which self-advocates from Scotland, Germany and Spain were involved. It features 6 small booklets which explain:

- How to prepare for elections.

- How to vote in local elections.
- How to vote in Scottish elections.
- How to vote in European elections.
- What difficult words relating to elections mean.

These booklets use easy-to-read language and pictures which are easy-to-understand for people with intellectual disabilities.

'Voting in Scotland' booklet, Scotland



The 'Voting in Scotland' booklet was published by the Scottish Electoral Commission in 2007 and explains why voting is important and how to vote in easy-to-read language. It covers issues such as: what is voting? Who can vote? How to vote by post and by proxy, and how to find out the election results.

Easy-to-understand websites

In several countries, including the UK, Germany, Ireland and Sweden, websites which provide easy-to-understand information about voting and participating in elections have been developed.

'Promote the vote' website¹⁷, UK

This website was produced by a groups of self-advocates called 'Speaking Up' in Cambridge. It features short videos and

¹⁷ www.promotethevote.co.uk.

easy-to-read information about the different stages of voting, including topics such as: 'Why vote?' 'How to register to vote' and 'How to vote'.

Information in other accessible formats

Our research revealed that 4 countries¹⁸ had information about elections in Braille or large text for people with visual impairment. Research among electoral commissions or relevant government ministries revealed that audio options providing information about elections were available for people with visual impairments in 4 countries¹⁹. Information in sign language was provided 2 countries²⁰.



Accessibility for blind and partially-sighted voters to electoral systems, European Blind Union

In July 2009, the European Blind Union published a study on Accessibility for blind and partially-sighted voters to electoral systems in EU Member States. The study presents research undertaken in 18 EU Member States on access to the electoral process for people with visual impairment. It showed that in some countries, provisions such as large print or Braille ballot forms are available, and in many countries, blind people are allowed to be accompanied by a person they trust. In Spain for example, the Spanish Organic Law on General Voting procedures was amended in 2007 due to lobbying from

¹⁸ Ireland, Malta, Spain, Sweden.

¹⁹ Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Sweden.

²⁰ Italy and Sweden.

once (the national organisation for blind people in Spain). This led to the use of Braille ballots and also led to the setting up of a free phone line where voters could receive information about the electoral role and about the different political candidates.

'Don't leave me out!' information sheet²¹, Scotland



The Scottish Council on Deafness produced an information sheet in 2009 for political candidates to raise awareness about the importance of making electoral campaigns accessible for voters with hearing impairments. It was published with support from the Scottish Electoral Commission. It highlights that British Sign Language is the preferred method of communication for 6000 deaf people in Scotland alone. It includes advice such as ensuring appropriate support for deaf people at political meetings and events and providing information in a wide range of accessible formats.

²¹ You can see the information sheet at: http://www.scod.org.uk/pdf/scodpublications/is_mepsWEB.pdf.

Information provided in other languages for non-native citizens

According to information collected from Inclusion Europe's member organizations and from national electoral bodies or relevant governmental departments responsible for organizing elections, information was available in at least one language other than the national language about the elections in the country in 15 countries²². In Sweden, there is information about elections in 21 different languages.

Information on registering for a vote, Ireland

In Ireland, information about elections exists in a number of languages, including Chinese mandarin, Polish, Russian and Slovak. For the 2009 European elections, the Department of the Environment & Local Government informed us that a multi-lingual prompt card was translated into 14 languages to facilitate staff engaged by registration authorities in their door-to-door registration work.

Leaflets on how to register and how members of local authorities are elected were translated into 7 different languages for the last elections, and a leaflet on how MEPs are elected was translated into 5 EU languages. These were distributed in public offices, foreign embassies and organizations dealing with integration, such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland,

²² Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Sweden, Spain, UK.

the Irish Centre for Human Rights, Integrating Ireland and the Irish Refugee Council.

4. Training

Training for polling station officials on how to assist people with intellectual disabilities, as well as other groups who find it difficult to vote is important to ensure that they are provided with the right support when voting. It is also important to provide people with intellectual disabilities and other groups who find it difficult to take part in elections with training on how to vote to ensure that they understand the voting process.

Training for polling station officials

In three countries, Inclusion Europe's members said that there was training for polling station officials on how to assist people with intellectual disabilities²³. The Czech Ministry of the Interior informed us that the Regional Office and the Czech Statistical Office regularly organize training for the electoral commission, which includes how to assist people with disabilities. According to the electoral commissions in Lithuania and Malta, training is given to polling station officials and guidelines are issued on how to assist people with physical disabilities, blind people and the elderly. In Hungary, the National Election Office stated that training is provided for polling station officials on how to assist the elderly. In Belgium and Finland, guidelines are also

²³ Belgium, Czech Republic, Sweden.

issued to polling station officials on how to assist people with intellectual and physical disabilities and blind people according to the Belgian Department of Elections and the Finnish Ministry of Justice.

In Denmark, the Ministry of the Interior and Health issues guidelines to municipalities before each election containing measures on accessibility including allowing enough space for a person in a wheelchair and their support person in the polling booth. It also stipulates that polling stations should be accessible for people in wheelchairs and with mobility disabilities. The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons has produced guidelines for municipalities on how to address different groups of people with disabilities.

Training for people with intellectual disabilities



Inclusion Europe's members in 7 countries informed us that there were training materials developed for people with intellectual disabilities about how to vote²⁴.

'Our Voice, our Vote' peer training manual, Scotland

'Our vote, our voice' is a peer training manual for people with intellectual disabilities which enables them to train other people with intellectual disabilities on how to participate in elections. It was produced by community development

²⁴ Finland, Germany, UK, Ireland, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden.

organisation 'Outside the box', with support from the Scottish Electoral Commission. It uses pictures, diagrams and easy-to-read text to explain different aspects of the electoral process, including:

- 'Choosing things and changing things'
- 'Finding out who is in charge'
- 'Voting to change things'

The manual can be used by people with intellectual disabilities on their own, with support or in groups. A DVD is included in the manual which goes through each section in easy-to-understand language. It provides contacts and websites where more information about voting can be found.

5. Access to voting

Lack of access to voting currently hinders many people, particularly people with disabilities from voting. There is a wide range of good practices in this area which significantly improve access to voting, including measures to improve accessibility at polling stations for people with intellectual, sensory and physical disabilities, as well as providing alternative ways of voting for voters who may find it difficult to get to the polling station.

Access to polling stations

According to the electoral commissions or government ministries responsible for organizing elections, in 11 European countries it is stated in national law that

polling stations should be accessible for people with disabilities²⁵.

In France, the law states that polling stations and ways of voting should be accessible for people with physical, sensory, and intellectual disabilities and mental health problems. Access to information and communication through television programmes are also stipulated²⁶. The decree of October 2006 states that polling station and voting booths must be accessible for wheelchair users. The government also sets out provisions for deaf voters (including use of sign language and subtitles).

In Malta, electoral legislation specifies that all polling stations must be accessible for people in wheelchairs (including measures such as the tables must be the right height for wheelchairs and there must be adequate lighting for people with visual impairments).

In Scotland (and the United Kingdom), under disability discrimination laws, all voting places should be physically accessible.

Regarding the above-mentioned countries, some of our members agreed that polling stations in their countries were accessible, however several did not agree or said that only a small number of polling stations were accessible for people with disabilities. The fact that accessibility measures are specified in the national law is an important step, however monitoring

of these measures is vital for effective implementation.

Research among electoral commissions or government ministries responsible for organizing elections also revealed that funding for the implementation of accessibility measures was available in 7 countries²⁷.

'Polling station accessibility'²⁸ brochure, Luxembourg

In June 2009, disability organisation 'Info-Handicap' produced a brochure about how to make polling stations more accessible. The brochure explains in detail concrete accessibility measures for polling stations, including:

- Requirements for disabled parking spaces (it states that 5% of parking spaces should be accessible and that they should be as close as possible to the polling station).
- Requirements for the polling station itself (for example it states that the passage to the polling booths must be free of obstacles and corridors must be at least 120 cm wide, whilst doorways should be more than 90cm wide to facilitate access for wheelchair users).
- Requirements for space provided in the polling booths and the height of tables where the ballot forms are provided.

²⁵ Spain, Sweden, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Malta.

²⁶ Articles 73 and 74 of the Law of 2005 <http://vosdroits.service-public.fr/>.

²⁷ Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania, Malta, Romania.

²⁸ The 'Polling station accessibility' ('*Accessibilité des bureau de vote*') brochure can be found at: www.welcome.lu.

- Information about accessibility measures for people with visual and hearing impairments, such as the provision of support if necessary by polling station staff and adequate lighting.

‘Polls Apart’ campaign²⁹, UK

Scope, a UK organisation for disabled people, launched the ‘Polls Apart’ campaign. In the last general election, Scope surveyed over 2000 polling stations and found that 68% were inaccessible for people with disabilities. On the basis of this research, Scope raised awareness at government and local level about the importance of making their polling stations accessible. On the Polls Apart website, people can find out how accessible their local polling station is in the UK.

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

The Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority informed us about the project ‘Your vote is equal to others!’, which aims to change electoral law to help blind, deaf and motor disabled people to vote. They are also researching and wish to better define the concept of ‘intellectually disabled’ in the electoral code. Through the project they want to produce materials in Braille, facilitate access to polling stations for wheelchairs and propose special media programmes for deaf voters. They are currently researching these issues with NGOs and plan to organize a conference with politicians to propose modifications to legislation.

²⁹ www.pollsapart.org.uk.

Assisted voting

Inclusion Europe’s members and the electoral commission or government department responsible for organizing elections stated that assisted voting was permitted in 24 countries surveyed³⁰. Some countries specified that assisted voting was permitted for people with physical or sensory disabilities (for example the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Spain), in other countries, assistance is provided upon the discretion of the polling station official (for example in Belgium and Sweden). In other countries, people could be assisted by a family member or carer (for example in Latvia).

‘Pushing for changes in the electoral code’, Albania

The Help the Life association sent 20 parents as observers in Tirana city for the voting process in the 2007 local elections and 2009 national elections. Help the Life was part of a working group that worked for 6 months to change the electoral code before the 2009 national election and made important changes. One of these changes was the introduction of assisted voting for people with intellectual disabilities. Part of the programme also included training 20 parents as observers at polling stations on Election Day.

³⁰ Albania, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, UK.

Alternative ways of voting

Postal Voting, voting by proxy and advance voting

Our research showed that in 14 countries, it is possible to vote by post³¹. We found that in 7 countries, it is possible to vote by proxy³². In 7 countries, advance voting is possible³³. These measures can facilitate the voting process for those who need assistance or who have physical disabilities and cannot get to the polling station, including elderly people who have limited mobility or who live in residences which are far from polling stations.

Mobile polling stations

In 17 countries which replied to the questionnaire, mobile polling stations were used³⁴. The Department of the Environment & Local Government in Ireland informed us that special voting facilities are provided in hospitals, nursing homes or similar institutions for residents who cannot go to the polling station due to a physical disability or physical illness. According to the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, Department of Elections In Austria there is a new law which allows subscription of postal voting to disabled or bed-ridden people, meaning that they do not need to apply for a postal ballot before every election.

³¹ Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, UK, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania.

³² Belgium, France, Norway, UK, Slovakia, Sweden, Netherlands).

³³ Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Sweden.

³⁴ Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Estonia.

Electronic voting

According to our research, electronic voting was only currently possible in Estonia. Several countries have introduced electronic voting but later stopped using it due to concerns for the lack of safeguards (for example in Portugal) or have introduced pilot projects for electronic voting (such as in Ireland and Finland). In the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Romania there are plans to introduce electronic voting in the near future. In Norway, for the next elections, some regions will try electronic voting.

Internet voting in Estonia is based on WAI principles (Web Accessibility Initiative)³⁵, which develops strategies, guidelines, and resources to help make the Web accessible to people with disabilities, and JAWS (Job Access With Speech). The latter converts text and components of the Windows operating system into synthesized speech, thus allowing people with visual impairments to access written information in audio form.

In 2009, ANEC (a European consumer organization) made a '**Statement on Accessibility of Voting**', which called for greater web accessibility regarding electronic voting and online information about elections³⁶.

³⁵ See <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>.

³⁶ <http://www.anec.org>.

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AGE Europe, Alzheimer Europe, the European Citizen Action Service, the European Blind Union.

Inclusion Europe

The European Association of Societies
of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities
and their Families

Inclusion Europe is a non-profit organisation. We campaign for the rights and interests of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Our members are national organisations from 39 countries.

People with intellectual disabilities are citizens of their country. They have an equal right to be included in society, whatever the level of their disability. They want rights, not favours.

People with intellectual disabilities have many gifts and abilities. They also have special needs. They need a choice of services to support their needs.

Inclusion Europe focuses on three main policy areas:

- Human Rights for people with intellectual disabilities
- Inclusion in society
- Non-discrimination

Inclusion Europe co-ordinates activities in many European countries, including projects, conferences, working groups and exchange meetings. It responds to European political proposals and provides information about the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. Inclusion Europe advises the European Commission and members of the European Parliament on disability issues.



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