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Developing a Disability Inclusion Policy

A Strategic Planning and Implementation Guide for Election Management Bodies

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Developing a Disability Inclusion Policy: A Strategic Planning and Implementation Guide for Election Management Bodies

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Developing a Disability Inclusion Policy: A Strategic Planning and Implementation Guide for Election Management Bodies.

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Cover photo: A voter in Ukraine's Kyiv Oblast Council elections in 2020 scans a QR code on a poster in a polling station which then showed the voter COVID-19 safety instructions in Ukrainian sign language.

About IFES

IFES advances democracy for a better future. We collaborate with civil society, public institutions and the private sector to build resilient democracies that deliver for everyone. As a global leader in the promotion and protection of democracy, our technical assistance and applied research develops trusted electoral bodies capable of conducting credible elections; effective and accountable governing institutions; civic and political processes in which all people can safely and equally participate; and innovative ways in which technology and data can positively serve elections and democracy.

IFES views inclusive political participation as a human rights issue and collaborates with election management bodies (EMBs) and other government stakeholders, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) to reduce barriers to political participation for persons with disabilities. One out of every seven people in the world has a disability, yet citizens with disabilities remain under-represented in political and public life. Participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral process provides the basis for mainstreaming their inclusion in all aspects of society by breaking down social stigmas and increasing the accountability of elected representatives. IFES works to strengthen political inclusion by:

- Providing technical assistance to EMBs on how to implement international standards such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- Empowering persons with disabilities and civil society organizations to advocate for equal rights; and
- Assisting citizen-led efforts to define best practices through the development of global tools such as the Equal Access manual[1] and the online resources available at www.ElectionAccess.org.[2]

Since 1987, IFES has worked in more than 145 countries, from developing to mature democracies. IFES is a global, nonpartisan nonprofit organization based in Arlington, Virginia, and registered as a 501(c)(3).

This handbook was developed by IFES' Regional Europe Office (REO) in Prague, Czech Republic, which opened in 2014. Through the USAID-supported "Regional Election Administration and Political Process Strengthening" (REAPPS) program, IFES REO engages stakeholders in Central and Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and the Balkans working on electoral issues. IFES REO supports professional development events featuring experience sharing, innovative approaches, evidence-based solutions, and peer-to-peer learning. Under REAPPS, IFES REO specializes in election administration, inclusion, disinformation, cybersecurity, political finance, and electoral jurisprudence.

[1] Atkinson, V., Azelton, A., & Fogg, K. (2014). Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes. *International Foundation for Electoral Systems.* https://www.ifes.org/publications/equal-access-how-include-persons-disabilities-elections-and-political-processes

[2] See online resources at www.electionaccess.org

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Executive Summary

The world's one billion persons with disabilities face barriers to meaningful participation in political life, including when voting in elections, running for political office, observing elections and serving as election officials. Election management bodies (EMBs) have a duty to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their political rights alongside their peers. Disability inclusion policies can help ensure disability rights are codified across an EMB, thereby enhancing the quality of democracy, yet they are rare. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has developed this guide as a roadmap for EMBs to develop an effective disability inclusion policy and mainstream an inclusive approach throughout the electoral process in partnership with people with disabilities and their organizations.

Overview of the Guidebook

Developing a Disability Inclusion Policy: A Strategic Planning and Implementation Guide for Election Management Bodies provides necessary tools and strategies for EMBs to plan their work on strengthening the participation of persons with disabilities in elections and political processes. EMBs can refer to this guide as they develop and implement a disability inclusion policy. Through the development and implementation of disability inclusion policies, EMBs can meet their obligation to ensure disability-inclusive elections by facilitating the participation of persons with disabilities as voters, observers, candidates, poll workers, and permanent EMB staff. Many steps taken to increase access to the political process for voters with disabilities also benefit other citizens voter education materials that might benefit older voters or step-free entry to polling stations which might benefit voters with a temporary injury or voters with young children.

The guidebook outlines the relevant considerations, strategies, and tools necessary to make political processes more inclusive of persons with disabilities. It is intended for election officials at every level and can also provide insights to other stakeholders, such as OPDs, election observers, ministry officials, political parties, and the private sector. The guidebook takes a step-by-step approach to disability-inclusive policymaking by providing relevant global examples and recommendations.

Guidebook Sections

The guidebook includes several sections. ***Section One: Meaningful Participation*** **introduces the guidebook, provides contextual information on disability rights and inclusive elections and highlights key international and regional legal frameworks.** Utilizing existing legal frameworks and international standards such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) facilitates the process of ensuring political processes throughout the electoral cycle are inclusive. Increased awareness of person-first language and a glossary of election access terminology can be utilized to train EMB and polling station staff. This section also includes example indicators to measure implementation of the United Nations CRPD Article 29, on participation in political and public life, as well as relevant sustainable development goal (SDG) targets and indicators. This section includes a graphic with examples of how EMBs can engage persons with disabilities throughout the electoral cycle.

Section Two: Institutionalizing Disability Inclusion **provides good practice examples for codifying disability inclusion across all functions of an EMB,** such as developing and implementing a disability inclusion policy and mainstreaming disability in other policies and strategic planning. It includes guidance for conducting a disability assessment to determine where gaps may exist in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, for creating an Election Access Working Group and for developing a Memorandum of Understanding between EMBs and OPDs. Throughout the development and implementation of a disability inclusion policy and strategic planning, EMBs should prioritize collaboration with OPDs.

Section Three: Key Topics for Inclusion in a Policy **includes guidance on mainstreaming disability in critical areas of election administration.** It provides recommendations for disability-inclusive policy development and implementation in the following areas:

- Establishing a senior disability rights focal point;
- Creating reasonable accommodations policies;
- Training EMB staff;
- Accessible and inclusive voter education;
- Accessible websites and social media;
- Collecting disaggregated data during voter registration;
- Procurement of assistive devices and accessible election technology;
- Selection of accessible voter registration and candidate nomination locations, polling stations, and counting and results centers;
- Accessible complaints mechanisms; and
- Access to funding for candidates with disabilities.

This section also provides suggestions on how to monitor and evaluate policies to ensure effective implementation.

The guidebook contains four annexes:

- Disability Inclusion Policy and Implementation Checklist;
- Draft Scope of Work for an EMB Election Access Working Group;
- Disability Inclusion Policy Action Plan, Dominican Republic; and
- Voter Registration Supplementary Data Collection Form, Sri Lanka.

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Glossary of Key Terms

Terminology	Definition
Accessible	A site, facility, work environment, service or program that is easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in and/or use safely, independently and with dignity by persons with disabilities
Accessible formats	Print, audio or visual information that is accessible to persons with disabilities
Assistive device	A tool that aids completion of a task or other function that might otherwise be difficult or impossible
Attitudinal barrier	Stereotypes about persons with disabilities or stigma that affect access
Auditory disability	Conditions that affect hearing; a person may be deaf or hard-of-hearing
Barrier	A restriction to the access of any process, building, or materials
Braille	Writing system comprised of raised dots used by people who are blind or have low vision
Communication barrier	Restricted access due to formats or methods of sharing information that are not accessible
Easy-to-read	Text where the content, language, illustrations, and graphic layout are simplified for ease of use by persons with intellectual disabilities, non-native speakers of a language and/or people with low literacy
Environmental barrier	Physical buildings that limit access of persons with disabilities
Institutional barrier	Laws and policies that are not inclusive of persons with disabilities
Intellectual disability	Term used when there are limits to a person's ability to learn at an expected level and function in daily life
Mainstreaming	Process whereby persons with disabilities are integrated as equal participants and leaders in assistance programs and society
Neurodiversity	The idea that humans have a range of neurological experiences. This term has gained popularity among self-advocates groups, particularly regarding autism.
Organization of persons with disabilities	A civil society organization that is run by and for persons with disabilities
Person-first language	Terminology that uses a "person" word before the disability-related word such as "voters with disabilities" or "woman who uses a wheelchair"
Physical disability	Conditions that affect mobility, movement, or the body
Psychosocial disability	Conditions that affect cognition, emotion and behavior
Reasonable accommodation	Provision of materials or environment that allow persons with disabilities to participate and contribute on an equal basis with others
Sign language	A form of communication that uses hand signals
Tactile	Raised symbols that can be used in contexts in which persons are not fluent in braille
Universal design	All buildings, materials and processes are designed to be accessible for both persons with and without disabilities from their inception
Visual disability	Conditions that affect eyesight; persons may be blind or have low vision

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym/Abbreviation	Meaning
CEC	Central Election Commission
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
EMB	Election Management Body
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations

Section One: Meaningful Participation

Introduction

A voter using a wheelchair casts his ballot on Election Day in Georgia in 2012. Source: IFES.

It is estimated that there are one billion persons with auditory, intellectual, physical, psychosocial or visual disabilities globally – around 15 percent of the world's population.[3] Persons with disabilities continue to encounter barriers to full political participation in political life. These barriers can include attitudinal, communication, environmental and institutional barriers. Poll workers might question the right to vote of someone with an intellectual disability, voter education material might not be provided in accessible formats, such as sign language or easy-to-read, polling stations might be held in inaccessible buildings, and laws and policies might discriminate against persons with disabilities serving in political leadership positions. The full participation of all persons with disabilities, including women, young people, Indigenous Peoples, lesbian-gay, bi, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) communities, and ethnic and religious minorities with disabilities, in political and electoral processes as voters, candidates, elected officials and election management body (EMB) staff is critical to ensure inclusive decision-making. Numerous international and regional mechanisms lay the foundation to make this a reality by calling on states to provide equal access to political rights for persons with disabilities.[4]

Mexico[5]

In 2019, the National Election Institute of Mexico (INE) was recognized by the Zero Project for their policy, "Protocol for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities." INE received an Innovative Practice Award for the policy, which includes measures to facilitate access, such as hospital voting and simulations to empower persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities to take part in elections independently and on an equal basis with their peers.

EMBs do not set laws, but they can take proactive steps to ensure inclusive policy development and implementation of laws through regulations, policies, and processes. The degree to which persons with disabilities can participate in elections may therefore be strongly influenced by the policies and programs of an EMB.

As part of their mandate to organize credible and inclusive elections, EMBs are responsible for implementing international instruments to reduce barriers and provide access to political and electoral rights for persons with disabilities. This includes a duty to implement **Article 29 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**, which protects the right of people with disabilities to participate in political and public life on an equal basis as others. To meet these commitments, EMBs must intentionally and proactively take disability into account in the analysis, planning,

[3] World Health Organization & World Bank. (2011). *Summary: World report on disability 2011.* https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/70670

[4] The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a body of independent experts which monitors implementation of the Convention by the States Parties. State reporting deadlines and committee recommendations can be found here: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/CRPDIndex.aspx

[5] Zero Project. (2019). *New guidelines are making Mexican elections accessible.* https://zeroproject.org/view/project/2342e0bd-9817-eb11-a813-000d3ab9b226.

and implementation of all activities, as well as their interactions with other electoral stakeholders. One way in which EMBs can facilitate equal participation in political life is through the development and implementation of disability inclusion policies. Disability inclusion policies can complement efforts to integrate disability rights into an EMB's strategic and operational plans.

What is an EMB Disability Inclusion Policy?

Disability inclusion policies codify an EMB's commitment to disability inclusion throughout the electoral cycle. They can provide guidance on how to operationalize the legal framework and influence the internal management of the EMB as well as the external administration of elections.

In 2021, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), an international nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that all citizens have a voice, gathered information about election administration from EMBs in 13 Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries.[6] This included questions related to the EMB's commitment to ensuring persons with disabilities are integrated into all parts of the electoral process, including whether the EMB has a disability inclusion policy. **Findings revealed that none of the EMBs surveyed had a standalone disability inclusion policy.** A disability inclusion policy helps create a culture of inclusion at an EMB and acknowledges that disability rights are integral to all aspects of an EMB's internal and external operations. The survey showed that few EMBs have hired persons with disabilities to serve as commissioners, senior management or staff and few have designated a disability rights focal point at the EMB. IFES also consulted with OPDs, who noted that whether an EMB focused on disability access and inclusion was often personality-based and inconsistent, and that there was a need for EMBs to codify their commitment via a formal policy – which must also be accompanied by internal political will to ensure effective implementation.

> "Findings revealed that none of the EMBs surveyed had a standalone disability inclusion policy.

This guide provides a roadmap to EMBs to develop and implement a disability inclusion policy. Developing a disability inclusion policy often increases access to the electoral process for people with and without disabilities and it helps EMBs to fulfill commitments to human rights obligations, as detailed below. **Adopting a disability inclusion policy can also help an EMB show that it is serious about enhancing inclusion in the political process and that it is a professional and modern institution seeking the democratic participation of all citizens.**

The Critical Role of Persons with Disabilities in Political Processes

It is critical that persons with disabilities are full and active participants in political and decision-making processes. The equal rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of political, economic and social life and nondiscrimination are fundamental human rights principles. These rights are enshrined in a body of international and regional human rights law stemming from the groundbreaking 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states upfront in Article 1 that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

> "Societies are less likely to fail if they are inclusive."
>
> – Scott Busby, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Affairs, 2018

Persons with disabilities comprise significant populations of every country, and their exclusion undermines the spirit and practice of democracy. In addition to complying with human rights principles, there are also important practical reasons why persons with disabilities must be included in political life. **Developing disability-inclusive measures for elections can help ensure young leaders have access to political life; there are an estimated 180-220 million young persons with disabilities globally.[7] It can also help EMBs meet their commitments to gender equality, as global prevalence of disability is higher for women than men, and women are severely under-represented in decision-making.[8]**

> It can also help EMBs meet their commitments to gender equality, as global prevalence of disability is higher for women than men, and women are severely under-represented in decision-making.

[6] International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (March 5, 2021). *Strengthening Political Participation in Europe through Disability Inclusion Policies.* https://www.ifes.org/news/strengthening-political-participation-europe-through-disability-inclusion-policies

[7] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Youth with Disabilities.* Retrieved December 23, 2021 from https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/youth-with-disabilities.html

[8] UN Women. *Facts and figures: Women and girls with disabilities.* Retrieved December 23, 2021from https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/women-and-girls-with-disabilities/facts-and-figures

> Ensuring that all voters can participate increases trust in the EMB and confidence in the electoral process.

Additionally, the involvement of persons with disabilities in political processes and decision-making is essential to maintaining a representative society. Persons with disabilities often encounter different barriers participating in political and public life than persons without disabilities. Involving persons with disabilities in political processes and decision-making helps ensure a more representative society, one in which the rights of persons with disabilities are upheld in the development of policies and programs. Research shows that societies that are more inclusive of persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities and persons with multiple marginalized social identities, are often less violent and more tolerant. Inclusive political processes have positive impacts on all persons, including persons without disabilities.[9]

In short, the full participation of persons with disabilities in political and electoral processes is not something to which an EMB should aspire just because it is a basic human right; involving persons with disabilities also makes practical sense. The failure to do so misses a major opportunity to deliver credible and inclusive elections, as well as to build a more democratic and representative society. **Ensuring that all voters can participate increases trust in the EMB and confidence in the electoral process.**

International and Regional Foundations for Disability Inclusion Policies

When developing an inclusion policy, EMBs should refer to key international standards and regional agreements, which call on states to recognize barriers and provide access to all people. At the domestic level, the electoral legal framework should give practical effect to these commitments, supporting the right of persons with disabilities to take part in political life.

International Legal Foundations

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) calls for universal and equal participation as the foundation for elected government. The UN CRPD calls on states to proactively ensure the political rights of persons with disabilities and contains the most comprehensive description of these rights in the international public law arena. The treaty's definition of disability includes women, men and non-binary persons who have auditory, intellectual, physical, psychosocial and visual disabilities. It also notes the double marginalization that women with disabilities experience in all aspects of political and public life. At the time of this writing, the treaty has been ratified by 185 UN member states, over 95 percent, which demonstrates broad consensus on the rights outlined in the CRPD.[10]

Article 29 of the CRPD explicitly protects the rights of persons with physical, visual, psychosocial, intellectual, and auditory disabilities to vote, run for office and take part in political life on an equal basis as other citizens. CRPD signatories are obliged to implement the Convention's provisions and report on their progress periodically. EMBs are responsible for providing information to the government body that reports on CRPD indicators. Therefore, it is important for EMBs to be familiar with the CRPD Article 29 indicators related to disability-inclusive elections listed below.[11]

[9] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2019). Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities.* https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/6/414344.pdf

[10] United Nations, supra note 6.

[11] United Nations. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *SDG-CRPD Resource Package.* Retrieved December 23, 2021 from https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/Pages/SDG-CRPD-Resource.aspx

CRPD Article 29 Indicators on Inclusion
Indicator 29.1 - Legislation on political and electoral systems which are inclusive of persons with disabilities and guarantees their right to vote and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels and branches of government on an equal basis with others.
Indicator 29.2 - No provisions in the constitution, legislation or regulations which restrict the rights of persons with disabilities to vote, be elected and hold office and perform all public functions.
Indicator 29.3 - Accessibility standards established and applied to voting procedures, voting environment, facilities and materials and to all public buildings.
Indicator 29.4 - Legal requirement to collect data on the number and proportion of persons with disabilities registered to vote, exercising the right to vote, including on related complaints, and on the number and proportion of persons with disabilities holding office and performing public functions.
Indicator 29.12 - Legal requirement to establish a marker on spending specifically directed to promote and ensure the exercise by persons with disabilities of the right to vote, be elected, hold office and perform public functions, and the right to freedom of association and to participate in public and political life.
Indicator 29.26 - Proportion of received complaints on the right of persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life that have been investigated and adjudicated; proportion of those found in favour of the complainant; and proportion of the latter that have been complied with by the government; each disaggregated by kind of mechanism.
Indicator 29.32 - Proportion of population who believe decision making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group (SDG indicator 16.7.2).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a plan for global development that was agreed upon by UN member states in 2015. SDG signatories are expected to work toward the targets for each goal and report on their progress periodically. In order to measure progress, EMBs need to provide information to the government body that reports on SDG indicators. SDG 16 calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, as well as accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The targets and indicators related to disability-inclusive elections which EMBs need to report on include SDG target 16.7, which measures “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making” and target 16.B, which calls for nondiscriminatory laws and policies to ensure that the rights of all citizens, including citizens with disabilities, are realized.[12] Data collected toward target 16.B is disaggregated by disability, as well as other factors.

Regional Instruments

Several regional instruments support the right of persons with disabilities to participate in the political process on an equal basis with others. These protections range from enforced mechanisms through bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights to declarations that demonstrate acceptance of recognized rights.

[12] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division. *SDG Indicators*. Retrieved December 23, 2021 from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=16&Target=

AFRICA
African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance[13] - encourages states to promote participation of persons with disabilities in development processes and decision-making
African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights[14] - recognizes the right to participate in government and public service
African Union Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want[15] - calls for democratic government institutions that enable all citizens to participate actively
Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[16] - recognizes the human and political rights of persons with disabilities and calls on states to provide reasonable accommodations for ballot secrecy and accessibility. It also supports participation in political and public offices
ASIA-PACIFIC
ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[17] - calls on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states to include persons with disabilities in all policymaking and development initiatives, including for electoral and political processes to be made inclusive of persons with disabilities
Bali Declaration on the Enhancement of the Role and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in the ASEAN Community[18] - encourages ASEAN countries to ratify the CRPD and encourages provision of equal political rights to persons with disabilities
Colombo Resolution of the Sixth Meeting of the Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA)[19] - recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to participate in elections and to building EMB capacity
Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025[20] - calls for rights-based, disability-inclusive development, including access to voice development concerns and serve in leadership roles
Pacific Islands, Australia, and New Zealand Electoral Administrators (PIANZEA) Network Outcome Statement[21] - In 2016, the PIANZEA Network released a statement supporting the rights of persons with disabilities in elections

[13] African Union (Jan. 30, 2007). *African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.* Available at https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-democracy-elections-and-governance

[14] African Union (June 1, 1981). *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*. Available at https://achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/banjul_charter.pdf

[15] Ibid.

[16] African Union (Jan. 29, 2018) *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Available at https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-persons-disabilities-africa

[17] Association of Southeast Asian States (Nov. 15, 2018). *ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights on Persons with Disabilities.* Available at https://aichr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ASEAN-Enabling-Masterplan-2025-Mainstreaming-the-Rights-of-Persons-with-Disabilities.pdf

[18] Association of Southeast Asian States (Aug. 3, 2013). *Bali Declaration on the Enhancement of the Role and Participation of the Persons with Disabilities in ASEAN Community and Mobilisation Framework of the ASEAN Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2011-2020).* Available at https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2013/resources/publication/2013%208.%20aug%20-%20bali%20declaration%20on%20persons%20with%20disabilities.pdf

[19] Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (2015). *Sixth Meeting Resolution ("Colombo Resolution").* Available at http://fembosa.org/files/file/20-fembosa-6th-meeting-resolution/

[20] Pacific Islands Forum (2016). *Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025.* Available at https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PFRPD.pdf

[21] Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators Network. Available at https://www.pianzea.org

EUROPE
European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms[22] - guarantees the right to freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association without discrimination
Kiss vs. Hungary, European Court of Human Rights[23] - persons under guardianship retain the right to vote
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Moscow document - OSCE member states must ensure the equal opportunity of persons with disabilities to participate fully in the life of their society
Revised Interpretative Declaration to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters on the Participation of People with Disabilities in Elections[24] - European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) – removed a clause that restricted the right to vote based on a court decision
Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO) Sarajevo Declaration - states must guarantee full electoral and political rights for persons with disabilities
Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec (2011) 14 of the Committee of Ministers - recommendations for member states to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life
European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights[25] - prohibits discrimination on the ground of disability and recognizes the right of persons with disabilities "to participation in the life of the community"
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBEAN
Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities[26] - mandates that states protect the rights of all persons with disabilities to participate in political activities
American Convention on Human Rights[27] - obliges states to protect human rights without discrimination on social condition
Inter-American Democratic Charter[28] - recognizes elections, secret balloting and universal suffrage as intrinsic to human rights
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
Arab Charter on Human Rights[29] - guarantees the right of all people to participate in political life

[22] European Commission on Human Rights (Sep. 3, 1953). *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms*. Available at https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf

[23] European Court of Human Rights (May 20, 2010). *Alajos Kiss vs. Hungary.* Available at https://www.lawpluralism.unimib.it/en/oggetti/614-alajos-kiss-v-hungary-no-38832-06-e-ct-hr-second-section-20-may-2010

[24] Venice Commission (Dec. 15, 2011). *Revised Interpretative Declaration to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters on the Participation of People with Disabilities in Elections*). Available at https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2011)045-e

[25] European Union (Oct. 26, 2012). *Charter of Fundamental Rights*. Available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?url=CELEX:12012P/TXT

[26] Organization of American States. (June 7, 1999) I*nter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities.* Available at https://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-65.html

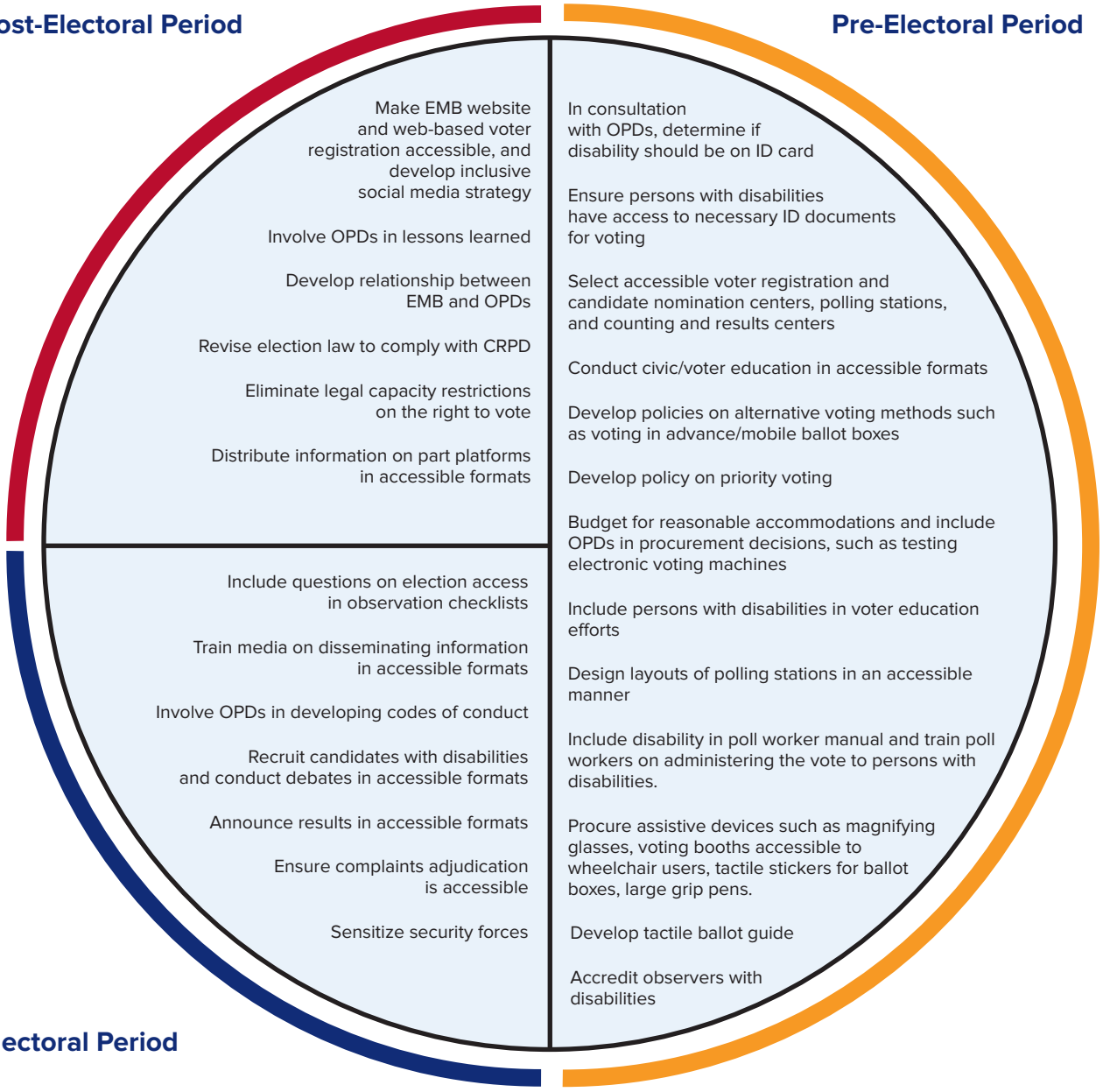
[27] Organization of *American States. (Nov. 22, 1969). American Convention on Human Rights*. Available at http://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_B-32_American_Convention_on_Human_Rights.pdf

[28] Organization of American States. (Sept. 11, 2001). *Inter-American Democratic Charter*. Available at https://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1_en_p4.htm

[29] League of Arab States. (May 22, 2004). *Arab Charter on Human Rights.* Available at https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/551368?ln=en

Inclusion Throughout the Electoral Cycle

Activities that can be conducted to make an election accessible to persons with disabilities are illustrated in the graphic below.[30]



Graphic: Disability Inclusion Activities throughout the Electoral Cycle

[30] Adapted from Atkinson et al., *supra* note 1, p. 37

Section Two: Institutionalizing Disability Inclusion

Three key principles should inform an EMB's approach to institutionalizing disability inclusion:

- **Meaningfully engage persons with disabilities and OPDs** – persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are best placed to identify both barriers and solutions relevant for each country context.
- **Build consensus among EMB staff and commissioners** – Sensitization on international, regional and domestic disability rights standards and knowledge around barriers to political participation can promote viewing accessibility and inclusion as core to the EMB's work. Staff understand that many accessibility features benefit the entire electorate. Communication from senior leadership that disability inclusion is a priority will support change-management.
- **Incorporate accountability mechanisms** – Identified measures should come with associated budgets, timelines, and action plans to ensure meaningful inclusion and avoid a box-ticking exercise. Specifically mention persons with disabilities in strategic and operational plans.

EMBs can most effectively ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout the electoral process through a **twin-track approach**. This means EMBs should both develop a standalone disability inclusion policy as well as mainstream disability into their strategic operational plans. For example, by doing so, EMBs can implement targeted actions to support election access while ensuring progress toward disability inclusion as a cross-cutting goal. Institutionalizing disability inclusion requires both looking at an EMB's **internal policies and procedures,** such as reasonable accommodations for hiring staff with disabilities, as well as reviewing **external communications and approaches**, such as production of voter education in accessible formats.

Actions EMBs can take to Institutionalize Disability-Inclusive Elections
• Mainstream disability rights in the EMB's strategic and operational plans
• Develop a standalone disability inclusion policy
• Create an Election Access Working Group to develop and implement solutions
• Develop inclusive hiring and reasonable accommodations policies
• Sign a Memorandum of Understanding or Cooperation with OPDs

Mainstreaming Disability into Strategic and Operational Plans

Many EMBs write strategic and operational plans to guide their work. Strategic plans focus on policy-setting and are often long-term. Operational plans, sometimes also referred to as action plans, detail how and when policies will be implemented. When EMBs include goals and milestones on disability as part of their strategic and operational planning, this is called mainstreaming. **Mainstreaming** disability is one way to demonstrate progress toward making electoral processes more inclusive. When mainstreaming, a key consideration is to ensure disability inclusion is specifically addressed. A common pitfall is to develop a broad gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) policy is that does not address disability rights specifically or involve meaningful consultation with persons with disabilities.

Benefits of mainstreaming disability into an EMB strategic plan:

- Ensures progress toward disability inclusion as a cross-cutting goal
- Increases visibility of disability rights initiatives with all EMB stakeholders
- Disability seen as integrated alongside other parts of EMB strategy
- Disability inclusion will be integrated into the EMB's operational plan where resources and deadlines are attached to various activities
- Could help support an intersectional approach with gender and youth goals of the EMB

In Georgia, the Central Election Commission (CEC) included steps in its strategic plan toward making elections more accessible and making the CEC more inclusive.[31] The Georgian CEC's strategic plan includes a section dedicated to increasing participation of persons with disabilities. To guide implementation of its strategic plan, the CEC developed an action plan, which includes specific instructions on actions for the CEC to uphold Georgia's 2020 disability law. The action plan includes specific targets and indicators on civic and voter education, as well as internal functioning of the CEC. In addition to integrating accessibility into its strategic plan, the CEC has demonstrated its commitment to disability-inclusive elections by developing clear indicators and targets on disability, as well as by identifying the responsible party for carrying out activities toward fulfilling objectives and a timeline and budget for the completion of each activity. The CEC also shared the draft action plan with members of its working groups on ethnic minorities and people with disabilities to provide input and recommendations before approval.

[31] Election Administration of Georgia. (2019). *Strategic Plan 2020-2030.* Available at https://cesko.ge/res/docs/20200224163205StrategicPlan-Eng.pdf

STRATEGIC PILLAR 4. INCLUSIVE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT

Creating an equally accessible environment for everyone, promoting the involvement of all actors in the electoral process

STRATEGIC GOAL:	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:
4.1. Access of vulnerable groups to electoral processes improved	4.1.1. Promote participation of ethnic minorities in the electoral processes by providing accessible information 4.1.2. Promote participation of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups[4] in the electoral processes
4.2. Equal election environment supported	4.2.1. Implement activities to ensure gender equality 4.2.2. Promote women participation in the electoral processes

4.2	Objective	Promote participation of persons with disabilities and other target groups in the electoral processes											
	Objective Outcome Indicator	Number of mechanisms used for promoting participation of persons with disabilities and other target groups in the electoral processes											
N	Activity	Activity Performance Indicator	Term of Implementation										
			I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
4.1.2.1	Considering fully the needs of persons with disabilities in the process of equipping polling stations	Two copies of Tactile ballot guide is available for blind voter in all polling stations Two magnifying sheets are available for persons with vison impairment in all polling stations Information poster is available in all polling stations Special voting booth is available for wheel-chair users at adapted polling stations												
4.1.2.2	Providing access to CEC information videos for persons with disabilities (including those receiving support)	CEC inforamtion videos are available for persons with disabilities A video clip about the services available for persons with disabilities has been made Number of video ads												

N	Activity	Activity Performance Indicator	Term of Implementation
4.1.2.3	Retrain the election administration staff to support independent participation of voters with disabilities in elections	The training modules for the members of the district and precinct election commissions provide for the promotion of independent participation of persons with disabilities in the elections Trainings for District and Precinct Election Commission Members on Promoting Independent Participation of Voters in Elections are conducted Number of participants in the training	
4.1.2.4	Upgrading the e-learning program for independent particiaption in the elections of persons with disabilities for those interested	The Instruction on promoting independent participation in elections of persons with disabilities is updated Program tests are prepared Number of program users	
4.1.2.5	Organizing online meetings with persons with disabilites regarding election issues	At least one information meeting is held (deaf and hard of hearing, blind, physically handicapped, support recipients) Number of participants	
4.1.2.6	Prepare/initiate legislative proposals on independent participation of wheelchair users in Municipal Elections	Legislative proposal is prepared and submitted to the Parliament	

The disability inclusion section of the Georgian CEC's 2020-2023 strategic plan and 2021 action plan. Source: CEC.

Standalone EMB Disability Inclusion Policies

Standalone EMB disability inclusion policies are separate policy documents that are focused on actions, regulations and procedures to promote inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities and ensure compliance with domestic laws and international treaties. Standalone inclusion policies include goals and milestones on accessibility and inclusion, such as actions to ensure persons with disabilities are included as polling staff or to guarantee voter education materials are accessible. **Many adaptations to make the electoral process accessible to persons with disabilities benefit all people, such as large font voter education materials that might benefit older voters or step-free entry to polling stations which might benefit voters with a temporary injury or voters with young children**. Depending on context, a potential risk of a standalone policy is that disability rights is seen as separate from other considerations, goals and activities of the EMB. This can be mitigated by clearly linking the disability inclusion policy to other EMB policies and procedures, such as the strategic plan and operational plan, and holding a broadly consultative internal process to help ensure that all staff at the EMB take ownership of the policy and view disability inclusion as part of their role and responsibility. Training on disability rights, in partnership with OPDs, can also help mitigate this concern.

There are many ways in which EMBs can work with OPDs throughout the development and implementation of the disability inclusion policy. For example, EMBs and OPDs can jointly develop and review new electoral laws and policies and discuss how proposed reforms might impact persons with disabilities. Disability inclusion policies might also include actions related to civic and voter education. OPDs can provide support to distribute accessible voter education messages to persons with disabilities that might not be reached by traditional EMB outreach methods. Hiring persons with disabilities as EMB officials or consultants and meaningfully engaging with OPDs can help to ensure a disability perspective is included across the electoral cycle.

Benefits of standalone disability inclusion policies:

- Could have greater impact on disability inclusion than a mainstream policy
- Includes targeted actions to increase participation of persons with disabilities and gives greater visibility both internally and externally to disability inclusion
- Disability can sometimes be unintentionally left out of broader Social Inclusion policies. Disability inclusion policies and specific references to persons with disabilities in strategic plan and operational plans can fill this gap.
- Opportunity for the EMB to work closely and build relationships with OPDs
- The disability inclusion policy action plan can be integrated into the EMB's operational plan, thereby securing funding and resources

In 2021, the Dominican Republic EMB developed a Disability Inclusion Policy to better codify their commitment to disability rights. The EMB consulted with OPDs to develop a policy, integrated the Action Plan (Annex C) for the policy into the EMB's Strategic Plan and then formally adopted a resolution on disability inclusion. The EMB has formed a working group comprised of EMB officials and OPD members, which will oversee implementation of the policy and Action Plan.

Disability Inclusion Assessments

To better understand the electoral process through the lens of disability inclusion and to appropriate solutions to address barriers, EMBs can conduct disability inclusion assessments. Disability inclusion assessments can help identify unique barriers for people with different types of disabilities as well as for people with intersectional identities, such as women with disabilities and young people with disabilities. The methodology can include a desk review of relevant legislation, existing policies and past and current disability-related activities. Focus group discussions with persons with disabilities and surveys can also help to determine political access gaps and what's currently working well. Sample questions that can be examined as part of an assessment include:

- Are there constitutional provisions enumerating the political rights of persons with disabilities?
- Has the country ratified the CRPD?
- Are there social or cultural barriers that restrict the political participation of persons with disabilities?
- What percentage of EMB staff have a disability?
- What percentage of poll workers have a disability?
- Does the proportion of persons with disabilities on the voter's list appear to reflect the estimated population in the country?
- How do persons with disabilities receive voter education information?
- Is voter turn-out information disaggregated by disability?

IFES conducted a disability inclusion assessment of the EMB in Kenya in 2021. The audit found that OPDs were not consulted about electoral access. To increase collaboration among the EMB and OPDs, IFES supported the Kenyan EMB to create the Disability Inclusion Coordinating Committee, a working group with a multi-year mandate. The group is creating a plan to ensure that disability rights is not just a priority at the national level; officials at field offices are also engaging with grassroots OPDs.

How to Ensure Meaningful Engagement of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

International Disability Alliance and Disabled People's International are two international umbrella organizations for OPDs and can serve as good resources to EMBs to locate national OPDs in their country. Learn more about the International Disability Alliance.[32] Learn about Disabled People's International.[33]

> "Only policies and programs that are developed and validated with people with different types of disabilities will have the authority and legitimacy to be effective.

EMBs should engage with OPDs throughout the development and implementation of a disability inclusion policy. This helps to ensure that there is buy-in on the policy from both the EMB and OPDs and guarantees that actions included in the policy are aligned with the disability community's priorities. **Only policies and programs that are developed and validated with persons with different types of disabilities will have the authority and legitimacy to be effective.** Collaborating with OPDs on policies also demonstrates to the public and other government agencies that persons with disabilities are equal citizens who should be consulted on all matters of public policy.

[32] https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/

[33] http://www.dpi.org/index.html

Memorandum of Understanding

A letter or **memorandum of understanding (MOU) or cooperation (MOC)** between the EMB and OPDs can provide the foundation for the groups to work together on ensuring access to and inclusion of people with disabilities throughout the electoral cycle. As such, disability inclusion policies can encourage EMBs and OPDs to sign a memorandum of understanding to build their relationship with one another and signal their commitment to implementing the disability inclusion policy.

In 2018, the State Election Commission (SEC) of North Macedonia signed a MOC with the OPD, Inkluziva. The MOC outlined terms and conditions for cooperation in the area of disability-inclusive electoral reform and election administration. After the MOC was signed, Inkluziva provided capacity development for SEC on inclusion of persons with disabilities at all stages of the electoral cycle, and the SEC consulted Inkluziva to enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of policies, procedures and materials at the SEC. Collaboration via the MOC has led to adopting a tactile ballot guide as obligatory election material; voter education and political campaign materials are now developed in accessible formats; Inkluziva and other OPDs are accredited to observe elections; adaptations have been made to nearly 140 polling stations to enhance their accessibility, and the SEC-certified pool of trainers now includes persons with disabilities. The MOC facilitated these advancements because it clearly and publicly expressed the commitment to create an enabling environment for persons with disabilities to exercise their right to vote and to be elected. The MOC also provides a platform for Inkluziva and other OPDs to advocate for further election access measures.

Creating an Election Access Working Group

Bringing[34] together government ministries, OPDs, civil society, and other stakeholders through an **Election Access Working Group** is another good way for EMBs to build relationships with the disability rights community. Connecting with persons with disabilities and their organizations is an important first step to creating a disability inclusion policy that is relevant and meaningful to persons with disabilities. Institutionalizing those connections through an election access working group is one method for ensuring that a drafted policy is responsive. Election Access Working Groups can ensure that the design, drafting, and evaluation of a disability inclusion policy are aligned to priorities of persons with disabilities. Ideally, there is a senior EMB official assigned to the group, such as a Director or Commissioner. The Ukraine and Kosovo case studies below provide good practices for establishing a collaborative working group between an EMB and OPDs.

Ukraine

With IFES support, Ukraine's Central Election Commission (CEC) established a working group in 2019 as a consultative forum for the CEC, civil society, OPDs and relevant ministries to support inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral process. The working group mainstreamed disability into the CEC's draft strategic plan, analyzed the accessibility requirements in the election code, and provided guidance to the CEC on accessibility of polling stations and voter education materials. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the working group continued meeting via Zoom. Following the working group's recommendation, the CEC included QR codes on posters which linked to audio and sign language information on COVID-19 safety measures at each polling station in the 2020 local elections.

Kosovo

In Kosovo, the CEC, other government ministries, and OPDs representing persons with different types of disabilities established an EAWG with IFES' support to consider how inclusive the electoral process was of persons with disabilities. In 2015, IFES and HandiKOS, a local OPD, conducted a long-term election access observation. The report issued from the observation recommended that the CEC map where voters with disabilities live in order to provide better access. The working group created a database that collects information about disability access at the national, municipal, and local levels. The website contains information on access to MECs, polling centers, party offices, and campaign venues. This information has been used to guide election officials in making updates to existing polling locations, as well as to provide voters with useful information.

[34] For more information, please see IFES' Election Access Observation Toolkit.

Sample Disability Inclusion Policy Outline

If an EMB plans to mainstream inclusion into the strategic plan, the EMB should use the same format as the rest of the strategic plan for a disability inclusion section (or pillar). The mainstreamed disability inclusion section can include many of the same elements outlined below for a standalone disability inclusion policy. More details on specific areas that can be included in a policy and implementation ideas can be found in Annex A.

I. Introduction and EMB Commitment

This section contains a general description of the initiative. It may also contain the approximate number of persons with disabilities in the country and describe how disability inclusion is relevant to the EMB's mandate and vision. Having a message from the Chairman of the EMB at the beginning of the policy can be an impactful way to demonstrate commitment to disability inclusion.

II. Context

This section describes the legal framework that guides electoral access. It should mention the CRPD, as well as any applicable regional and national legal frameworks. This section can also reference any commitments related to gender, age or any other marginalized group that might also apply to intersectional groups such as women with disabilities, young people with disabilities, Indigenous people with disabilities or ethnic or religious minorities with disabilities.

III. Rationale and Guiding Principles

This section includes the mission statement with the reason the framework is being created. It could include data from surveys of voters with disabilities, analysis from any assessments on disability inclusion and/or quotes from voters, poll workers, observers and/or EMB staff with disabilities. This section should outline the barriers the policy seeks to remove as well as any opportunities that the policy seeks to leverage. This section can also include a set of principles that lead to more inclusive elections, such as accessibility, inclusiveness, diversity, anti-discrimination and engagement of stakeholders.

V. Objectives and Activities

The objectives, or milestones, are steps that will lead to the realization of the guiding principles. Activities and step-by-step guidance for fulfilling the objectives, should be included under each objective.

VI. Expected Outcomes

This section describes the desired result of the policy. It can include concrete items such as development of a new system to collect disability disaggregated data or an increase in percentage of persons with disabilities who vote.

VII. Implementation Plan

Implementation plans identify the responsible party for carrying out activities, as well as a timeline and budget for the completion of each activity. Plans include key results and targets, identify resources needed, and a method to monitor and evaluate progress. One aspect of the implementation plan could be to form an Election Access Working Group and/or to establish a Memorandum of Understanding with an OPD. Depending on the context, the implementation plan could be included as part of an EMB's operational plan instead of as part of a standalone policy or strategic plan.

Section Three: Key Topics for Inclusion in a Policy

OPDs should be meaningfully involved in the development and implementation of all aspects of a disability inclusion policy. Key topics that an EMB should consider including in a disability inclusion policy are:

- Appointing a senior disability rights focal point at the EMB
- Creating reasonable accommodations policies for hiring of permanent and temporary staff
- Training EMB staff and poll workers on the disability inclusion policy
- Accessible and inclusive voter education
- Accessible websites and social media
- Collecting disaggregated data during voter registration
- Advisory role of OPDs in procurement of assistive devices and accessible election technology
- Selection of accessible voter registration and candidate nomination locations, polling stations, and counting and results centers
- Creation of access funds for candidates with disabilities
- Involving OPDs in lessons learned processes and strategic planning processes
- Accessible complaints process

Establishing a Senior Disability Rights Focal Point

Having a senior permanent staff member or team at the EMB dedicated to integrating disability can help to ensure that targets included in the strategic plan are met and that the EMB's activities are inclusive of persons with all types of disabilities. **A disability rights focal point or disability inclusion team** can also coordinate with EMB gender focal points to ensure the unique concerns of women with disabilities are taken into account, provide support to sensitization trainings, work with OPDs, and run programs that target voters, observers, and candidates with disabilities.

A disability rights focal point can support the disability inclusion policy by monitoring, reviewing and reporting on its implementation. The disability rights focal point can also collaborate with focal points on gender and other minority group rights to ensure inclusion throughout the EMB's policies and programs. Disability inclusion policies can also support EMBs to proactively recruit persons with disabilities to work as interns, consultants and advisors. This approach helps young people with disabilities to learn how to engage with government while building skills of EMB staff to work with persons with disabilities as team members and future staff.

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- Responsibilities and scope of work for the senior disability rights focal point
- Qualifications of the focal point

Creating Reasonable Accommodations Policies

Reasonable accommodation means "necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms."[35] In an EMB, reasonable accommodations ensure that persons with all types of disabilities have equal access to the interview process and to fulfill the duties of their jobs, when hired. Creating a reasonable accommodations policy helps EMBs ensure they do not lose out on the talents and skills of persons with disabilities and, depending on country context, helps EMBs meet government mandated quotas for hiring of persons with disabilities.

[35] United Nations. (Dec. 13, 2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, art. 2.* Available at https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CTC/Ch_IV_15.pdf

It should be noted that not all persons with disabilities will want or need reasonable accommodations; indeed, persons with the same type of disability may require quite different accommodations from each other. Many reasonable accommodations also enable broader access for older people, persons with young children, and others. The table below provides examples of different types of accommodations that people with disabilities might request. It is not a comprehensive list.

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- Right to reasonable accommodations for all permanent and temporary staff
- How to request a reasonable accommodation
- Reasonable accommodations throughout the electoral process, such as candidate nomination, voter registration, poll worker training, and counting and results

Type of Disability	Possible Reasonable Accommodations
Auditory	• Quiet office space • Good lighting • Sign language interpretation for in-person and virtual meetings • Desk that faces the door • Fire alarm with flashing lights
Intellectual	• Documents in a simple format (plain text, easy-to-read, wordless) • Opportunities to work with a partner • Repeat directions • Directions and materials provided in advance
Physical	• Accessible transportation • Office and restrooms on ground floor (no stairs) or in buildings with elevators • Enough room to maneuver a wheelchair or other assistive device • Meetings in accessible spaces • Reserved parking near the entrance • Budget for assistants
Psychosocial[36]	• Quiet office space • Low lighting • Flexible schedule • Opportunities to work remotely
Visual	• Screen reading software (text-to-speech) • Soft copies of printed documents before meetings • Braille and large print materials • Accessible PDFs • Budget for assistants

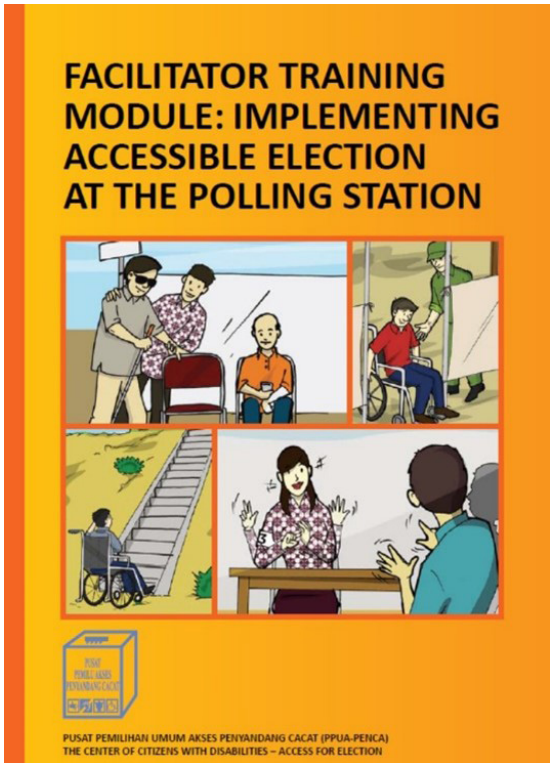
[36] Psychosocial disabilities are conditions that affect cognition, emotion and behavior. These disabilities may not be visible to others. Depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are all examples of psychosocial disabilities.

Training EMB Staff

Ensuring that the EMB is inclusive of all citizens, including persons with disabilities, is only possible if staff treat persons with disabilities with dignity and respect. In order to build the skills of EMB staff to create an inclusive workplace, the disability inclusion policy should include a plan for both short-term workers, such as poll workers, and long-term staff to take part in trainings on disability inclusion.

Poll workers are often not trained to provide assistance appropriately to voters with disabilities. Training programs should emphasize that persons with all types of disabilities have the same rights as every other voter. For example, it is the poll worker's job to provide support to any voter who is registered in that polling station, regardless of their disability. If poll workers are not appropriately trained, the secrecy of the vote could be compromised, for example, if a poll worker who marks a ballot for a person with a visual disability tells others how that person voted. Negative experiences while at the polls, such as long lines and disrespectful treatment, could affect future participation of voters with disabilities. All EMB officials should receive training on international standards, such as those included in the CRPD, and training on how to include persons with disabilities in the electoral process.

Training programs stipulated in a policy should also emphasize the proper etiquette for poll workers to use when supporting voters with disabilities. Polling station leadership such as presiding officers should remind poll workers routinely while executing election day procedures of reasonable accommodations to be provided, such as prioritizing voters with disabilities in queues. Additionally, the training should include any relevant information about collecting disaggregated voter data and other preparations done by the EMB in advance of election day.



Cover of Indonesian poll worker training manual on how to ensure voting is accessible to people with disabilities, developed in 2014.

It is also important to remember that some voters may have hidden, or invisible, disabilities. Hidden disabilities are not apparent to other people, but persons with hidden disabilities such as learning or psychosocial disabilities may need or want access to accommodations. The table below includes some examples of how poll workers can support persons with different types of disabilities. Training is critical to ensure EMB staff are prepared to engage with all voters. Therefore, it is important for EMBs to include targets and indicators on internal training of EMB staff within their disability inclusion policy.

How Poll Workers Can Support Voters with Disabilities

Disability Type	DO	DO NOT
All	• Reassure voters with disabilities that their right to vote will be respected • Talk directly to the voter • Offer your assistance • Prioritize persons with visible disabilities in the queue, as well as persons whose disabilities are not visible but request assistance	• Ignore someone who appears to be struggling • Assist a voter without asking if they would like your help • Talk to the voter's assistant about the voter • Ask about the person's disability
Auditory	• Look directly into the person's face when speaking • Speak slowly and clearly • Use a different word if the voter does not understand • Write or draw instructions • Find an interpreter if they are available • If you need to get the voter's attention, gently wave or tap them on the shoulder	• Speak with a very loud voice • Repeat the same word if the voter does not understand • Shout to get their attention
Intellectual	• Look directly at them and speak clearly • Use simple and clear phrases • Write or draw instructions if needed • Respect them as you would any other voter	• Direct questions to their assistant • Assume they do not understand you
Physical	• Sit down next to the person so that you are speaking at eye-level • Offer a chair for individuals with assistive devices	• Lean on or touch the wheelchair or other assistive device without permission • Push their wheelchair to move them without permission
Psychosocial	• Be patient • Repeat instructions, if needed • Respect their personal space • If possible, minimize noise by offering a quiet space to wait and vote	• Crowd the voter • Ask a lot of questions or demand a lot of information
Visual	• Introduce yourself when they enter the room • If you need to get their attention, say hello and gently tap them on the shoulder • Offer to guide the voter and put your arm out if they want assistance	• Guide the voter without permission • Mark the voter's ballot without their explicit request for assistance

***** Remember, some disabilities are not visible to others. Poll workers should be ready to provide support to any persons with disabilities, even if the disability is not apparent. Nonapparent disabilities are sometimes also called invisible or hidden disabilities.***

Georgia

In Georgia, IFES developed a training module and guidebook for poll workers, entitled "Manual on Supporting Voters with Disabilities in Georgian Elections", that was adopted by the CEC Training Centre. The module and guidebook include good practices for supporting voters with disabilities, such as those included in the table above. The training also included interactive lessons, such as practice describing how to use a tactile ballot guide to a person who is blind and offering assistance to persons with disabilities as they enter the polling station. Ahead of elections in 2020, the CEC Training Center developed a remote course for CEC staff which included guidance on communicating with voters with disabilities and how to support voters with disabilities to exercise their right to vote independently and in secret.

Cover of the "Manual on Supporting Voters with Disabilities in Georgian Elections", which was integrated into poll worker trainings in 2016.

Poll workers also need to be trained about any assistive devices that will be available on election day, and presiding officers should confirm receipt of assistive devices among other polling materials before the polls open. Tactile ballot guides, for example, help persons with visual disabilities vote independently and in secret.[37] Some polling stations also offer magnifying glasses and large grip pens.[38] Poll workers should be instructed to offer any assistive devices available to all voters, not only voters with apparent disabilities. Their training should also provide them the skills to describe how to use the assistive devices. If the legal framework supports poll workers assisting voters to mark and cast a ballot, trainings should emphasize that such assistance must support the voter's choice. For example, the poll worker can ask the voter which of the following options they would like to select and then read out loud all of the options for one race or ballot measure. The voter may ask for the options for that race or ballot measure to be read out loud again before moving to the next selection.

Permanent EMB staff can also play an important role in promoting disability-inclusive electoral processes. A disability inclusion policy can include mandates for new staff to attend sensitization trainings, for example. Disability rights focal points may also benefit from additional professional development to ensure alignment with evolving international standards.

[37] When developing a tactile ballot guide, consult with persons with visual disabilities and their organizations to determine whether, for example, braille or only tactile features should be included on the guide.

[38] Examples of different types of assistive devices from around the world are available on ElectionAccess.org.

Liberia

In 2017, IFES and the Liberian National Elections Commission (NEC) Gender Section conducted a disability rights sensitization training for permanent staff. The training prepared staff to implement a draft disability inclusion policy. The training included activities on the legal framework that supports the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in elections as well as brainstorming methods for including Liberians with disabilities in voter registration, voter education and polling.

Participants from the National Elections Commission in a disability inclusion sensitization training in Monrovia, Liberia, in February 2017.

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- Requirement for permanent and temporary staff to be trained on disability inclusion
- Topics to be covered in disability inclusion trainings
- Any assistive devices that should be available to voters in the polling station
- Code of conduct of poll workers

Accessible and Inclusive Voter Education

EMBs provide voters with information about the entire electoral process, including how to register to vote, where polling stations are located and how to vote. Voter education initiatives should strive to reach all citizens and provide an opportunity for EMBs to further support disability rights. International instruments, including Article 29 of the CRPD, mandate that EMBs provide voter education materials in accessible formats. Disability inclusion policies and strategic planning can help EMBs to fulfil this commitment by supporting the development of voter education materials that are inclusive of and accessible to all voters.

There are several ways EMBs can develop disability-inclusive voter education plans. EMBs can include images of voters with disabilities alongside their peers. The process of **mainstreaming** persons with

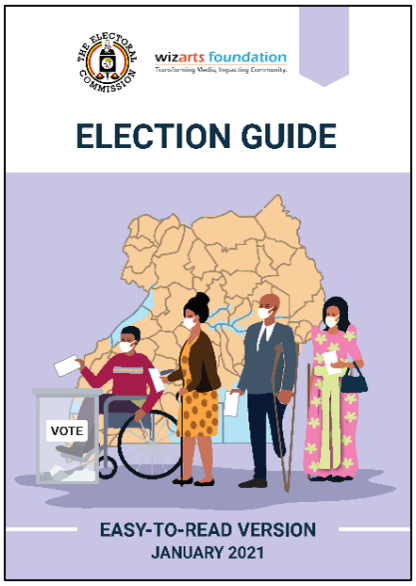
Persons with disabilities are mainstreamed in this 2020 voter education video from Ukraine.

A 2020 voter education poster with information on rights of voters with disabilities in Jamaica.

disabilities demonstrates to the public that voters with disabilities have the same rights as other citizens. Including an actor or picture of a person with a disability in a video or poster does not have any cost implications but can help to break down the stigma that restricts inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral process.

Voter education campaigns are also critical for providing **targeted** messages to persons with disabilities. For example, as part of their disability inclusion policy, EMBs should ensure voters with disabilities are informed about the accommodations and assistive technology that are available on Election Day. Other examples of targeted voter education for persons with disabilities include messages on which polling stations are accessible, the right to choose an assistant to support with voting, queue jumping policies, availability of assistive devices and how to use them and information on quotas for candidates with disabilities.

EMBs should take into account both the content and dissemination method of voter education. Voter education dissemination plans should be based on analysis of persons with disabilities' use of traditional and new media. Messages are **accessible** when they are distributed in formats such as sign language, Braille or easy-to-read. Easy-to-read materials include simple text and photos and support outreach to people with intellectual disabilities and people with low literacy. The chart below provides good practices for making voter education accessible to all.



An easy-to-read election guide developed by Wizarts Foundation in Uganda in 2021.

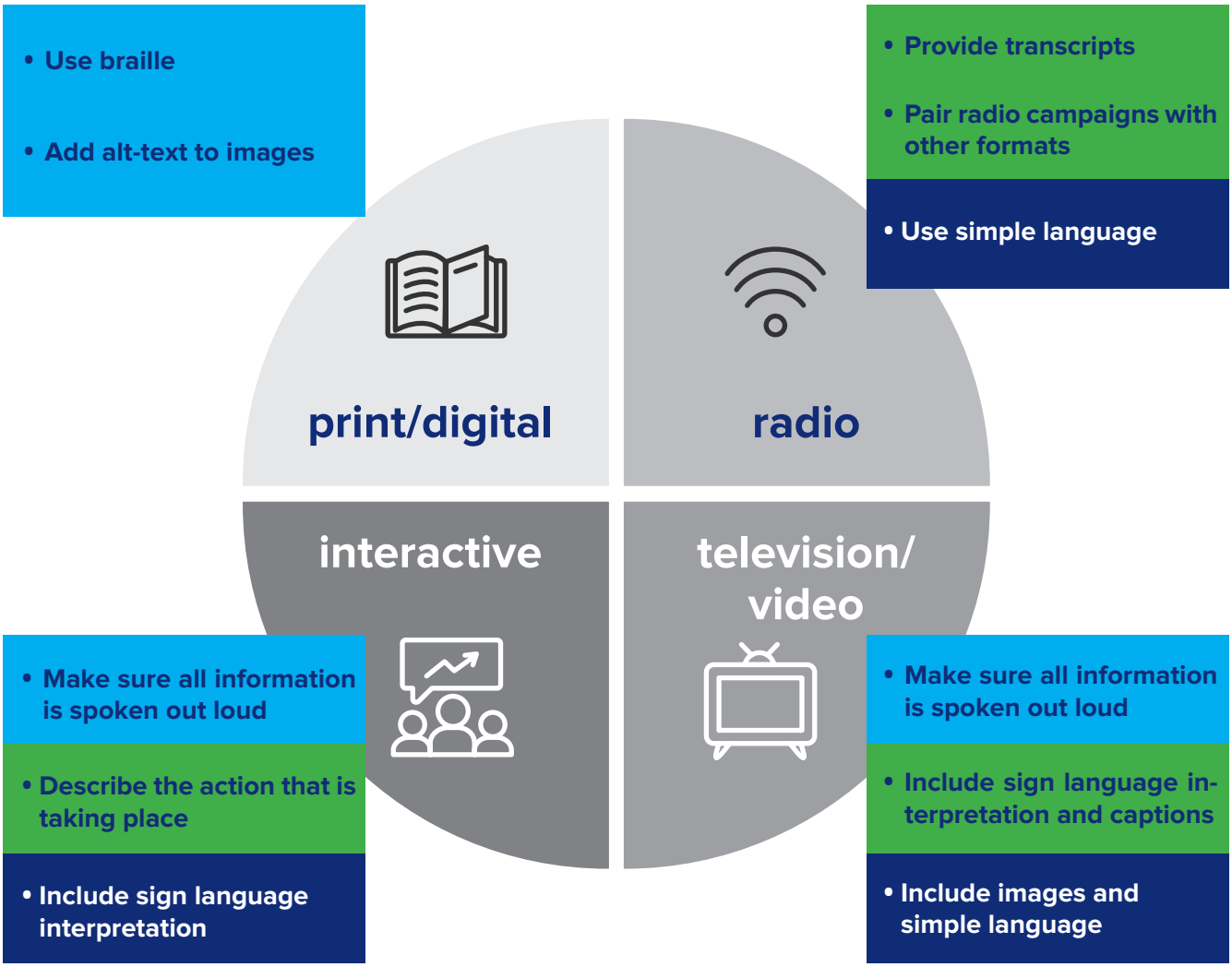
Examples of voter education materials can be found on www.ElectionAccess.org.[39]

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- Accessible formats for voter education, such as sign language, Braille or easy-to-read
- Mainstreaming persons with disabilities in general voter education materials
- Ensuring an intersectional approach to voter education, so that persons with disabilities who identify with another marginalized group, such as women with disabilities or persons with disabilities who are part of an ethnic minority group, are included in voter education images
- Develop voter education targeted to pepole with disabilities, with information such as which accommodations are available on Election Day, which polling stations are accessible, the right to choose an assistant to help with voting, queue jumping policies and information on quotas for candidates with disabilities

[39] International Foundation for Electoral Systems. *Voter Education. Election* Access. Available at http://www.electionaccess.org/en/resources/voter-education/voter-education/

HOW TO MAKE CONTENT ACCESSIBLE TO PERSONS WHO ARE BLIND, DEAF, OR HAVE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES



How to make voter education activities accessible to persons with different types of disabilities.

Source: IFES.

Accessible Websites and Social Media

Official EMB websites are often the first place that many election stakeholders visit if they are looking for information about an upcoming election. An EMB website can include information about voter registration, recruit and provide training materials for poll workers, provide details on how to register as an election candidate, announce any new developments around an election and include additional information targeted to voters with disabilities. When incorporating disability inclusion into strategic planning, policy development and implementation, EMBs should recognize the role that websites and social media play in their communication strategies and identify good practices that they will implement to ensure all voters have access to the same information.

Because a website is one of the main sources of election information for many voters, candidates and media groups, it is especially important that any features or content provided on the website are both inclusive and accessible. **Creating accessible websites aligns EMBs with international standards, such as the CRPD, and helps EMBs to implement their mandate more effectively by strengthening their outreach to voters.** Examples of inclusive web content include a voter education video that shows a young person with an intellectual disability voting or a press release that includes a quote from an OPD. Examples of accessible features include text-to-speech, subtitles or captions on videos, and ensuring that the backend of a website's code is set up to be accessible to screen readers, devices that are often used by persons who are blind or have low vision. The inclusion policy could include a provision stipulating that OPDs – including persons who use screen readers – be involved in testing of EMB websites for accessibility.

Armenia

The Armenian EMB's (CEC) website is a good example of an inclusive and accessible EMB website.[40] In 2020, OPDs provided recommendations to the CEC on how to make their website accessible to people with different types of disabilities. The CEC implemented these changes and posted the results of an audit of Armenia's 2,000 polling stations to the site so that voters can see how accessible their polling site is ahead of the next elections.

The homepage of Armenia's Central Election Commission.[40]

Social media is a good way for EMB representatives to have a two-way conversation with the public, particularly if EMBs are trying to engage underrepresented groups that might have a more active presence on social media, such as young people with disabilities. Social media allows EMBs to respond instantaneously to any concerns or questions among the public. Examples of popular social media websites that EMBs have successfully used in the past include Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. For example, the EMB in Sri Lanka used social media as part of a campaign to encourage candidates to use rights-based language and avoid ableist speech about persons with psychosocial disabilities.[41]

[40] Central Election Commission, Republic of Armenia. Territorial Election Commissions. [Screenshot]. Retrieved from https://www.elections.am/TEC

[41] International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (Nov. 13, 2020) *Strengthening Access to Voting Rights for Sri Lankans with Psychosocial Disabilities.* https://www.ifes.org/news/strengthening-access-voting-rights-sri-lankans-psychosocial-disabilities

There are several ways for EMBs to ensure messages on social media are accessible for all, such as adding alt text (or brief descriptions of an image's content) to all images, including transcripts or captions for any videos and keeping the content simple. These guidelines, which should be included as part of a disability inclusion policy, can also be applied to creating accessible websites. For more information, visit www.ElectionAccess.org,[42] a clearinghouse run by IFES for information on inclusive elections, which includes a page with a list of accessibility features that could be adapted for an EMB's website.

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- Standard use of alt-text for all social media posts and captions/transcripts for videos
- Ensure that the website's code is set up in a way that it can be read by a screen reader
- Involve OPDs in beta testing processes for the website development and updates to ensure accessibility

Collecting Disaggregated Data during Voter Registration

The voter registration process provides a critical opportunity for EMBs to collect information about where voters with disabilities live, how many there are in different parts of the country and which accommodations they might need to participate on an equal basis with others. In Sri Lanka in 2019, IFES, the EMB and OPDs from the Election Access Working Group developed a supplementary data collection form on accessibility requirements for voters to complete during voter registration. The information collected on this form helped the EMB to know what kinds of accommodations to make available to voters during the elections. This type of detailed information also allows EMBs to tailor accessibility solutions at individual polling stations, providing a higher level of accessibility and potential cost-savings.

Using the Washington Group Questions

Inclusion policies can stipulate the use of inclusive tools for collecting voter data. In many countries, stigma prevents persons with disabilities from identifying as having a disability. The Washington Group questions are a set of diagnostic queries that count persons with disabilities based on functioning, rather than self-identification. Because the Washington Group questions rely on responses to questions such as, "Do you have difficulty seeing, even if you wear glasses?" they capture parts of the population that may benefit from reasonable accommodations but do not necessarily identify as having a disability, such as older people. The information collected by the Washington Group questions can also be useful to EMBs in determining where resources might be allocated on initiatives such as voter education. For example, if there are more people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing living in one community, voter educators who are deaf or hard-of-hearing could be deployed there. Learn more about the Washington Group questions here.[43]

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- How data on voters with disabilities will be collected, stored and used
- Guidelines for collecting data to inform accommodations for voting, such as use of the Washington Group Questions

[42] International Foundation for Electoral Systems. *Accessibility*. Election Access. http://www.electionaccess.org/en/help/accessibility/

[43] https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss/

Procurement of Assistive Devices and Accessible Election Technology

EMBs' inclusion policies should outline the assistive devices and accessible election technology, such as electronic voting machines, available to voters to facilitate the voting process. **Well-designed assistive devices ensure that persons with disabilities and others who may encounter barriers to voting unaided, such as persons with low literacy or older voters, can vote independently and in secret**. However, it should be noted that not every person with a disability will want or need an assistive device to vote independently.

Two Armenian men with visual disabilities test tactile ballot guides for use in the June 2021 elections. Source: IFES.

Assistive devices are most useful to voters when they are placed on the check-in table or within the voting booth. While EMBs provide voter education that informs citizens about the assistive devices available to them, it is important that both poll workers and voters know that these instruments are available for use and how to use them. Examples of common assistive devices include a magnifying glass or sheet, tactile ballot guide, pencil grip or large grip pen.

OPDs should be part of any advisory board the EMB's procurement unit might have formed and should be involved in designing and testing assistive devices, like tactile ballot guides, ahead of elections. For example, if an EMB's disability inclusion policy outlines a plan to pilot a new assistive device for voting of persons with visual disabilities, EMB staff should reach out directly to an organization that works with people who are blind or have low vision to test out the device. In 2021, Armenia's EMB worked with OPDs to test tactile ballot guides and make recommendations on improvements to ensure ease of use by people with visual disabilities ahead of the June 2021 elections. The EMB and OPD already had an established relationship, so the OPDs could easily reach out to their members to facilitate testing of the tactile ballot guides.

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- OPDs serve on advisory board for EMB procurement unit
- Design and testing of assistive devices and election technologies by persons with disabilities
- Use of alternative technologies for accessibility, such as voting by phone
- Which assistive devices will be made available for polling
- Placement of assistive devices in the voting booth or at the check-in table

Selection of Accessible Voter Registration and Candidate Nomination Locations, Polling Stations, and Counting and Results Centers

In addition to the architecture of the building itself, how the polling booths, registration table, and other elements of the polling place are set up within the building impact the accessibility of the voting process. A disability inclusion policy can provide guidance on how to set up accessible election locations, such as ensuring that the door to the voter registration building is kept open so all voters can enter, keeping the ballot box on the floor so it can be reached by for voters of short stature and wheelchair-users, leaving enough space between tables, voting booths, and elsewhere. **An output of a disability inclusion policy could be to produce a checklist on polling station accessibility and train poll workers on how to set up an accessible polling place.**

In 2017, the EMB in North Macedonia established a multi-stakeholder working group of government and civil society stakeholders, with the support of IFES, to conduct the first nationwide polling station accessibility audit. The working group, which used a modified version of IFES' Polling Station Accessibility Checklist, assessed the accessibility of 2,733 polling stations out of a total of 3,480. Data on polling station accessibility from the audit was made available online through an application developed by IFES, enabling voters with disabilities in North Macedonia to check their name on the voters' list as well as the accessibility of their assigned polling station. The audit findings were published in a report along with policy recommendations for government and civil society stakeholders to improve access to the electoral process for persons with disabilities.

A woman measures a ramp to a polling station during an accessibility audit in North Macedonia in 2017. Source: IFES

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- Requirements for accessible polling stations
- How to request polling station re-assignment if the assigned polling station is not accessible

Accessible Complaints Process

During the elections, persons with disabilities may want to submit a complaint about the electoral process. Complaints may be made by persons with disabilities about the accessibility of the process or about any other aspects of the electoral process, such as the registration of political parties or candidates, voter list, campaign violations or polling and counting irregularities. A clear and transparent right of redress for election complaints and disputes is one of seven international standards that address individuals' rights under the election complaint process. This right is particularly important for persons with disabilities often left out of the complaints process.[44] Ensuring that the complaints mechanism is accessible to all persons ensures that people with disabilities can submit complaints on an equal basis as others or be provided equal rights when acting as a respondent or as a witness. Therefore, when developing a disability inclusion policy, EMBs should outline activities, including sensitization training to EMB staff, arbiters, judicial staff or election judges, to ensure complaints processes are accessible. The table below provides additional guidance for EMBs on possible accommodations to ensure complaint mechanisms are accessible to all voters.

[44] Vickery, C. (Ed.). (2011). Guidelines for Understanding, Adjudicating, and Resolving Disputes in Elections (GUARDE). *International Foundation for Electoral Systems.* https://electionjudgments.org/ en/entity/fl9n7xs35tc?page=2

Ensuring Accessible Compliant Mechanisms	
Action	**Possible accommodation**
Information on how to file a complaint	Option to have complaint information/requirements available in multiple, accessible formats (e.g. procedure on accessible website, video on how to file for voter education).
	Examples of access issues on which to base complaints
Filling out an online form	Text-to-speech or other accessible services embedded on the webpage
	Option to lodge a complaint via a phone app
	Option to call
	Simple language
Filling out a hard copy form	Accessible location
	Option to meet in person
	Option for the form to be available in multiple, accessible formats
	Option to have a formed mailed
	Option to have assistant fill out form or to request assistance from the election officer or registrar at the court
Calling a complaint office	Option to meet in person
Checking on status of a complaint, submitting additional evidence or scheduling hearing	Developing a case management system with accessibility features to submit evidence, set a hearing date or check status of case
Attending an in-person meeting or attending a hearing	Sign language interpretation
	Step-free entry
	Attend meeting with assistant
	Participate or attend Virtual hearing with accessibility features on the online platform
Decisions on complaints	Simple language
	Publish decisions and ensure that decisions are available in multiple, accessible formats
	Data collection on complaints/ alleged violations and nature of decisions regarding accessibility for persons with disability

Ghana[45]

The Court Hearing of 2020 Election Petitions in Ghana was available both online and with sign language interpretation.

Indonesia[46]

Bawaslu, the Election Supervisory Authority, produced a series of videos to inform voters on how to file a complaint. The video mainstreams persons with disabilities.

United States of America[47]

The Federal Election Commission accepts complaints filed electronically with an e-signature. Online filing can be useful for people who have difficulty traveling or who use screen readers.

Albania[48]

Albania election commission also produced a video during the 2021 elections to provide information on how to file /report complaints re: campaign finance violations and a video on election offences with sign language

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- How to file a complaint about accessibility of the candidacy, voting, or other relevant process
- Alternative, accessible methods for filing and adjudicating a complaint regarding any irregularities in the election process

Access to Funding for Candidates with Disabilities

The legal mandate to oversee the financing of election campaigns varies between countries – in some countries this mandate lies with the EMB, in others this task is given by legislation to an auditing institution or to an anti-corruption agency.

Even where the EMB does not have a legal mandate to oversee regulations on campaign finance, it may consider ways to ensure that access to funding does not unduly hinder persons with disabilities from participating in elections as candidates. This can include calling on the government to provide earmarked funding for unique costs incurred by candidates with disabilities, such as having a sign language interpreter accompany them to campaign events if they are deaf, or the additional costs associated with accessible transportation if the candidate has a physical disability. Such funding was for example made available in England between 2018 and 2021,[49] and it was available as of 2022 in Wales[50] and in Scotland.[51]

[45] Ghana: UTV Ghana Online. (March 4, 2021). Judgement Day: 2020 Election Petition Hearing [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wrSK4yWUiU

[46] Indonesia: Bawaslu. Galeri Video. Available at https://bawaslu.go.id/publikasi/galeri-video

[47] USA: Federal Elections Commission, United States of America. How to file a complaint with the FEC. Available at https://www.fec.gov/legal-resources/enforcement/complaints-process/how-to-file-complaint-with-fec/

[48] Albania: Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve. KQZ- Veprat penale që cënojnë zgjedhjet 2021 [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfnxOrQdIhs

[49] Disability Rights UK. "EnAble Fund." Accessed via https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/enablefund

[50] Evans, R. "Written Statement: Access to Elected Office Fund." Accessed via https://gov.wales/written-statement-access-elected-office-fund-0

[51] Inclusion Scotland. "Access to Elected Office Fund." Accessed via https://inclusionscotland.org/disabled-people-become-a-leader/civic-participation/aeo-fund

The EMB may also urge political parties not only to nominate persons with disabilities in winnable positions, but also, where possible, to provide them with necessary resources for effective campaigning. Legal amendments that connect the provision of public funding to the share of nominated candidates with disabilities can also be considered, or, alternatively, penalties can be applied in case political parties fail to comply with regulations on nominating persons with disabilities as candidates. The enforcement of such provisions should be carefully monitored so that they do enhance the opportunities of electoral success for candidates with disabilities.

The 2018 municipal elections in Tunisia were the first time an innovative new disability quota was implemented by the EMB for candidate lists, resulting in 144 people with disabilities being elected. If political parties did not meet the quota, they were fined. IFES conducted a Disability Inclusion Assessment ahead of the elections.[52] The assessment identified several ways the EMB could more effectively monitor compliance with the new quota, as well as ways the EMB could enhance voter and civic education outreach to people with disabilities.

What the disability inclusion policy should address:

- How to file a complaint about accessibility of the candidacy, voting, or other relevant process
- Alternative, accessible methods for filing and adjudicating a complaint regarding any irregularities in the election process

Monitoring and Evaluating Disability Inclusion

It is important to monitor the implementation of policies and strategic plans on a periodic basis. Detailed indicators can provide more meaningful insight into the effectiveness of policy activities and their impact on people with disabilities. Because they include a variety of disability rights stakeholders, Election Access Working Groups can be effective evaluators. The working group can help monitoring and evaluation specialists to determine whether actions have been completed and milestones achieved, as well as to provide recommendations for next steps. For example, if the strategic plan included as a milestone "50% of all polling stations made accessible," the working group could help to develop guidelines by which the EMB determines if a polling station counts as being made accessible. During the evaluation, the working group could review where accessible polling stations are located to see if they cover areas where there are larger populations of persons with disabilities, or to note if, for example, all accessible polling stations are located in cities. This level of detail is not always possible when an evaluation is conducted by a staff member with less expertise on disability inclusion.

Questions for evaluating mainstreaming in strategic plans	Questions for evaluating disability inclusion policies
• Are there milestones on disability inclusion? Have they been achieved? • What resources are allocated to disability inclusion milestones? • If milestones have not been achieved, what activities have been conducted? What the outcome of those activities? • How have OPDs been involved in strategic plan activities, such as lessons learned and evaluation sessions? • Are EMB staff aware of the disability inclusion milestones in the strategic plan?	• Has the policy been officially adopted by the EMB? • Has a position or group been assigned to implement each part of the policy? • Has an action plan been created? If so, are its results achievable in the specified time period? • How have OPDs been involved in the implementation of the policy? • Has the policy been socialized among EMB staff at all levels and in all departments?

[52] Zobairi, V., Atkinson, V., & Ouertani, I. (2018). Political Participation of Women and Men with Disabilities in Tunisia: An IFES Assessment. *International Foundation for Electoral Systems*. https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_2018_tunisia_disability_assessment_english.pdf

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3. African Union (June 1, 1981). *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.* Available at https://achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/banjul_charter.pdf

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11. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (March 5, 2021). *Strengthening Political Participation in Europe through Disability Inclusion Policies*. https://www.ifes.org/news/strengthening-political-participation-europe-through-disability-inclusion-policies

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Annex A: Disability Inclusion Policy and Implementation Checklist

This checklist provides an overview of the areas that can be included in a Disability Inclusion Policy and/or Implementation Plan. A Disability Inclusion Policy can complement mainstreaming disability in strategic and operational plans. The outline is illustrative and should be adapted based on country context and issues identified via a disability inclusion assessment and/or consultations with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), as well as analysis of election observer reports.

I. Introduction and EMB commitment

- ☐ General description of the initiative (what this policy seeks to do)
- ☐ Approximate number of persons with disabilities in the country
- ☐ How disability inclusion is relevant to the EMB's mandate
- ☐ Message from the EMB Chairman outlining high-level institutional commitment to disability inclusion

II. Context

- ☐ International, regional and national legal frameworks on disability rights (such as CRPD, SDGs, Global Disability Summit/Summit for Democracy commitments, etc.)
- ☐ Intersectional legal frameworks and commitments made on gender, age and/or miniority inclusion

III. Rationale and Guiding Principles

- ☐ Mission statement on why the policy is being created
- ☐ Data from surveys of and consultations with voters with disabilities, analysis from observer reports and/or recommendations from disability inclusion assessments
- ☐ Barriers the policy seeks to mitigate
- ☐ Opportunities the policy seeks to leverage
- ☐ A set of principles that the EMB hopes will lead to greater inclusion of people with disabilities in elections; may include areas such as accessibility, inclusion, diversity, anti-discrimination and engagement of all stakeholders

V. Illustrative Objectives and Activities

- ☐ Appoint a senior disability rights focal point
    - Outline a set of responsibilities for the disability rights focal point
    - Ensure that the disability rights focal point is connected to other staff working on gender and social inclusion
    - Consider hiring interns with disabilities
- ☐ Create a reasonable accommodation policy for the hiring of permanent and temporary staff with disabilities
    - Right to reasonable accommodations for all permanent and temporary staff
    - How to request a reasonable accommodation

- Create a list of accommodations the EMB should consider. (See the table on page 28):
  - Adjusted working equipment (tables; chairs; IT equipment, etc.)
  - Accessible entrance, office and working station
  - Internal documents are accessible for people who use screen readers
  - Sign langauge interpreters are provided for people who are Deaf

☐ Train EMB staff on disability inclusion

- Include a plan for both short-term workers, such as poll workers, and long-term staff to take part in trainings on disability inclusion.
- Emphasize the proper etiquette for poll workers to use when supporting voters with disabilities
- Include targets and indicators on internal training of EMB staff within their disability inclusion policy
- Train the staff on assistive devices that will be available on election day (tactile or braille ballots, tactile ballot guides, magnifying glasses, large grip pens, etc.)
- Code of conduct for poll workers

☐ Develop accessible and inclusive voter education

- Accessible formats for voter education, such as sign language, braille or easy-to-read
- Mainstreaming persons with disabilities (in images, as speakers, etc.) in general voter education materials
- Ensuring an intersectional approach to voter education so that persons with disabilities who identify with another marginalized group, such as women with disabilities or persons with disabilities who are part of an ethnic minority group, are included in voter education
- Develop voter education targeted persons with disabilities with information such as which accommodations are available on Election Day, which polling stations are accessible, the right to choose an assistant to help with voting, queue jumping policies and information on quotas for candidates with disabilities

☐ Develop an accessible website and social media presence

- Standard use of alt-text for all social media posts and captions/transcripts for videos
- Ensure that the website's code is set up in a way that it can be read by a screen reader
- Involve OPDs in beta testing processes for website development and updates to ensure accessibility

☐ Collect disaggregated data during voter registration

- Develop a supplementary data collection form on accessibility requirements for voters to complete during voter registration
- Address how data on voters with disabilities will be collected, stored and used
- Guidelines for collecting data to inform accommodations for voting, such as use of the Washington Group Questions

☐ Procure assistive devices and accessible election technology

- OPDs serve on advisory board for EMB procurement unit
- Involve persons with disabilities in the design and testing of assistive devices and election technologies, such as electronic voting machines, magnifying glasses or sheets, tactile ballot guides, pencil grips or large grip pens
- Develop alternative technologies for accessibility, such as voting by phone
- Place assistive devices in the voting booth or at the check-in table

- ☐ Select accessible voter registration and candidate nomination locations, polling stations and counting and results centers
    - Conduct a nationwide accessibility audit of buildings used for election purposes
    - Provide guidance on how to set up accessible polling stations. For example:
        - Ensuring that the door to the polling station is kept open so all voters can enter
        - Keeping the ballot box on the floor so it can be reached by voters of short stature and wheelchair-users
        - Leaving enough space between tables, voting booths, and elsewhere
- ☐ Create an accessible complaints adjudication process
    - Ensure that the complaint mechanism is accessible to all
        - Text-to-speech option embedded on the EMB website
        - Simple language and option to call
    - Alternative, accessible methods for filling and adjudicating a complaint regarding any irregularities in the election process
        - Option to meet in person (for filling in the form or contacting the complaint officer)
        - Ability to provide sign language interpretation onsite or having an assistant present at the meeting
- ☐ Access to funding for candidates with disabilities
    - Ways the EMB can seek to reduce the financial burden for people with disabilities to stand as candidates
        - Consider access to elected office funds for candidates with disabilities
    - Legal changes the EMB may advocate for that may increase accessibility of funding

VI. Expected Outcomes

- ☐ The desired result of the policy
- ☐ Indicators to demonstrate success

VII. Implementation Plan

- ☐ Identification of overall lead for the policy
- ☐ Identification of staff and/or departments responsible for each objective and/or activity
- ☐ Formation of an Election Access Working Group or establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding with a OPD, if applicable
- ☐ Timeline
- ☐ Budget
- ☐ Key results and targets and a method to track progress

Annex B: Sample Scope of Work for an EMB Election Access Working Group

Summary

The Disability Access Working Group (the "Working Group") will bring together representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), the EMB, political parties, the National Disability Rights Council, National Human Rights Council, and other stakeholders to discuss ways to make the electoral process more inclusive of persons with disabilities. The group will draw on work already done by EMB and OPDs to identify measures, such as procedural changes and specially targeted information materials that will empower persons with disabilities to participate in elections and political processes alongside fellow citizens. Recommendations made [in a recently published report by OPD partner or observer group or in a disability inclusion assessment of the EMB, where applicable] will be used as a starting point for collaboration.

Objectives

The working group will:

1. Develop guidelines for [officials responsible for polling station accessibility] regarding the accessibility of polling places. The goal will be [e.g., to increase the number of polling places that are accessible to voters with physical disabilities; to increase awareness of locations of polling places that are accessible; to develop training of poll workers, etc.].
2. Make recommendations for [updated or to enforce existing] [EMB] procedures and rules that facilitate full participation of persons with disabilities as candidates, observers, election commission members and voters.
1. Develop a proposal for a voter information strategy to ensure that voters with disabilities have the information they need to exercise their right to vote, [both] through the mainstream voting process [and home voting, if applicable]. The strategy will include recommendations on how best to reach all members of the disability community; i.e. by radio, braille leaflets, sign language interpretation, pictures, etc.
3. [Support implementation of or Create] the National Action Plan [for the realization of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities] until [year], or other plans or strategies developed by the government or by this Working Group].
4. Advocate for the implementation of [plan noted above] guidelines, recommendations and proposals, and monitor their implementation.

Working Group Composition

The Working Group, facilitated by the EMB and [local OPD partner] in [country], will include representatives from the following:

- [EMB]
- [OPDs and persons with disabilities]
- [High-level government official working on disability rights, such as the National Council on Disability and/or National Human Rights Council]
- [Domestic observation group]
- [National civil society organizations and international organizations working on elections]

- Members of [Legislative body]
- [Government ministry or ombudsman responsible for reporting on CRPD progress or implementing policies on disability rights]
- [Ministry of Education, if adaptations to make polling stations in schools more accessible is an objective of the group]
- Political parties

The Working Group will be chaired by the EMB. Outside experts and interested parties, such as government ministries or civil society groups, may be invited to meetings on a case-by-case basis.

Timeline

The group will hold its first meeting in XX and will meet once per month after that, facilitated by the EMB and [OPD partner], in order to plan and implement the activities described in its Terms of Reference.

An example TOR from the Disability-Inclusive Elections in Sri Lanka technical working group is available at http://electionaccess.org/en/resources/voter-education/training-material/717/.

Annex C: Disability Inclusion Policy Action Plan – Dominican Republic

ACCESS AND INCLUSION

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: to mainstream INCLUSION AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL, IMPROVE CIVIL REGISTRY AND IDENTIFICATION SERVICES, AND ENSURE ACCESS to ELECTORAL PROCESSES, FOR all PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

STRATEGIC ACTIONS	GOALS	ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY	TERM	MEANS
1.1 ADJUST THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND ADHERE TO COMPLIANCE WITH THE SAME	Adoption of the JCE Commitment of Inclusion	1.1.1 Inclusion Policy	Approval by the Plenary Session	Inclusion Commission Plenary Session Decision	2021	
	Modification of laws currently under review, to incorporate an inclusion perspective	1.1.2 Electoral Law-Proposals	% of articles presented by the JCE and % approved by Congress	Inclusion Commission Legal Team Plenary Session Decision	2021	
		1.1.3 Political Parties Law-Proposals	% of articles presented by the JCE and % approved by Congress	Inclusion Commission Legal Team Plenary Session Decision	2021	
		1.1.4 Civil Registration Law - Proposals	% of articles presented by the JCE and % approved by Congress	Inclusion Commission Legal Team Plenary Session Decision	2021	
	Updates to existing regulations	1.1.5 Review of Legislation and Adjustments	The four (4) regulations, revised, adjusted, and adopted	Inclusion Commission Legal Team Elections Directorate Plenary Session Decision	2021	
	Fill in any loopholes for inclusion	1.1.6 Identification of Needs	Number of approved legal documents	Inclusion Commission Legal Team Plenary Session Decision	2021-2023	

STRATEGIC ACTIONS	GOALS	ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY	TERM	MEANS
1.2 MAINSTREAM INSTITUTIONAL INCLUSION	Facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities at the JCE	1.2.1 Adopt a 5% rule, as established in Law 5-13 on disability	% increase in the recruitment of persons with disabilities	Human Resources Directorate	2021-23	
	JCE staff trained in issues of Inclusion and accessibility	1.2.2 Staff training	Minimum 25% of employees trained per year	EFEC	2021-23	
		1.2.3 Integration of the module on accessibility and disabilities, in the welcome course for new staff	All new employees trained	EFEC	2021-24	
	Needs of current employees with identified disabilities	1.2.4 Internal JCE survey	Survey results	Human Resources	2021	
	Accessible JCE communications	1.2.5 Sign language and an accessible website	Number of events with sign language and changes to the website	Plenary Session Decision Management Communication Technology management	2021-2024	
	Inclusion Commission includes members with disabilities, to benefit from their perspectives	1.2.6 Integration of persons with disabilities as members at the table	Number of polling station members	Plenary Session Decision	2021	

STRATEGIC ACTIONS	GOALS	ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY	TERM	MEANS
1.3 IMPROVE REGISTRATION AND DENTIFICATION SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES	Accessibility barriers identified and reduced at the country's government offices	1.3.1 Mapping of accessibility in government offices	Mapping results	JCE/CONADIS	2021	
		1.3.2 Adequacy of government facilities	Number of adapted government offices	JCE	2021-23	
	Reasonable accommodation measures adopted to increase identification and registration	1.3.3 Increase in Mobile Units	Number of units and number of additional records	Addresses and ID Registration Registry	2021-23	
		1.3.4 Adjustment of the Fingerprint Capture System for people with partial hand amputation	Number of settings and people registered	IT Addresses, ID Registration	2022	
		1.3.5 Creation of Strategic Points for the Civil Registry	Number of points and registered people			
	Information collected on persons with disabilities, in order to provide better services	1.3.6 Modify the Individuals line in the Master Registry, changing the section of Individual Signs by Condition and, in this, specifying the type of disability, according to the Disability Certification issued by CONADIS.	Number of odifications	Addresses Registry, ID Registration	2021-22	
		Database shared between the Civil Registry, ID Office, and CONADIS	Shared database	JCE/CONADIS		
	Correct identification forms to avoid discrimination	Campaign to eliminate the disabled / incapacitated term in occupation line, at no cost	Number of changes	ID Registration Address	2021-22	
	Sensitivity Training for ID/ Registration Center staff	Training on disability, rights, dignified treatment, and existing reasonable accommodation programs	% of staff trained in sensitivity	EFEC Registration Address	2021-22	
	Awareness campaign for persons with disabilities	Awareness campaign to increase registration and identification through the measures adopted by the JCE	% increase in registrations and IDs	Address Registry and ID Registration	2022	

STRATEGIC ACTIONS	GOALS	ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY	TERM	MEANS
1.4 4. IMPROVE PARTICIPATION AND ACCESSIBILITY IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS	Identified barriers in past elections	1.4.1 Survey on Barriers	Survey results	JCE/IFES	2021	
	Increase accessibility at polling stations	1.4.2 Mapping of existing schools and improving access	List of schools in need of improvement	Elections Directorate	2022	
		1.4.3 Determine potential new schools, based on their accessibility	% of new accessible schools	Elections Directorate	2022-2024	
		1.4.5 Adaptation of polling stations via an agreement with Public Works	30% additional accessible schools	Elections Directorate	2023-24	
	Make voting easier	1.4.6 Ballot Template Design	A model designed and number planned for the identified polling stations	Elections Directorate	2023	
		1.4.7 Help Desks	Identification and planning at an establishment	Elections Directorate	2023	
		1.4.8 Other measures			2022-2023	
	Polling stations include persons with disabilities	Board members trained in inclusion (include module on PcD)	100% members are trained	EFEC Elections Directorate	2024	
		Facilitate recruitment of polling table members	1-2% of members with disabilities	Human Resources Elections Directorate	2024	
	Accessible electoral information	Sign language at public events	Number of events	Communication Directorate	2021-2024	
	Awareness / participation campaign	Motivation campaign for voters with disability	Methods used	Communication Directorate	2023-24	

STRATEGIC ACTIONS	GOALS	ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	RESPONSIBILITY	TERM	MEANS
1.5 5. PROMOTE INCLUSION IN POLITICAL PARTIES WITH PUBLIC FINANCING	Sensitivity training for political parties	1.5.1 Party training on disability and inclusion	Minimum five (5) representatives per party	EFEC	2022	
	Candidates with disabilities on the lists	1.5.2 1-2% inclusion of candidates with disabilities	% of candidates	Plenary Session Decision Agreement with the parties	2023	
	Disability and inclusion in political programs	1.5.3 Points of integration / inclusion in political programs	Number of points in each party	Plenary Session Decision Agreement with the parties	2023	
	Guaranteed accessibility to campaigns	1.5.4 Sign language and integration messages in campaigns	Number of rallies with sign language	Plenary Session Decision Agreement with the parties	2023	
	Delegates (match observers) with disabilities	1.5.5 Integration of 1% of delegates with disabilities	Number of delegates with disabilities per party	Plenary Session Decision Agreement with the parties	2023	
	Party commitment to inclusion	1.5. Signing of a commitment between the JCE and political parties, for inclusion in the next elections	% of parties that sign a commitment	Plenary Session Decision Agreement with the parties	2022	

Annex D: Voter Registration Supplementary Data Collection Form – Sri Lanka

Obtain Additional Data To Provide Accessible Facilities Necessary For The Disabled And Elderly Persons At The Elections.

The objective of obtaining these data is to prepare a programme to provide accessible facilities necessary for the disabled and elderly persons at an election.

Include in this form regarding the facilities required in the Polling Station at an election, for disabled and elderly persons at your residence.

Full Name	National Identity Card No:	Sex	Date of Birth	Mark a Cross (X) on the cage before the accessible facility of which the relevant persons expect to obtain at an election. Consider that more than one answer can be provided.														
				Need to use the wheel chair inside the polling station.	Need to use moving aids inside the polling station other than the wheel chairs.	Need to establish the voting cubicle and the ballot box at a lower height.	Braille medium is required	A non visible technical assist other than the Braille is required.	Enlarging equipment is required.	Unhurried explanations are required.	Visual details are required.	Assistance of a sign language communication is needed.	Assistant is required to cast the vote.	Assistance to visit the polling station is required.	Transport facilities to the premises of the polling station is required.

Signature of Chief Occupant:

www.IFES.org