



**ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA**

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON  
**INCLUSION OF PERSONS  
WITH DISABILITIES (PwDs) IN  
ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

**24<sup>th</sup> JANUARY, 2018  
NEW DELHI**

**CONFERENCE READER**

Dedicated to  
Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) Voters

# FOREWORD

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 constitutes the principal legal instrument that advocates electoral participation as a human right and supports universal adult suffrage. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 further seeks to protect the rights, and strengthens the cause of PwDs inter alia for guaranteeing them the participation in political and public life; and the opportunity to enjoy political rights on an equal basis with others. Different countries, while drawing upon guidance from above Treaties, have shaped up the legislative and policy framework for removal of inherent barriers and facilitate PwDs for enhancing their participation on equal basis.

Significant amount of good work has been done in this area by different EMBs and International Institutions. Election Commission of India has adopted 'Accessible Elections' as theme for this year's National Voters' Day celebrations and it is in this context it is proposed to hold International Conference on 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Electoral Processes' as a part of the National Voters' Day celebrations.

I am indeed happy to introduce the Conference Reader that has been prepared to support and facilitate the interaction during the Seminar. The Reader carries impressive contributions from the Participating EMBs, International Organizations and the section 'Breaking the Barriers' on the subject developed through in-house research and expertise in the ECI. We intend placing this document and the deliberations of the conference on the VoICE.NET Platform for a continued dialogue on 'Knowledge Sharing' for the cause of enhancing electoral participation by 'Persons with Disabilities' across the Democracies of the world.

**Umesh Sinha**

Senior Deputy Election Commissioner  
Election Commission of India  
Election Commission of India, New Delhi.  
January, 2018.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Conference Reader has been prepared to support and facilitate interaction at the 'International Conference on 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Electoral Processes.' as a part of the 8th National Voters' Day celebrations. The Reader, starting with the conceptual framework and guidance contained in International Treaties, visits the initiatives and experience of different EMBs and International Institutions in addressing issues and challenges of inclusion of PwDs in electoral participation.

I am extremely grateful to Sh O P Rawat, Hon'ble Chief Election Commissioner of India, and Sh Sunil Arora, Hon'ble Election Commissioner for giving me this opportunity to work for the aforesaid conference. I am thankful to Sh Umesh Sinha, Senior Deputy Election Commissioner for all the valuable time he shared with me in steering my thinking in developing the conceptual framework for the entire study despite his extremely busy schedule. I thank Ms Padma Angmo, Director, SVEEP Division of ECI for very valuable suggestions coming from her as an Expert on Voter Education. I also thank Sh. Dharendra Ojha, Director General and Sh. V K Sharma, Consultant (IC), ECI for their valuable help while developing this document. I thank Dr Aarti Aggarwal, Consultant, SVEEP Division for painstaking effort in going through the Reader and adding as I call it 'Life' to this document. My thanks to the concerned staff of the SVEEP Division and others in the ECI for their assistance during my work on this study.

I welcome the expert contribution from different EMBs and International Organizations to the Reader. Their contribution will go a long way in developing innovative strategies and a continued dialogue on the subject. Voter Education Resources of different Election Commissions have been very helpful for in-house research and developing several Papers under the section 'Breaking the Barriers.' I must record my sincere thanks to them.

I hope the Participating Dignitaries find the Reader useful for interaction at the Conference.

**S D Sharma**  
Senior Fellow,  
Election Commission of India

# CONCEPT PAPER

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights' 1948 (UDHR) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1976 (ICCPR), constitute the two principal and universal legal instruments that mark the beginning of electoral participation as a human right. Further, the UNCHR Handbook on Human Rights and Elections (1994) spells out the guiding principles for educating voters on realizing the envisaged electoral participation.

The issue of participation is further discussed in a number of specific human rights documents, such as the 1965 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as in the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This paper intends to visit the guiding principles on the issue of 'Inclusion of the Persons with Disabilities' (PwDs) in electoral processes as laid down in the CRPD, the related practice and experience including innovation and technology application in different countries. We start with the relevant excerpts from the CRPD.

## **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 (CRPD)**

### **Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information**

"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, including by:

- (a) Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost;
- (b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions;
- (c) Urging private entities that provide services

to the general public, including through the Internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities;

(d) Encouraging the mass media, including providers of information through the Internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities;

(e) Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages.

### **Article 29: Participation in political and public life**

States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake:

(a) To ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, inter alia, by:

(i) Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use;

(ii) Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;

(iii) Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request,

allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice;

The guiding principles, laid down in the aforesaid UN Treaties and the International instruments, are further fortified by a series of Regional Treaties. Different countries, as Parties to such Treaties, have adopted and integrated these guiding principles in their respective constitutions or the legislative instruments to shape up their policies, programmes and action plans for inclusion of the PwDs besides other marginalized groups in an endeavor to achieve the desired objectives of universal adult suffrage.

The main aim of voter education is to provide all the requisite information for electoral participation effectively and efficiently to all constituents of democratic polity. While many categories of voters are covered under formal voter education programmes including the outreach, there are special groups especially the PwDs which need strategically well designed powerful outreach, specially focused campaigns for voter information, motivation and facilitation in electoral participation. Efficacy and efficiency of any voter education programme lies in identifying the needs, the barriers and addressing the same effectively for reaching out to such special groups. Media, Civil Society organizations may be involved as important stakeholders in voter education outreach for inclusion of such groups.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that 15 percent of the world's population has a disability, with 80 percent of these persons living in developing countries. PwDs may also include various ethnic, religious, socio-economic and gender groups. Elections provide them an equal opportunity, with other citizens, to exercise their preferences and shape political outcomes. The mandate of the UN instruments coupled with

the country legislations and the support from the EMB's for participation in the electoral process has made a substantial impact in removal of barriers to inclusion.

VOICE.NET Platform dedicated its third issue of VOICE International to the cause of the PwDs. The Issue carries rich experience for knowledge sharing on inclusion PwDs across the world of democracies.

Notable, significant and substantive good work including technology and innovation has been done in this area by the EMB's in many countries across the world. Pioneering work has been done by international organizations, such as IFES, NDI, UNDP, WHO and International IDEA etc. to support inclusion and equal access in democracies of the world. Yet a lot more needs to be done. Also there is tremendous scope for learning from each other in this area.

The International Conference being organized by the Election Commission of India in January, 2018 at New Delhi is envisaged to share the experience of different EMB's and learns from their policy interventions, good practices and technological innovation. The Conference also aims to enrich and consolidate the knowledge base for addressing the barriers, issues and challenges in voter education, outreach and campaigns for equal access for PwDs with a view to maximize their electoral participation to achieve the desired objective of universal adult suffrage.

This Conference Reader has been developed with the contribution from the Participating EMB's, International Institutions and supplemented by in house research papers on the subject for supporting the interaction during the Conference.

**S D Sharma**  
Senior Fellow,  
Election Commission of India.

# INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PwDs) IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

## INTRODUCTION

The relevance of voter education, in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the principal and universal legal instruments as also the guiding principles for voter education in the UNCHR Handbook on Human Rights and Elections (1994), has been well appreciated by the participating states. Adoption of the Universal Declaration that marks the beginning of participation as a human right, is supplemented by a series of international conventions and treaties to support participation from all segments of the society including PwDs.

### **Special Groups: Guiding Principles under Specific UN Instruments**

The issue of inclusion in electoral participation is discussed in a number of specific human rights documents such as the 1965 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) etc. This article intends to focus on

the guiding principles as laid down in the CRPD, the practice and experience of voter education including outreach for inclusion of PwDs in electoral participation in different countries. We start with the excerpts from the Convention.

### **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, 2006 (CRPD)**

#### **Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information**

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, including by:

- (a) Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost;
- (b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other



accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions;

(c) Urging private entities that provide services to the general public, including through the Internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities;

(d) Encouraging the mass media, including providers of information through the Internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities;

(e) Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages.

### **Article 29: Participation in political and public life**

States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake:

(a) To ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, inter alia, by:

(i) Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use;

(ii) Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;

(iii) Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice;

(b) To promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs, including:

(i) Participation in non governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country, and in the activities and administration of political parties;

(ii) Forming and joining organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local levels.

The provisions contained in CRPD specify the mandate for inclusion and special attention to PwDs in terms of equal access. There are several other international treaties and agreements which support the inclusion of the PwDs.

### **WHO on Persons with Disability**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that 15 percent of the world's population has a disability, with 80 percent of these persons living in developing countries. PwDs may also include various ethnic, religious, socio-economic and gender groups. Elections should provide them an equal opportunity, with other citizens, to exercise their preferences and shape up the relevant political outcomes.

## Barriers and Breaking the Barriers

The barriers to access to different areas of electoral participation that may be perceived by the PwDs relate to difficulties in voter registration, inaccessible registration materials or facilities, inadequate or inaccessible voter education and related materials, difficulties in physical access to polling stations, inability to vote independently and privately, absence of inappropriate assistance from poll workers etc. The list is only illustrative but in effect it means discouraging PwDs from exercise of franchise. Barriers do dissuade persons with disabilities from voting.

In a democracy in true spirit of universal adult suffrage, every vote matters, every vote counts. Given this fundamental premise, equal access is vital to participation for PwDs. The Barriers can be obliterated if they are addressed appropriately and effectively.

The mandate of the UN instruments coupled with the enabling country legislations and the support from the EMBs for participation in the electoral process has made a substantial impact in removal of barriers to inclusion. Pioneering work has been done by international organizations, such as UNDP, WHO, NDI, IFES etc, to support inclusion and equal access through targeted voter education programs in many countries. Technology can help improve access to the voting process as demonstrated by the practice followed by many countries.

## Voter Education for Greater Inclusion of all Citizens

The main aim of voter education is to provide all the requisite information for effective and efficient electoral participation by all constituents to achieve the desired objectives of universal adult suffrage. While

many categories of voters are covered under the general or formal voter education programs, there are special groups which need strategically well designed and a focused outreach and special campaigns to receive voter information, facilitation and motivation to participate. Efficacy and efficiency of any voter education program lies in effectively reaching out to such special groups also. Voter Education outreach and campaigns should address and motivate inter alia the PwD voters for maximization of participation and voter turnouts. Media, Civil Society organizations may be involved as important stakeholders in voter education outreach for inclusion of such special groups.

This Conference Reader visits the experience of different countries in addressing voter education, facilitation and motivation on inclusion of the PwDs besides highlighting the support provided by the EMBs, international organizations and civil society organizations to the special voter education campaigns for PwDs in such countries.

Section I of the Reader contains papers from Australia, Ecuador and Moldova by way of contribution from the Participants and Section II 'Breaking the Barriers' contains papers based on in house research by the author with a view to support the interaction and experience sharing for the purpose of learning from each other. To further support the interaction we connect with the Issue No 3 Volume I of VoICE International on VoICE.NET the Issue was dedicated to Special Initiatives for enhancing Participation of PwDs. Together, these resources should make a helpful reading for the cause of enhancing access to the PwDs in electoral participation.



AUSTRALIA



# INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PwDs) IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

## AEC services to support people with a disability

As one of the few countries in the world to enforce compulsory voting, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) works hard to meet the needs of a diverse range of people when managing electoral events and preparing information for the public.

This paper describes the AEC's strategy to provide services to people with a disability and provides details of the specific operational activities the AEC undertakes for each federal electoral event. The AEC can provide further information on these activities as required.

## Disability Inclusion Strategy

The AEC's Disability Inclusion Strategy (2010-2020) outlines the high-level targeted actions and outcomes the AEC is pursuing under the Council of Australian Governments' National Disability Strategy 2010-2020. The key

principles of the AEC's approach to disability inclusion are to:

- support people with disability to fully participate in the electoral system, and
- provide a workplace inclusive and supportive of employees with disability.

The AEC's strategy shows how we aim to provide an inclusive workplace for staff in our workforce with disability, as well as to provide assistance and support to electors with disability to ensure they are not disadvantaged in the electoral system.

## Disability Advisory Committee

The AEC's Disability Advisory Committee is the primary mechanism through which the AEC communicates with, and understands issues for, people with disability.

The aim of the Committee is to enable the AEC to promote greater accessibility, inclusion and participation in the electoral process by people with disability.

The role of the Committee is to:

- seek feedback from relevant Australian peak disability organisations on the programmes and services that the AEC delivers
- understand new and emerging issues of concern for people with disability
- collaborate with our Electoral Council of Australia and New Zealand (ECANZ) partners in the delivery of accessible electoral services across jurisdictions
- learn about initiatives being developed in other sectors for people with disability
- seek the assistance of Committee members in promoting relevant AEC initiatives to their members.

### AEC website

The AEC website includes ReadSpeaker functionality, which allows the text on our website to be read out aloud to ensure that people who suffer from reading related disabilities can access information about electoral participation.

The AEC website also includes a dedicated page for people with a disability - <http://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/people-with-disability.htm>

A guide to enrolling and voting

The AEC's guide to enrolling and voting is also produced in large print and e-text formats, which are always available on the AEC website.

### Election briefings

To support the participation of Australians with disability in the 2016 federal election, the AEC held a dedicated information briefing for representatives of peak disability organisations, providing specific information on the range of services. These include blind and low vision voting and the National Relay Service for voters with a hearing or speech impairment. This also provided an opportunity for representatives of the disability sector to discuss matters related to the upcoming election.

### Specific resources provided to electors

The AEC offers a range of accessible information and resources to electors to improve democratic participation, including:

#### Easy English Guides

The AEC provides a set of guides written in an easy to read way that also use pictures to help explain some of the concepts. These guides describe how to enrol and how to vote at a polling place or by postal vote. The guides can be found here - [http://www.aec.gov.au/About\\_AEC/Publications/easy-english/](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/easy-english/)

#### AUSLAN guide

The AEC website features a series of videos that contain information on enrolling and voting for federal elections and referendums. The videos include AUSLAN (Australian Sign Language), a voiceover and plain English captions.

#### Blind and low vision voting

During Australian federal elections, voters who are blind or have low vision can cast a vote in secret by telephone from any location.

The Blind or Low Vision (BLV) voting method is to enable BLV voters to vote in secret, without the need to attend a divisional office or polling place on election day. This provides a more independent and secure voting option to the BLV community.



In order to use this voting method, eligible voters must register by telephoning the BLV call Centre. Registered voters will be issued with credentials, which they are required to quote when they call to vote. This allows voters to be marked off the roll without disclosing their names.

The system used to register and accept votes was hosted by the AEC for the first time at a full federal election in 2016, and for a federal by-election in 2015.

The AEC promotes these services through the AEC's Twitter page.

### Election specific accessible information

At each electoral event, the AEC's official guide to the federal election produces is produced in braille, e-text, audio file and large print. This

information includes polling place locations and accessible voting options.

### Special enrolment options

If people with a disability find it difficult to get to a polling place on election day, electors can become a general postal voter and will then automatically receive ballot papers in the mail at each electoral event.

### Polling places

The AEC makes sure that wherever possible polling place premises are accessible and provide wheelchair access. The key points the AEC looks for are:


- the doorway width must be wide enough (at least 740mm or wider) for a wheelchair user to pass through, and
- where there are step/s, there must be a ramp or lift available to overcome the step/s.

This consideration is built into the AEC's polling place inspection process, which includes an accessibility calculator and quick reference guide.


Polling place information on the AEC website includes whether or not the place is wheelchair accessible. The AEC is also developing an app for smart phone devices that will feature information relating to disability access of polling places.


### Working with stakeholders


The AEC works with stakeholders to distribute information. In 2016, Vision Australia provided information on the AEC's accessible voting options to more than 40,000 Australians who are blind or have low vision.


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## Latest news

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### Voting at the 2016 federal election

06 June 2016

We will provide information about the election on this page and on our [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter account](#) throughout June. Alternatively, you can contact the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) on 13 23 26 from 8am to 8pm, seven days a week or visit the [AEC website](#).

#### Placing your vote

Voters who are blind or have low vision have a choice of two options: assisted voting at the polling place or telephone voting. Votes cannot be placed at Vision Australia offices.

#### Assisted voting

Polling places with access for people with disability are shown on the [AEC website](#). The polling places identify the level of accessibility (full, assisted or none).

You can ask someone to help you vote. Polling place staff are trained to assist you, or you can nominate any person (except a candidate) to assist. This person could be a friend, relative or a party worker. If voters do not nominate someone, then the polling official in charge will provide assistance.

The assistant reads the contents of the ballot paper and then completes the ballot paper according to your preferences.


There are also special arrangements at polling places for people who cannot get out of their car. If the polling official in charge is satisfied that you cannot enter the polling place, someone will bring the ballot papers to you.


#### Telephone voting

##### Step 1: Register


If you wish to vote by telephone, you must register first by calling 1800 913 993. Registration is now open and will close at 12pm (noon) Saturday 2 July.


You will be asked questions to check your details on the electoral roll, and will be asked to choose a PIN number. You will then receive a telephone voting registration number by your choice of an email, SMS, phone call, or

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**BHUTAN**

# NATURE AND EXTENT OF BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBILITY IN ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF THE PwDs: ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS.

## INTRODUCTION

Bhutan is a young democracy. It was in 2001 when Bhutanese citizen was stunned by the Royal Decree on the drafting of the Constitution and path towards democracy. Bhutan has never looked back since, with every passing year Bhutan is making unprecedented achievement in deepening and consolidation of democracy. This is possible only with clear vision and political will from non-other than our beloved Monarchs to whom the people have given their sovereign power century ago.

The Election Commission of Bhutan recently celebrated the 12th Anniversary of its establishment and with four major elections (two parliamentary and two local government elections) under its belt, has already made decent progress in election engineering. However, like most EMBs around the world, an inclusive participation, especially from people

living with the disability has been felt more than any other challenges today.

The responsibility to elect representatives of the people through the conduct of free and fair elections rests with the Election Commission of Bhutan. To ensure maximum participation from people of all walks of life has always been the priorities of the Commission from the very First Parliamentary Elections in 2008.

Bhutan is a signatory to UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (CRPD). The High-Level Inter-Agency Task Force established last year under the Chairmanship of the Foreign Minister to study the readiness to ratify the instrument and where the Election Commission of Bhutan is a member. The study and report from the task force may take some time to study the gaps and come up with recommendations but the Election Commission of Bhutan is making an all-out effort in realizing the core mandates under the CRPD.



## Legal Provision

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan provides rights to every citizen to vote, elect leaders of his or her choice and participate as a candidate in the Parliamentary and Local Government Elections.

Apart from the provision of equal freedom to every citizen the Election Act, Section 323 provides assistance to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) on the Poll Day. They are assisted with physical assistance to the voting compartment, preferential access not having to wait in the queue, voter awareness with special attention and special arrangements in remote places.

## Barriers and Intervention

The political participation by PwDs has been an issue for all of us. Many International Conventions, CSOs, and relevant stakeholders have deliberated, articulated and formulated disabled-friendly policies to facilitate PwDs for better political participation. Bhutan being a late entry to the institution of voting and democracy had a clear advantage to resolve such disparity in the formulation of the Act, Rules and Regulations and Guidelines. Nevertheless, the country with just about 7, 50,000 people and over 400, 000 voters do face challenges in translating the participation of the PwDs in the election process due to various barriers. Some of the major barriers faced and intervention from the Commission to ease the political participation are as follows:

### 1. Polling Station – Accessibility

The polling stations in Bhutan consist of schools, hospital, government buildings and few temporary sheds. Except for few sheds, most of the infrastructure were built many years back without much consideration of the requirement of having facilities to accommodate the need of the voters with the disability.

Bhutan's inhospitable geographic terrain is one of the chief barriers to accessibility, even for the bodily fit person. Much of the polling stations in the country as of now do not have facilities to cater to the need of person living with disabilities. Though most of the villages are connected with the road but still house to house connectivity needs to be established to encourage the participation. The PwDs living in such remote villages faces difficulties to reach the polling station due to inaccessibility.

As stated above, much of the polling stations in Bhutan are located in already established government buildings which are centrally situated around the voter population. The Election Commission make every effort to reach out to such voters. The good news is that the Election Commission of Bhutan in preparation for 2018 Parliamentary Elections will be facilitating the PwDs with the postal ballot. The Mobile Postal Ballot in each district will be personally delivering and collecting the ballot specially set up for PwDs, long stay hospital patients and prisoners. The Electoral Officers in the districts have compiled and registered the name list by visiting very villages and hospitals. The Commission anticipates that most of the voters under these categories will be able to participate and make their choice in upcoming 2018 Parliamentary Elections. This is just a temporary measure and it's hoped that the situation will be better in coming years where PwDs proudly participate without any facilitation from the Commission. The first raw data of PwDs is collected and further registration drive will be carried out before the finalization of the list.

Male	Female	Total	Registered & Voted	Registered but not Voted	Not Registered not voted	Total
2083	1708	3791	1804	911	1100	3816

The first raw data of PwDs is collected and further registration drive will be carried out before the finalization of the list.



## 2. Discrimination/ Attitudinal Barriers

The negative attitudes toward persons with disability pose the biggest challenge to electoral access and political participation. The belief that impairment is a karmic consequence of the person's past life and such superstition induces negative attitude to both the family members and as well as the person themselves. In many instances, family member ostracized and isolate them from the social and community engagement creating the barrier to their everyday life. Such social stigma in the community encourages the families to abandon them to avoid embarrassment from the community. Many advocacies on attitudinal barriers in the country by CSOs and government agencies have not worked to break the barrier.

However, the Royal patronage under the Queen of Bhutan and awareness campaign by CSOs is making a strong presence. The Government's initiatives for policy on disability and the Election Acts' guidelines for implementation of section 323 for assistance to physically challenge voters are some of the important issues which will over the years help break the attitudinal barrier. The Election Commission of Bhutan in its pursuit for wholesome participation has included enhancement in facilitating the PwDs with relevant stakeholders in the 12th Five Year Plan which will start from July 2018. We hope that many of the issues regarding PwDs would be resolve within next 12th Five-year Plan.

## 3. Awareness

Every vote counts. The right to vote is universal and Civic and Voter Education is paramount importance for an electoral. Reaching out to PwDs is a tough task. In general, PwD focused awareness as of now are not carried out. Lack of capacity of the officials involved in voter education and the very low population of PwDs scattered all over the country make matter more difficult. At the same time, Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) in the country are new and lack the ability to organize and impart basic necessary facilitation.

2018 is an election year in Bhutan. To ensure mass voter turnout, the Commission has put in place comprehensive strategies. Each district to make it more efficient and realistic, have come up with their own customize strategies in-sync with the National Strategy to suit the local population and needs under their jurisdiction. The customize strategies of each district have clear plans and facilitation program for PwDs. The awareness programs are carried out in every village. Diverse methodology is used for the voter education to capture the voters of all types by the Commission such as lecture, animations, theme songs, brochure, notification, and advertisement in print media, television and radio.

Social media and engagement of youth through Democracy Clubs, Children Parliament, and Celebrities in street shows and inspirational video clips from the speeches of the His Majesty the King are other techniques extensively used for encouragement and motivate people to participate in electoral process. The Commission is optimistic that all section of people will be able to get information from one way or the other and get inspired to participate in the upcoming Parliamentary Elections.

## Conclusion

Political participation is the cornerstone of democracy. The people living with disability data has shown a good percentage of participation in elections in Bhutan. The government, Election Commission and CSOs have recognized the importance of facilitating the PwDs. The 12th Five Year Plan has been drafted with a clear direction to uplift this section of the population and the High-Level Task Force (HLTF) will be coming out with recommendations very shortly. The suggestions made by the HLTF will be given priority and we see there is a silver lining for PwDs in the country. Bhutan is a Buddhist Nation, we are optimistic that in few years down the line if all conditions work on our side we are confident that we will be able to break this jinx over PwDs.



ECUADOR

# THE INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRENGTHENING OF DEMOCRACY

*To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity*

– Nelson Mandela

Without a doubt, one of the key concepts of democracy is that all individuals from a society must enjoy the same rights and comply with the same obligations. In the practice, this fundamental principle could be considered a utopia. One of the challenges on this matter is to enable persons with disabilities to express their decision in the polls on the same terms than those of the rest of the citizens of the nation to which they belong. For the States, it should be a priority to guarantee the full exercise of this right.

This task is not impossible nor can only be settled in the countries of the so called “first world”. The National Electoral Council of Ecuador (CNE, for its initials in Spanish), being at the forefront of the electoral management

bodies in the region, and under the provisions of a Constitution that guarantees an effective democratic participation of the citizenry, has implemented programs and mechanisms to reduce obstacles that could undercut the access to the suffrage for persons with disabilities.

Among those, the Preferential Vote and the Vote for the Elderly Residing in Geriatric Homes are emphasized. These programs will be implemented in the process of Referendum and Popular Consultation 2018, along with the program Vote at Home, which has been replicated in other countries with the contribution of our technical assistance. Its implementation has managed to increase the participation of persons with disabilities. In the General Elections 2017, an approximate of 77% of the persons with disabilities registered in the Electoral Register exercised their right to vote.

The work done by the Ecuadorian Electoral Management Body to guarantee the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral processes and to foster the exercise of their political rights is recognized internationally. This past 5th of December, the CNE was granted the Accessibility Award in the International

Electoral Awards Ceremony 2017. It is an honor for us to have obtained such recognition, and to contribute to consolidate a true democracy.

**GUIDO ARCOS**  
**Head of Office of the Presidency**  
**National Electoral Council, Ecuador**

## NATURE AND EXTENT OF BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBILITY IN ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF THE PwDs: ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS.

In its Preamble, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognizes that disability is an evolving concept and the result of the interaction between a person with impairments and a wide range of barriers. These barriers, in turn, can be attributable to environmental issues or attitudes coming from other persons, societies or cultures. This sub-theme –barriers– is a matter of deep concern for Electoral Bodies all around the world.

Different countries have found varying solutions to address the problem of physical and/or architectural barriers. Some examples are e-voting, voting by mail and some other ideas about accessible cities. But, even now, the main issue is how to deal with the social barrier that People with Disabilities (PwDs) face in their political and public life.

In the aforesaid treaty, a distinction is made (article 29) between achieving equal rights to elect and being elected and the need to promote the right environment for PwDs to freely interact with others on public affairs. This difference provides a guideline for Electoral Bodies to design specific strategies focusing on PwDs and the social environment around them.

The first barrier an Electoral Body has to destroy is the one impeding PwDs to vote freely during an election day. As stated previously, there is a variety of solutions. For example, architectural barriers are being eliminated by two different ways: removing them physically from the cities and creating alternate ways for PwD to vote from their homes. Concerning the second one, Ecuador

has a unique vote strategy called “Home Voting”.

Home Voting is implemented for people over 65 years and presenting a physical disability of over 75%. Persons with these characteristics may express the desire to vote from home. The Electoral Council establishes a moving electoral station that will visit the beneficiary two days before the Election Day so he can cast his “home vote”. The secrecy of the vote is guaranteed by the presence of policemen through the moving and transport of the ballot boxes until they reach the Electoral Council headquarters and are secured in storage until the Election Day when these votes are counted.

But because it is limited to people over 65 years and with physical disability of over 75% it is important to face the barriers for the rest of PwDs on election day. And that is the second barrier Electoral Bodies have to destroy.

Ecuador has a mix voting system: compulsory and voluntary voting. It is compulsory for civilians between 18 and 65 years old, living in the country and without disabilities. It is voluntary for public forces (such as police and army), people with disabilities of over 30%, people between 16 and 17 years old, people over 65 years old, Ecuadorians living overseas and foreign people living more than 5 years in Ecuador.

The abstention rate has been below 20% in the last 11 electoral processes. That means that around 9 to 12 million people cast their votes on the same day. Because of our inclusive legislation, PwDs has preferential treatment. On Election Day this means that they don't have to wait in line to cast their vote. In addition, the Electoral Council has decided to create the Preferential Station. At the entrance of every electoral precinct there is a group of

electoral officers that assists PwDs who doesn't want to or can't walk to their voting stations. When a person calls for help, the officer goes to the voting station and asks the chairperson to accompany him so that the PwD can cast his or her vote. During this process the voting finishes in that station.

When the election process pauses in a station, people tend to become aggressive not only against the Electoral Body, but also against the PwDs trying to cast their votes. Because of this reaction, many people decide not to participate during Election Day. And this is why it is so important for every country to work on the second point of article 29 of the CRPD, referring to the need of creating the correct environment so that PwDs can interact freely. It means that each country has to create social campaigns to inform and create awareness of equality. Not only for PwDs but also for all humankind. Only then humankind around the world will be able to say we are trying to live according to the Human Rights Declaration. More than 70 years after its enactment!

Under letter “A” of article 29 of the CRPD, it is compulsory for States Parties to ensure that PwDs can fully exercise their right to being elected. That is an issue most countries prefer not to address because it is not without complications in the initial stages. Legislation has to be set straight so that everybody has the same opportunity to standing for election and that comes with more cultural and political awareness of the rights of women, LGBTQ+, native or ancestral ethnic groups, and the reality that there is no room for them in “modern democracies”. In Ecuador, the support for PwDs rights has brought a national effort to secure equality for human beings, regardless of the specific characteristics each one has.

It has been a subject of discussion how to

guarantee equality for all people to elect and be elected. If a country starts by setting quotas for everybody, the list of candidates will no longer be a political or civil affair, but the compliance of legal articles meant to include some people just to observe the law and not because they are fitted to represent citizens in different levels of government. Having a specific characteristic doesn't make you eligible for representation.

So, to achieve equality in the opportunities to be elected, first the Electoral Council has to establish a set of rules leading to a real democracy within the political parties. Doing so, rejection can be overcome because you choose a person that really represents your interests and needs and not the one that can move masses. The second strategy towards the right to be elected in conditions of equality is to set guidelines for the citizens to choose ideals and proposals over faces and attitudes.

Ecuador has designed a structure that allows people to opt for a government proposal and commit the candidate to fulfill it or risk to be put out of office through impeachment. Not only corruption or felonies can become a reason to be removed out of office, but also the non-compliance of the proposal expressed during election campaigns.

It's my strong believe that countries should focus more on how to open opportunities for PwDs to participate in common day life activities until the day we end labeling people according to their specific characteristics. It is better to benefit from a person's abilities rather than typecasting people and pretend to decide for them.

**MAURICIO TAYUPANTA NOROÑA**  
**Councilor of the National Electoral**  
**Council of Ecuador**



# ACCESSIBLE ELECTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

One of the laudable features that the Founding Fathers of the nation embedded in our Constitution is Part XV Elections; that provides for an Independent Election Commission, Universal adult suffrage, maintenance of electoral rolls and all the other fundamentals for conduct of free, fair and inclusive elections. These features have helped the polity evolve into a vibrant and a rich democratic culture marked by faith of Indian People in the electoral exercise, its non partisan nature, and with the basic tenet of 'No Voter should be left behind.'--- a perfect blend for inclusion and the consequent everlasting determination and endeavor for maximizing of the base of democracy in India.

### Guiding Principles for Accessibility

Article 324 of the Constitution provides for the Election Commission, its powers and functions for maintenance of the Electoral Roll and conduct of elections in a free and fair manner. Article 325 provides that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in the electoral roll on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or anyone of these. Article 326 provides for the Universal Adult Suffrage to be the basis of elections. The concerned provisions of the

Constitution and the law that flows there from cast an obligation on the ECI for conduct of free, fair and inclusive elections based on adult suffrage.

While the scope of Part XV Elections of the Constitution is very large, this article intends to focus on the 'Accessible Elections' that has been selected as central theme of this year's 'National Voter's Day' celebration. The theme, that seamlessly integrates into the underlying philosophy of universal adult suffrage and the concept of 'No voter to be left behind.'

A larger recognition to the rights of 'Persons with Disability' came from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that stress upon respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy and independence of voter, freedom to make one's own choice, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, accessibility etc.

'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 defines a "person with disability" as a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and

effective participation in society equally with others.' This would in effect mean inherent barriers to inclusion of such persons in the electoral process.

### **Elections Provide Choices**

Elections provide for exercise of choices by the voters to elect their representatives based on adult suffrage and it calls upon the Election Machinery to provide for that (i) eligible citizens are registered as voters in the electoral roll and (ii) voters are empowered to make choices for their representatives by casting the vote. Persons with Disabilities (PwD) constitute a special section of society that requires an affirmative action wherein the electoral machinery has to reach out to them for registration as voters and provide suitable facilities at the polling stations to enable them exercise their franchise.

### **Breaking Barriers**

The barriers in access to electoral participation that may be perceived by the PwDs relate to difficulties in voter registration, inaccessible registration materials or facilities, inadequate or inaccessible voter education and related materials, difficulties in physical access to polling stations, inability to vote independently and privately, absence of or inappropriate assistance from poll workers etc. The list is only illustrative but in effect it means discouraging PwDs from exercise of their right to franchise.

Barriers do dissuade persons with disabilities from voting.

In a democracy in true spirit of universal adult suffrage, every vote matters, every vote counts. Given this fundamental premise, equal access is vital to participation for PwDs. The Barriers can be obliterated if they are addressed appropriately and effectively under a well designed Policy Framework.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE ECI 2016-25**

### **STRATEGIC PILLAR 6; PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**Goal 1: Inclusive** -Special facilitation for registration of certain category of voters including Differently-abled electors, etc.

**Activity 1:** Electoral Roll to be made PwD friendly by identifying such voters in a dedicated section of ER, within each part. It envisages constitution of a Working Group on Facilitation and Inclusion of PwDs.

**Goal 2: Accessible** – Improving and strengthening accessibility for electoral registration with envisaged outcome of Barrier free electoral registration.

**Outcome: Barrier –free electoral registration.**

**Activity 1:** Making available one voter's facilitation center at every District Head quarters.

**Activity 2:** Making available one Voter Facilitation center at every Block Head quarters.

**Activity 3:** Integration with CSC's- Integrating the facility of Common Service Centers voter related services throughout the country by adopting service area approach.

### **STRATEGIC PILLAR 5; ELECTION MANAGEMENT**

**Goal 1: Strengthening planning processes**

**Activity 3:** Strengthening Basic Minimum Facilities in Polling Stations.

**Activity 4:** Lowering Physical and administrative barriers for voting.

### **STRATEGIC PILLAR 8; ELECTORAL LITERACY AND EDUCATION**

**Goal 1:** Activities 1 and 2 cover information, motivation and facilitation inter alia for PwDs.

### ECI's Broad Policy Framework

ECI's broad policy framework on Accessible Elections emanates from the guiding principles and the mandate as discussed above. Further, its Strategic Plan for 2016-25 spells out long term the strategic interventions and the current focus of in a continued endeavor for enhancement of inclusion of PwDs as an integral part of its election management including voter education.

### Directions and Guidelines of the Commission

Directions of the Commission on the subject focus on the following broad areas in Election Management and Planning:

- Identification of PwDs including polling station wise lists;
- Facilitation in filling up voter registration forms;
- Assured Minimum Facilities at Polling Stations, preference in obtaining facilities at polling stations, Matdata Sahayata Kendras and other election offices in the field;
- Involvement of NGOs, CSOs/DPOs, RWAs;
- System Sensitization and Training;
- Use of technology to provide help to PwDs;
- Cooperation of Political Parties
- Building a comprehensive Statistical Data Base.
- Utilising the services of volunteers;
- Training and Sensitization of Officials handling the work relating to PwDs.

### SVEEP

Voter education and Outreach for PwDs is an integral part of the SVEEP Plans. Broad areas of coverage are as below:

- An officer well versed with provisions of facilities for PwDs, shall be designated for each of the Assembly Constituencies.
- Wide publicity through various modes shall be ensured. Basic publicity material shall be prepared with simple language, sign language, Braille.
- Special/Mobile camps should be

organized to educate and motivate PwDs

- Efforts should be made to prepare volunteers from NCC, NSS, NYK etc to motivate and create awareness among PwDs.
- Publicity regarding services offered by CSC, MSKs should be enhanced.
- Efforts shall be made to have renowned PwDs as District Ambassadors and District, State icons.

### Lok Sabha Elections 2014

During the Lok Sabha Election 2014, ECI initiated several measures that made registration process voter-friendly.

- Online registration & name search facility in Electoral Roll on ECI's & CEOs' website.
- SMS based services for searching name and polling booth.
- Information on election laws, guidelines and details regarding ROs, AROs, BLOs on CEOs' website.
- Voter Facilitation Centers (VFCs) for E-Roll issues and EPIC.
- Forms 6, 7, 8 & 8A at prominent places including banks, post offices, colleges, universities & schools.
- Nation-wide Special registration camps held in weekly *haats*, during festivals and through mobile vans to facilitate voters for checking their details on the voters' list.

**ECI has implemented several measures to ensure basic facilities at the polling stations making them conducive for PwDs to cast their vote. Some of them are as below:**

- Braille signage on the Ballot Unit of EVM
- Construction of ramps – temporary installed where permanent ramps had not been provided.
- Entering polling stations without waiting in the queue.
- Facility granted to take wheel chairs inside polling stations.
- Polling personnel briefed about the



provisions of Rule 49 N of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, for permitting a companion to accompany a blind/infirm elector.

- Electors with speech & hearing impairment were given special care as in the case of other disabled persons.
- Poll personnel were trained & sensitized regarding special need of PwDs.
- Special Directions of the Commission were given for providing adequate facilities to the PwDs.

Provided Basic Minimum Facilities (BMF) at the Polling Station, such as

- location of polling stations preferably at the ground floor in good quality buildings with separate entrance and exit
- drinking water,
- toilets,
- provision of first aid,
- adequate space with ventilation, sufficient lighting & amenities like chairs, benches & covered shelter

### **Voter information and Awareness**

Wide publicity to all available facilities by means of print and electronic media including social media has been given besides holding meetings with political parties and candidates.

### **Initiatives in the Year 2018**

During the year, the Commission has launched the theme 'Accessible **Elections**' on the eve of the Nationals' Day 2018. An international seminar has been organized on 'Inclusion of the Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Processes'. The seminar is hosted on the VOICE. NET Platform for knowledge sharing across the world.

The Commission has already set up a Steering Committee to deliberate on the major challenges faced by the PwDs with a view to consolidate the status of facilities and

address the challenges in this area. A series of guidelines have already been issued on the subject. We intend consolidating our efforts on accessible elections during the year.

### **A Premise for Way Forward**

ECI directions and guidance is based on the premise that the PwDs have the right to full electoral participation, on basis of equality and shall not be discriminated against on any grounds. The rights of PwDs have to be respected, protected and promoted as per the mandate. In this context 'Accessible Elections' and enabling environment for the same provide an opportunity for electoral participation. ECI continues support in its endeavor to provide effective and efficient information, awareness, facilitation for enhanced participation for PwDs. And as such ECI is committed to ensure that PwDs feel encouraged and confident to enjoy their rights of electoral participation without any discrimination whatsoever.

**UMESH SINHA**

**Senior Deputy Election Commissioner  
Election Commission of India**



REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

# ACCESS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The number of stable population in the Republic of Moldova is around 3,557.6 thousands persons. According to the State Register of Voters, a number of 3.2 million citizens with the right to vote are registered. According to the data of the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection, and Family, the total number of the persons with disabilities accounts for 183,415 persons, representing about 5.2% of the total population.

Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova pays a special attention to enhance the accessibility of the electoral process for the persons with disabilities. This represents one of the main objectives of the institution, also established in its Strategic Plan for 2016-2019. The voters with special needs were not subject to international observation. The monitoring reports of the biggest observer's mission, OSCE/ODIHR reveal that the following categories of voters were most frequently under focus: the ones residing abroad, ethnical minorities, voters from the separatist region of Transnistria, and women.

The participation of persons with disabilities in voting has represented a topic of observation for one national nongovernmental organization, during the Parliamentary elections in 2009, 2014 and the local elections in 2011. The mass-media monitoring reports during the electoral campaigns also do not reflect to what extent the persons with hearing and visual disabilities had access to the information about the candidates or about their electoral platforms.

More than a half of the polling stations are opened in public buildings. According to the data revealed by the Ombudsman reports, about 46% of the public buildings (premises of public institutions and authorities, law enforcement bodies, courts, etc.), complied to a certain extent with the accessibility conditions set for persons with mobility disabilities.

Starting with 2015, Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and the Center for Continuous Electoral Training under the CEC,

have assessed the accessibility of the polling stations established in the country through the interview method and questionnaires addressed to the polling stations officers. Only 15% of them met the technical access conditions for the persons in wheelchairs.

### **Characteristics of the electoral system in the Republic of Moldova**

The citizens elect via direct vote: the Parliament, local public administration and the President of the Republic.

The voting right is held by the citizens who have turned 18 years old, except for those who have been deprived of the respective right.

One single restriction is set for the exercised of the right to elect and to be elected – the persons whose incapability has been recognized by a final court decision. This provision refers to the persons who “as a result of a mental disorder (mental disease or mental deficiency) cannot be aware of or manage their actions” (Civil Code, art. 24). This category of citizens also covers the persons with psycho-social disabilities. Currently, a draft law initiated by the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family to abolish the respective restriction undergoes the legislative process of the Parliament. The given draft was positively endorsed by the Central Election Commission.

### **The Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova regulates 3 voting possibilities:**

- Ordinary voting – according to the general procedures (art.53, par. 1).
- Assisted voting (art. 54, par. 1) - provided when the “Voter cannot fill in all by himself/herself the voting ballot and is entitled to invite in the voting booth another

person, except for the members of the precinct electoral bureau, representatives of the electoral candidates and of the persons authorized to assist the electoral operations. These cases shall be registered separately in the report of the precinct electoral bureau”. The assisted voting may be considered both, in case of persons with different disabilities, as well as in case of other persons (e.g. illiterate persons, persons with reading deficiencies).

- Voting at the place of stay (with the mobile ballot box) (art. 55 par.4) - if due to health reasons or any other well-grounded reasons, the voter cannot come to the voting premises, the precinct electoral bureau shall appoint, upon the voter’s written request, at least 2 members of the bureau who will go with a mobile voting box and the necessary material for voting to the place where the voter stays, for him/her to vote. The requests may be lodged in written form, starting with 2 weeks before the voting day till 18.00 o’clock of the day preceding Election Day. During the Election Day, the requests may be lodged in written form till 15.00 o’clock, if a medical certificate is presented. These persons vote according to the voters’ list for voting at the place of stay, compiled by the precinct electoral bureau based on such voters’ requests, and the persons who are not included in such a list cannot vote at the place of stay. In the voters’ list, the note “voted at the place of stay” is mentioned in the row with the name of the respective person. These provisions may be also applied in case of the persons with disabilities.

### **Legislative safeguards**

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was signed by the Republic of Moldova on March 30, 2007 and ratified by the Parliament on July 9, 2010. For the purpose of implementing the UN Convention, the

Parliament has adopted the Law No. 60 dated 30.03.2012 on Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, guaranteeing a number of rights to participate in public life and provides for:

- The right to adequate, accessible and easily understood and used voting procedures and materials (implementation of alternative voting modalities),
- The right to free opinion about political parties and their candidates, including by organization of electoral debates and radio/TV shows in mimic-gesture language, printing out electoral materials using the writing systems used by the persons with visual deficiency, and by using other information tools accessible for persons with disabilities.

The Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova, that regulates the organization of all types of elections and referendum, sets forth that the premises of the polling stations should be established, as a rule, in public buildings and shall be equipped so as to facilitate the access of elderly persons and persons with disabilities. The task to endow the respective premises with everything that is necessary is held by the local public authorities. CEC has only the role of developing the regulatory framework for uniform enforcement of the legislation in the area. Hence, via one of its decisions, the CEC provided for the polling premises to be established only at the first floor of building, in more accessible places.

Also, the Commission has approved and adjusted its own normative acts. Before the parliamentary elections from 2014, the CEC has approved an Instruction regarding the infrastructure of the polling station. This document sets forth the conditions to be met by the premises of the polling stations for conducting the voting process in good conditions. Thus, based on CEC's request, the

local public authorities (LPA) have organized the polling stations at the first floor of buildings so as to facilitate the access of persons with special needs.

In April 2015, before local elections, CEC has amended the Regulation on the electoral campaign media coverage that established recommendation for all electoral subjects to ensure accessibility of disseminated information to people with special needs by all available means - subtitles, sign language language etc.

In 2015 CEC also adopted the Declaration on the accessibility of the electoral process for disabled persons that later was transformed into the Regulation on the accessibility of the electoral process for people with disabilities (26/01/2016). According to this documents the Commission has taken the obligation to broadcast informative spots with the translation in sign language, to equip polling stations with informative and illustrative materials with enlarged font, and to adjust its websites to easily accessible format for the persons with visual impairments. The Precinct Electoral Bureaus were given the task to provide the necessary assistance for persons with disabilities and/or those with special needs. At the same time, the local public authorities were asked to adapt the polling stations, as well as the roads/paths to this polling stations, to the needs of the voters with disabilities. The documents called for political parties, election candidates and media that broadcast the electoral events, to ensure the information of voters with visual and / or hearing impairments by alternative means.

### **Recent achievements of the Central Election Commission**

CEC cooperates actively with the civil society organizations dealing with promotion

of rights and interests of the persons with special needs, so as to identify solutions for ensuring personal exercise of the right to vote.

During the parliamentary elections from 2010, CEC tested in a pilot project, a solution for the blind persons to vote without assistance. It included the use of a template-envelope with the help of which the voter identified the preferred electoral candidate. The template-envelope was manufactured of some hard material (carton), having the form and the size of the ballot paper, and having some circles cut in it, which coincided with the circles printed on the ballot paper, within which the voter should apply the stamp "voted" in line with the preferred electoral candidate, according to the rules of the Electoral Code. The ballot paper was introduced in this envelope, the voter was palpating with the fingers the cut holes, afterwards identifying the preferred candidates and applying the stamp "voted". Hence, the voter did not need any assistance anymore. A polling station was equipped with such a template-envelope, around which persons with visual disabilities live compactly. The project was extended during the Parliamentary Elections in 2014.

Starting with General Local Elections of 2015, all the opened polling stations are equipped with special envelopes (2 envelopes per station). They were improved – besides the perforated circles (for the application of voting stamp), it had the order numbers of the candidates in Braille language. The design of the envelop permits the voter to use it independently.

Remark: The ballot is organized in a linear form, all the electoral candidates are listed from the top to the bottom in the order of their registration, maintaining the same positions during the entire electoral campaign, except for the cases when they withdraw from campaigning.

A new tool meant to facilitate the electoral procedures for the blind persons and persons with poor eyesight was implemented starting in 2011 – the special rulers for identifying the voter in the voters' list. This ruler contains two cuts, which correspond to the respective fields in the list: name and signature of the voter. This cut helps the blind voter to sign within the quadrangle exactly in line with his/her name in the list.

It was for the first time during the 2014 parliamentary elections when CEC has standardized the electoral logistics equipment. Special voting booths (with the size of 50 cm\*30cm\*150cm) were procured for the persons with mobile disabilities or other persons with special needs. In case of persons with visual disabilities, the voting booths were equipped with additional light source. To facilitate the access of persons with mobile disabilities in the polling station, special ramps were established at the entrance of some polling stations. These premises were selected together with the local public authorities and "Motivation" NGO.

For the presidential elections of 2016, CEC has equipped all the polling stations with magnifying glasses, for voting of persons with partial visual impairments. Also, the Commission approved the implementation of the project "Social policies for realization of electoral rights by persons with disabilities" by a group of NGOs. The project provided two opportunities: the first is to offer the persons with visual impairments to vote by using TV closed systems (STVCI) that will be installed in polling stations and the second - to facilitate, by request, the communication process for persons with hearing impairments. STVCI systems were installed in 3 polling stations. The interpreters for persons with hearing impairments were present in 3 polling stations from the capital.

For the successful electoral education and information of persons with disabilities about the voting procedures, CEC has developed and printed, in cooperation with NGOs, the Voter's Guide in Braille language. There was developed the audio version of this guide and a poster which shows the voting procedure. Also we shoot a methodical-didactic film "Direct and Secret Voting of Persons with Disabilities through the Special Envelope" and organized trainings for the voters with special needs. All these informative materials are sent via mail to all the territorial organizations of impaired persons from Moldova. As well, trainings. Information campaigns conducted by CEC, namely video spots, are produced with sign language translation and subtitles. Similarly, press briefings and meetings of the CEC from the Elections Day, are assisted by the sign language interpreters. Also, the trainings for the electoral officials from lower electoral bodies, held by the Center for Electoral Training, includes a module dedicated to the insuring of the accessibility of the polling station, including behavior rules of the polling stations officers when they are dealing with persons with disabilities.

### **Inclusion of persons with disabilities in organizing the voting process**

It was for the first time, during the parliamentary elections on November 30, 2014, when a person with mobile disabilities was included as member of a precinct electoral bureau. CEC organizes information campaigns to encourage the voters with special needs to become future members of electoral bodies. As well, during the parliamentary elections in November 2014, the CEC has accredited 31 national observers from the "Motivation" Association from Moldova, of whom 16 are persons with mobile disabilities and 2 – with hearing disabilities.

Objectives to be achieved by CEC in the area of inclusion of persons with special needs  
CEC's short-term objectives in the area of accessibility to voting:

- Setting a special column in the State Register of Voters dedicated to persons with special needs: this group of persons will be easily identified and thus it will be known to which polling stations to provide special attention. Preparation of an interactive map of the polling station, that will include information on accessibility;
- Involving more persons with disabilities as electoral officials (members of precinct electoral bureaus);
- Completing the normative framework with provisions related to the binding duty to ensure mimic-gesture translation of all informative materials related to electoral topics and of the electoral debates organized at the radio and TV.

CEC's long-term objectives in the area of accessibility to voting:

- Improving continuously the normative acts so as to ensure full accessibility of the polling stations and to facilitate the electoral procedures for the persons with disabilities;
- Developing alternative voting means: remote voting, voting with the help of special equipment for blind persons.

# ***BREAKING THE BARRIERS***

**ADDITIONAL  
READINGS ON  
ACCESSIBLE  
ELECTIONS**

by  
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Senior Fellow,  
Election Commission of India



## AFGHANISTAN

# AFGHANISTAN: CONTRIBUTING A VOICE; VOTER EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS

## INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan has a total population of about 33 million. Going by the 15% estimate laid down by WHO, the population with a disability is estimated at 5 million. Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 18 September, 2012. The democracy and the electoral processes have evolved in Afghanistan in recent past in a sustained manner. The Joint Electoral Management Body followed by the Independent Election Commission, despite the challenges before them, have initiated the voter education process in Afghanistan with the help of international organizations such as IFES, UNDP etc besides the in house activities. Separate Media Commission under the IEC has been established under the law to ensure fair access to the public mass media.

### Voter Education

Voter education campaign has been carried out by the EMB in Afghanistan through posters and leaflets. The Posters, some of which are discussed as follows, convey a focused message of encouragement to different categories of voters including PwDs for participation in the electoral process

### Contributing a Voice

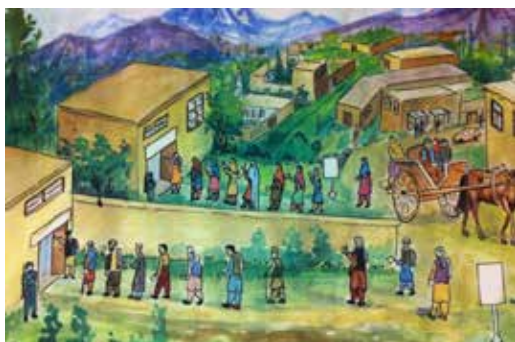
The poster illustration shown below is part of a voter education presentation that was used to explain as to how a successful vote leads to an elected official joining Afghanistan's government. It was produced by the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) and supported by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the 2005 election.





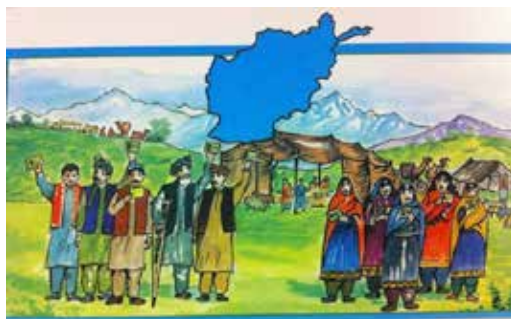
## Voting on Election Day

The inclusive illustration shown below was part of a series of voter education posters produced by the IEC, Afghanistan to support understanding of voting procedures and encourages the PwDs also before the Election.



## Registered voters

The illustration shown above was part of a series of voter education posters produced by the IEC. It explains as to how to register as a voter before the election in simple yet effective manner. Emphasis on accessible election is also projected in the poster.



*( Source; Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan)*



ARMENIA

## ARMENIA: VOTING ON ELECTION DAY

The Disabled Center for Development of Education and Culture (PAROS) led a coalition of 9 disability organizations to implement a project supported by IFES designed to empower Armenians with disabilities to participate in the 2007 and 2008 elections for the National Assembly (parliament) and Presidency. The national program on disability awareness and enfranchisement made the elections amongst the most accessible and inclusive in the history of Armenia.

PAROS led the development of an informational campaign to raise awareness on the equal rights of Armenians with disabilities, including political and electoral rights. A series of televised public service announcements were aired nationally and Armenian journalists provided positive media attention on project activities (such as the development of a tactile ballot guide). An increased awareness of disability rights was complemented by strong support from the Armenian government and endorsements by high-ranking elected officials and election candidates



*This poster from the campaign in Armenia calls for equal access to polling stations.*



# ELECTIONS CANADA: ACCESSIBILITY POLICY AND SERVICE OFFERING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

## INTRODUCTION

Elections Canada is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to the Parliament of Canada. EC's important responsibilities include conducting federal elections, by-elections and referendums. EC's long-term vision envisages accessibility to be an ongoing process to provide inclusive, universal and flexible services that benefit everyone and in the recent years they have specially focused on reducing barriers for people with disabilities.

### Policy for People with Disabilities

EC developed the current policy for People with Disabilities (PwDs) in February 2015 in consultation with EC's Advisory Group for Disability Issues. EC launched this Advisory Group in 2014 to fulfill its commitment to ongoing consultations with groups that represent people with disabilities. An early outcome of this consultation came in February 2015, with the development of an Accessibility Policy and Service Offering.

### Accessibility

EC is committed to inclusive, universal and varied services that respond to the needs of all electors. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the right to vote in federal elections in Canada. The Canada Elections Act provides for a variety of voting methods and allows the Chief Electoral Officer to advertise the services it offers for assisting voters with disabilities. EC has worked to remove the obstacles voters may encounter by making continual improvements to the electoral process, including communications and administrative processes. To ensure accessibility, the voting process includes the following features:

- Flexible voting methods: voting by mail or at a local Elections Canada office; advance voting days; mobile polls serving facilities for seniors or persons with physical disabilities; and, in special cases, voting at home in the presence of an election officer and a witness.

- As much as possible, level access to local Elections Canada offices, polling stations and other premises used during an election.
- In the event that a polling station does not have level access, provision of a transfer certificate on request and permission to vote at another location.
- If requested in advance, sign language interpreters to assist electors at the polls.
- The ability to have an election officer, a friend or a relative to assist an elector with a disability in marking his or her ballot at the poll.
- Voting screens that admit plenty of light, lighted magnifiers to make the ballot easier to read, Braille and large-print lists of candidates on Election Day and tactile and Braille templates that fit on top of a ballot.
- Requisite training to election officers and community relations officers for meeting the accessibility needs of people with varied disabilities.

### **Policy, a Living Document**

EC intends to continue working with the disability community to better understand accessibility issues and reduce barriers. Accessibility policy and Service Offering document has a specific focus on the tools and services that people with disabilities can expect when they vote. This document is intended as a “living” document to be updated following the next general election in light of accessibility best practices, evaluations and as new opportunities for improvements arise. Among other things, the policy describes the mechanism for feedback, complaints and inquiries from individuals concerning accessibility. Elections Canada welcomes any

input that will help it to better serve PwDs. Questions or feedback on this policy may be provided to EC online at 1-800-463-6868.

### **EC's Commitment**

EC is committed to building upon the accessible electoral framework that Canadians trust and use, to be responsive to the needs of Canadians of all abilities, to working to accommodate voters and employees with disabilities, to make the voting experience as accessible as possible and to engage people with disabilities about the services that affect them. In this context, EC is committed to adopting the following principles:

- Design for choice and flexibility by thinking inclusively.
- Educate and inform Canadians using plain language.
- Provide Canadians with modern and convenient ways to access information, register and vote.
- Improve the voting experience and make it easier to participate by removing barriers.
- Support the independence, and respect the dignity, of people with disabilities.

### **Accessibility Initiatives**

Elections Canada works on a continued basis to remove the obstacles voters may encounter by making improvements to the electoral process, including communication and administrative processes. Since the last general election in 2011, EC has implemented a series of measures to improve the accessibility of the electoral process. These include:

- Enhanced and expanded cross-disability training for both election workers and Elections Canada staff.

- Increased investment in community outreach for people with disabilities.
- Improved signage and voting screens at polling places.
- New voting tools such as magnifiers and Braille lists of candidates.
- A polling place accessibility review process that follows a new checklist of 35 accessibility criteria.
- Improvements to website accessibility ( see Link for details).
- A revamped communications campaign that presents information in plain language and in accessible formats.
- Greater consultation and outreach programs to share information. EC works with national and provincial organizations and, through their networks, gain an additional way to reach people with disabilities.

### **Informed by Consultation and Research**

Elections Canada's ongoing accessibility initiatives build upon research and consultation undertaken since the last general election in 2011.

In 2011–2012, Elections Canada met with 19 national and provincial disability organizations across Canada. The goal of this exercise was to build better relationships with the disability community and gain a better understanding of its needs and the barriers that people face. In 2014, Elections Canada launched its first ever Advisory Group for Disability Issues.

## **The Voting Experience – Tools and Services at Polling Places**

### **Polling Places**

In consultation with experts and the disability community EC has developed accessibility criteria for polling stations. The returning officers use Accessibility Checklist to evaluate the accessibility of potential sites prior to the election. This checklist contains 35 criteria, 15 of which are mandatory. After an election is called, EC sends out a voter information card to all registered voters indicating the accessibility of polling places with the following information, in one of three ways:

- The site meets 15 accessibility criteria. The accessibility symbol is displayed, along with where to find more information.
- The site is wheelchair accessible. The accessibility symbol is displayed, along with the phone number that you can call for help.
- The site has no wheelchair access. The accessibility symbol is not displayed, but voters are encouraged to call their returning office for alternate location.

Voter Information Service also provides complete details of accessibility to the concerned voters. EC's help lines also provide guidance. Tools and Services

EC provides a variety of tools and services for PwDs:

- Magnifiers with light (4x)
- A tactile and Braille voting template that fits on top of a ballot
- Large-print lists of candidates
- Braille lists of candidates (available on election day only)

- Language or sign language interpretation (to be requested in advance)
- Assistance in marking a ballot
- Improved voting screens that let in more light
- Information through video if required.

### **Language or Sign language interpretation**

If a voter requires language or sign-language interpretation on Election Day, he may request Elections Canada to provide the service as per time prescribed. Online service through TTY is also made available

### **Service Animals**

Elections Canada supports the use of service animals to assist voters with disabilities when they go vote at polling places. Election workers are fully aware that service animals are working animals and should not be distracted, spoken to or offered food.

### **Assistance from Others**

Voters with disabilities may require the assistance of a support person to help them vote. Support people provide assistance to a person with a disability and may be a family member, friend, personal support worker, intervener or sign-language interpreter. The support person will be required to take an oath to respect the secrecy of the voter's choice. A deputy returning officer can also help a voter mark the ballot. This will always be done in full view of a poll clerk.

### **Assistive Devices**

Voters with disabilities, in particular people with a visual impairment, may use a personal mobile device, such as a smart phone, to read their ballot behind the voting screen. All reasonable steps should be taken to preserve the secrecy of the vote.

**Community Relations Officers for Accessibility**  
The Community Relations Officer program was created to reduce barriers to voting faced by certain groups of voters. Officers provide information on when, where and ways to register and vote as well as the tools and services available to voters.

EC has added community relations officers for accessibility across Canada to engage voters with disabilities and local organizations, and to serve as a resource to the returning officer. Additionally, information on accessibility has been included in a new communications booklet and toolkit provided to all community relations officers.

### **Training for Election Workers**

The training program takes into consideration the time constraints associated with training electoral officers and incorporates in-class and online training. Our online training modules, including videos, are fully accessible and have been tested by people with disabilities.

Elections Canada's accessibility training:

- Makes election workers aware of accessibility tools at the polling place.
- Provides tips on how to maintain these accessibility features.
- Makes election workers aware of various tools available to voters, and
- Educates them on how to approach a voter who may require assistance.

### **EC's Website**

The Elections Canada website is compliant with the federal standard on web accessibility, which follows World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) accessibility guidelines (version 2, level AA). EC is always working to improve the website's accessibility.



# DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: 'RIGHT TO CHOOSE PROJECT' FOR PERSON WITH DISABILITIES

## INTRODUCTION

Dominican Republic has a population of 10 million of which 1.2 million persons are estimated to be with a disability which means 11.9 percent of the population. Dominican Republic ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in August, 2009. This ratification strengthened the regulatory framework and efforts for inclusion inter alia for the equal voting rights and access.

### Legislative provisions

Article 121 of the Electoral law provides for assistance to the electors with disabilities to the extent that an individual trusted by such voter may accompany him to the polling booth and help him in preparing the ballot with the condition that such a person is not permitted to be too close to see or hear whatever is done or said while the ballot is being prepared. Article 23 of the National Law on People with Disabilities, 2013 provides that people with disabilities enjoy and experience legal capacity in equal conditions as the rest of the individuals in all aspects of life.

### Plan of the Decade of the Americas for the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities in the Dominican Republic (2006-2016)

This plan establishes the responsibility of States to ensure recognition and exercise of the civil and political rights of people with disabilities in all matters of interest to the community.

### Barriers to Electoral and Political Participation

In spite of implementation of initiatives by the Dominican Republic, barriers still persisted against people with disabilities in exercise of their civil and political rights. In addition, inclusion may also be hindered due to discrimination and stigma towards people with disabilities. Different types of barriers faced by people with disabilities included mobility, cognitive, sensory, and psycho-social, communications besides information barriers.

### 'Right to Choose Project' for PwDs

'Right to Choose Project' was started in April



2012. The project aims at inclusion of PwDs in the Electoral and Political processes of the country and seeks to motivate key public officials for creation and strengthening the conditions for inclusion in political participation. The main objective was to increase awareness through broad based engagement and consequent improvement in participation of PwDs in political and electoral process.

The project was established by La Red Ibero-americana de Entidades de Personas con Discapacidad Fisica (La Red), a Latin American network of organizations of persons with physical disabilities. The project emerged from the context of 2012 presidential elections through coordination of organizations such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), La Red, the Dominican Republic Central Electoral Board (JCE) and a host of other sister organizations that played an important role in the project. The National Council on Disability (CONADIS) provided support and collaboration with the implementation of sensitization activities.

### Approach

The project approached the challenge through establishment of National Observatory for the project with a vision to assess and oversee the inclusion. It aimed at following objectives:

- Inclusion of people with disabilities in the electoral and political processes.
- To act as a new platform to oversee and monitor best practices and lessons learned from the electoral process.

The Observatory included a team of 20 community leaders who were themselves PwDs from ten provinces in the country. These community leaders received training on the

rights of p and the significance of political participation. After the training, these leaders carried out sensitization talks, orientation and awareness visits in their communities, addressing people with disabilities and their families.

The three main outcomes of the project are:

- Political parties have been sensitized on the importance of including in their agendas, the issue of political participation of people with disabilities in electoral process.
- Increased awareness amongst people with disabilities and improved knowledge on their voting rights.
- Documentation of Best practices and lessons learned on inclusion in the electoral process.

### Best Practices

#### Best Practice 1: Design interventions by people with disabilities, for people with disabilities



La Red is comprised of entities for the rights of PwDs, majority of the staff is PwDs only. This provided an opportunity to increase the



number of people to participate in the activities and a larger empathetic environment and dedication. The project engaged more staff from amongst PwDs with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities to be lecture facilitators, electoral observers and technical staff.

### **Best Practice 2. National Scope Project's Implementation**



The institutional platform established by La Red in the project along with hubs established by collaborating entities of FENADID, CIMUDIS and ASODIFIMO at the national level ensured due regional representation in the project. The participants, who were leaders in their hubs from different regions, attended a three-day interactive session on issues and challenges relevant to political participation by people with disabilities, communication and self-esteem. The participants in turn, on return to their communities shared their knowledge and

experience gained through awareness lectures and home visits. Further on elections day, they participated in the electoral observation and identified the accessibility of various polling stations.

### **Best Practice 3. Create opportunities for participation**

Creating opportunities to promote participation and dissemination of information to PwDs and their families has a multiplier effect and as such an important step in changing perceptions and behaviors towards political participation. Reflection and participation opportunities have been generated during the project through awareness lectures, meetings with organizations, and forums with political candidates, visits to political parties and dissemination materials. Spaces already established by the JCE have also been utilized in order to give visibility to people with disabilities in campaigns such as Verificate. During the awareness campaign, people with disabilities explained as to how the lack of information had affected their lives. Following comments illustrate the message:

“I am very pleased with the workshop because I used to feel intimidated in other electoral processes, and now I know that I have the same rights as others.”





"I want to assert my vote."



"A blind participant in the lecture expressed that he did not think of voting, because in the past he was not allowed to enter the polls with his companion. Now that he knows the

articles, which enable his right to enter with a person of his choice, and use a template to help him vote independently. He will vote in the future, and will do it with the template."

#### **Best Practice 4. Unify inter-agency efforts to achieve a commitment to expansion in the full inclusion of people with disabilities**

Agreements with government organizations responsible to regulate and influence the processes of participation were attained with a view to bolster sustainability and achieving visibility for PwDs in State policies and



initiatives. As per framework of the project, an institutional agreement was made amongst JCE, IFES and all the concerned organizations for PwDs, with CONADIS as a witness in its role as a government entity. This integration helped in future actions for holistic achievement of the rights of PwDs. As a consequence of this integrated effort, JCE included information for PwDs in Election Instructions manual. The JCE also included sign language in informative programs on TV and provided

access to information for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

### **Best Practice 5. Information Campaigns in Accessible Formats**



Following media coverage and impact thereof was achieved:

- A TV slot on the voting rights of PwDs, and
- Participation of several PwDs in radio and TV programs.
- People with disabilities became visible to the public.
- People with disabilities felt encouraged to participate in the electoral process and exercise their right to vote.
- The general public was informed that PwDs have equal right to participation and integration in social and political life.

### **Best Practice 6. General Population's Awareness and the Awakening of the Sector's Political Participation**



together with JCE in order to raise awareness of poll workers, such as executing a Verificate program activity.

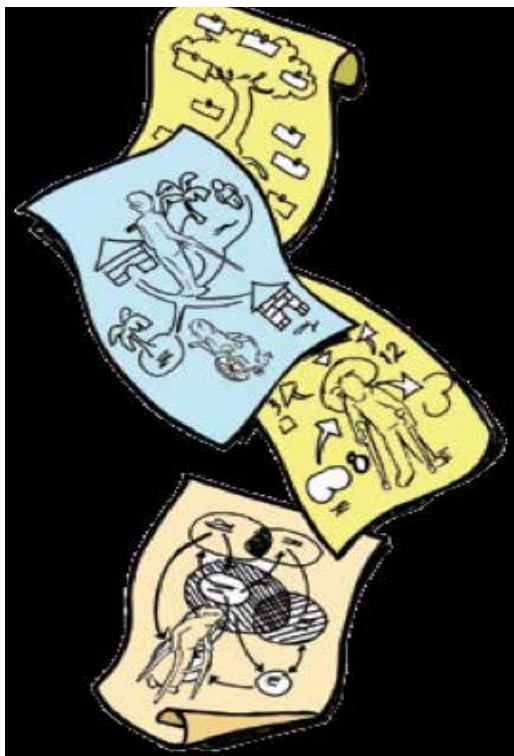


"A blind person from Los Mameyes told me that he was prevented from voting in the past elections, and he told the polling station worker that he had the right to vote. He stated 'Law 275 allows me to vote with a person of my choice, and sent his son to find the brochure [from La Red], presented it, and was able to vote.'"

### **Best Practice 7. Systematization and Base Line Establishment**

Systematic database and baseline creation is vital to documentation for status of political participation of PwDs. During the project period, regional and national inputs have been developed to broaden the field and scope of studies and data on status of people with disabilities, which was hitherto not available. Such studies bring out impact

of the project, besides serving as a reference point for course of action on future interventions



### Lessons Learnt



1 Reliable census for PwDs would prompt government and its institutions to focus on needed resources to ensure the electoral and political rights of PwDs

2 Political inclusion activities should be completed sufficiently before election year.

3 Understanding context limitations

- The political system in the country has to develop a broad based and a holistic approach for inclusion and aim at guaranteeing the full enjoyment of the rights to PwDs.

- A large proportion of PwDs are without proper identity documents, which poses problems in legitimate recognition and registration in electoral roll.

- Inadequacy of information and education means that many families discriminate against PwDs

4 Erroneous perceptions regarding involvement of public agencies in this type of projects

5 Adaptation or creating instruments to facilitate the vote of people with disabilities do not always lead to independent voting

6 Addressing the issues relating to voting rights of people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities

***Of the people with disabilities surveyed during the project, 80% expressed motivation to vote as result of their participation in the political rights workshops. However, they also recognized that there are still barriers within the electoral process***

**Voter Education through Posters and assistive devices**



A set of 2012 voter education posters in the Dominican Republic to increase their awareness and encourages PwDs to vote. The posters carry a larger educative value since they are in local language and explain the polling process step wise.



### Ballot Guide: An Assistive Device for Polling by PwDs

A ballot guide of Dominican Republic Central Electoral Board (JCE) is an assistive device which enables voters with visual disabilities to determine where boxes for each candidate are. It is hinged so that users are able to easily slide the ballot in and out.



### Television Spot

The “Right to Choose” project utilized multiple formats to reach voters with disabilities. An inclusive television spot was produced which showed persons with disabilities participating in the community and voting. It also incorporated an inset box with sign language interpretation in order to reach voters who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. The video empowered persons with different types of disabilities to take part in elections as active citizens and demonstrated the voting process.



### Barriers to electoral inclusion

During the monitoring and assessment of the electoral process, the following observations were made by the project program and technical teams and electoral observers. Following barriers to electoral inclusion are yet to be overcome as per the evaluation studies:

- Lack of informational and orientation material for people with visual and auditory disabilities, barrier to access polling stations and centers (ex: polling stations located on second and third floors, stairs, and/or lack of ramps);
- Low motivation of people with disabilities to be involved in the electoral process (working in polling stations and centers), in an official manner (with the JCE), or to represent political parties;

- Out of the six government plans from the presidential candidates, only two took into consideration issues facing people with disabilities;
- By other people telling them who to vote for, people with intellectual disabilities were being used as a means to obtain an additional vote, rather than exercising their right to vote and being respected for their participation;
- The JCE incorporated sign language in their citizen's information and orientation television programs;
- While assisted voting is included in the electoral law, there is still unawareness of this right for people with disabilities, their families and polling station workers;
- Lack of knowledge of auxiliary templates for people who are blind or with low vision, as well as family members and polling station workers; and
- Low training and information on the use and existence of the auxiliary templates for people who are blind or with low vision.



## HAITI

# INCLUSIVE VOTER EDUCATION IN HAITI

Haiti has a population of 10.1 million with an estimated 1.5 million persons with disabilities (PwDs) according to WHO's estimation level of 15%. Haiti ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 25 July 2009 and as such provides due recognition to the inclusion of PwDs in electoral and political process.

### Voter Education for PwDs in Haiti

Haiti embarked upon a simple yet very effective system of civic and voter education for the PwDs through attractive posters, signage's in collaboration and support from the International Foundation For Electoral Systems (IFES) under civic education series in 2015 before presidential and legislative elections. The series covers the electoral process stepwise with a clear message for inclusion and encourages the PwD voters to join the electoral process. Some of the posters are as follows:

#### Pre election period:

##### 1. All Our Voices Count

With a view to demonstrate inclusion at the time of presidential election in Oct 2015, the Provisional Electoral Council of Haiti (CEP) issued a poster encouraging all voters including persons with disabilities to join the electoral process. The poster in simple terms conveys the

message of inclusion and accessibility in an attractive manner.



##### 2. Go Vote

An educative poster captioned 'Go Vote!' was produced by local artist Jerry Bourisquot. The poster conveys an illustrative message to the

PwD voters to join the voting process. The poster given below is self explanatory and decisively encouraging to the targeted population.



### 3. At the Election Time: Arriving to Vote

An illustrative poster produced by local artist Jerry Bourisquot under the civic education series at the time of presidential and legislative elections in the country in Oct 2015 demonstrates inclusion and access. The poster conveys clearly the help that would be available to PwDs to facilitate entry to the polling station.



### 4. At the Election Time: Voting by All Citizens

An educative poster produced by local artist Jerry Bourisquot under the civic education series at the time of presidential and legislative elections in the country in Oct 2015 reflects inclusion. The poster conveys very clearly the equal opportunity, in presence of Election Observer, to all the voters including PwDs inside the polling station during the elections in the country.



### 5. Post Voting Period: Counting of Votes

The poster produced by the PEC and IFES (Jan 2016) in Haitian Creole explains the process that follows after the ballot has been cast. The poster shows PwDs working as polling/counting workers for processing the polled ballots. While it demonstrates the inclusion at all stages of electoral process, it also builds confidence in PwDs that information on inclusion has been recorded correctly.





KENYA

## INCLUSIVE VOTER EDUCATION IN KENYA

Kenya has a population of 45 million and the population of the persons with disability is estimated at 6.7 million (per WHO's estimation level of 15%). Kenya ratified the CRPD in the year 2008. Kenya has in place the 'Persons with Disabilities Act' 2003 to provide support and equal access to PwDs. Excerpts of Article 29 and 30 from the Act are given as below:

### **Persons with Disabilities Act (2003)** **Article 29**

(1) All persons with disabilities shall be entitled at their request, to be assisted by persons of their choice in voting in presidential, parliamentary and civic elections.

(2) A person who undertakes to render assistance under subsection (1) shall do so strictly in accordance with the instructions of the voter.

(3) A person described in subsection (2) shall bind himself, in the prescribed form, to comply with that subsection.

(4) A person who contravenes subsection (2) is guilty of an offence.

### **Article 30**

Polling stations shall be made accessible to persons with disabilities during elections, and

such persons shall in addition be provided with the necessary devices and assistive devices and services to facilitate the exercise of this right under this section.

*Voter Education using road shows A Citizen going through Voter Education materials at the ASK show in Kenya*



### **Voter Education Weeks: 'Informed Voter for Informed choices'; Emphasis on Inclusion**

During this week, the IEBC sensitize public on the importance of participation in the electoral process as well as boost the continuous voter registration process. Other issues highlighted cover inclusion and mainstreaming, party lists, political tolerance and dispute resolution mechanisms etc. The voter education weeks are implemented countrywide through outreach programmes to schools, electoral

technology exhibition, media campaigns, onsite service delivery, open stakeholders' forum, and town hall meetings. IEBC engages Stakeholders in advance to derive larger voter satisfaction from the event. IEBC has given a special call inter alia to the Persons with a Disability to participate in the forthcoming elections and all facilities are provided to such voters.

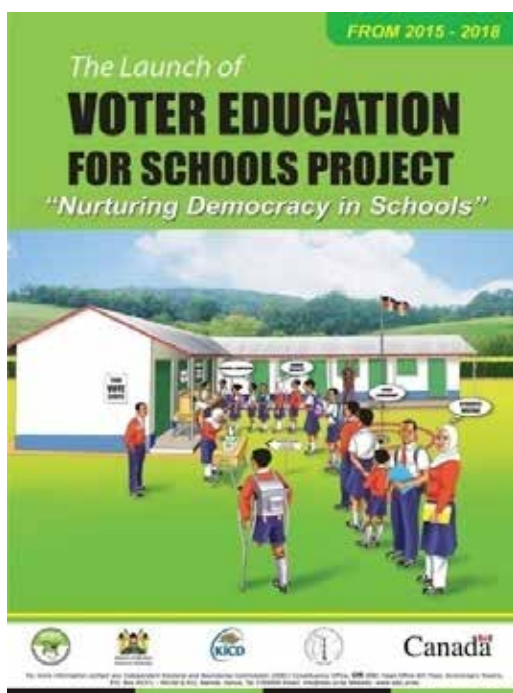
### **IEBC Collaboration with the IFES**

IEBC has collaborated with the IFES for facilitating Consultative forums for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), Women and Youth

forums. Further, IEBC also collaborates with the KCHR (Kenya Commission of Human Rights) for assessment of participation of Persons with Disabilities in general elections.

Inclusion of the PwDs is prominently demonstrated in banners displayed at the launch of a new voter education initiative for schools in Kenya. Led by the IEBC, the Kenyan Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Kenya Institute of Curriculum development (KICD) the project is supported by the IFES and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

*Banners Announcing Launch of 'Voter Education for Schools Project' in Kenya*





LIBYA

## LIBYA: 'ZAYKUM ZAYNA'

In 2013, an Electoral Access Working Group, that included members of the Libyan General National Congress, disabled persons' organizations, disability rights activists, and civil society members, was formed in Libya. Together, Working Group members launched a successful social media campaign called Zaykum Zayna ("As you are, we are") to promote awareness of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in Libya, emphasizing the right to political participation for men and women with disabilities.

The Zaykum Zayna campaign helped in development of voter education resources in braille and the provision of sign language interpreters for all press conferences hosted by the High National Election Commission. A collection of advocacy tools and information about trainings was also developed through the campaign.





MALI

## MALI: ELECTORAL ACCESS PROJECT

Boîte à images, or image boxes, were used by the Electoral Access Project in Mali (PAPEM) for a voter education project supported by IFES in Bamako in 2015. The pictures integrated persons with disabilities throughout the document, which used images to explain to voters how to participate. By including voters with disabilities in the drawing, the project not only encouraged persons with disabilities to take part in the election but also increased awareness of other voters on the rights of persons with disabilities to take part in political and public life.

Trained facilitators used the images to help explain the voting process. The wordless format enhanced access of persons with low literacy as well as voters with intellectual disabilities. Image boxes have also been used around the world in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti to increase awareness of participation in political life and elections.





# VOTER EDUCATION FOR ACCESSIBLE ELECTIONS IN MYANMAR

## GENERAL

Myanmar has a population of 56 million out of which 8.5 million population of disabled people is estimated to be 8.5 million (as per the 15% estimate of the World Health Organization). Myanmar ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in December 2011. Myanmar made sustained efforts for inclusion in 2015 electoral process.

### Voter Education

The Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI) collaborated with the Union Election Commission (UEC) to develop an inclusive voter education posters, brochures, logo and pamphlets etc that provide guidance and instructions for voters with disabilities and the public as such on how to cast their ballot for October 2015 elections. Visuals with simple language and clear message help mitigate communication challenges that may occur especially for people with low literacy levels besides effectively addressing the problem of barriers to inclusion. Use of local language further helped in dissemination. These

materials were used as a vital component of the Voter Education Campaign in 2015 elections in the country.

The initiative was supported by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Swiss Agency for development and Cooperation, and the United Kingdom department for International development (DFID). Some of the best practice materials are briefly mentioned step wise in the following:

### Encouraging Everyone to Vote: The LOGO

In support of the 2015 elections in Myanmar, UEC and the MILI developed a logo for a voter education campaign. Using a logo for a campaign allows voter education materials to be identified as part of a broader campaign and helps emphasize the importance of election accessibility. The logo was used on several voter education materials, including brochures and for voter education concert held in Myanmar.



## Supporting the Right to Vote



As the 2015 election approached, UEC of Myanmar and MILI worked to create a campaign in advance, encouraging persons with disabilities to vote and participate in the election. The production of the poster was supported by IFES.

## Encouraging citizens to register and vote



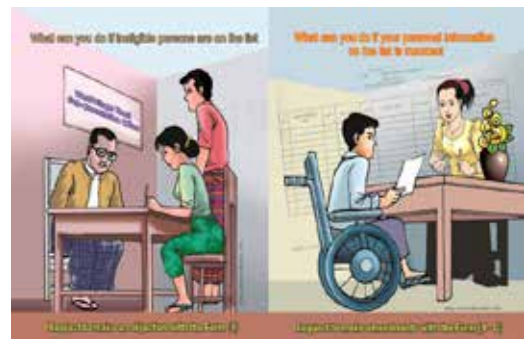
to encourage citizens including PwDs to register and vote. It was created 2015 elections with support from the IFES

## Citizens and voter registration



This poster was also produced by the Myanmar UEC with the support from IFES to encourage citizens to register to vote for 2015 elections

## Registering to Vote



This poster provides information on how voters can submit a form to correct their voter registration information or to report that a registered voter may be ineligible to participate in elections.



## Guidelines for Voting



In support of the 2015 elections Myanmar UEC and MILI developed a brochure explaining the guidelines for accessible voting. The brochure was printed and distributed with support from the United Kingdom's DFID, the Australian government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the IFES

## Providing Guidelines on How to Vote



In support of the 2015 elections the Myanmar UEC and MILI developed a brochure explaining the guidelines for voting. The brochure was printed and distributed with support from the United Kingdom's DFID the Australian government's DFAT, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and IFES.

## Voting by Persons with Disabilities



MILI in collaboration with the UEC developed an inclusive voter education poster that provides instructions for men and women with disabilities on how to cast their ballot in October 2015 elections. The poster was produced with support from IFES, DFID and other agencies referred to above.

## "Get-out-the-vote concert"

During Myanmar's historic 2015 election, MILI also organized a mobile "Get-out-the-vote concert" with IFES' support. This campaign presented a unique method to inform persons with disabilities about their right to vote and to encourage them to cast their ballots on Election Day.



For three days, MILI members drove around in an open-bed truck lined with voter education posters and a band of musicians with disabilities. The truck stopped in six towns where the band performed popular songs to gain the attention of persons in the neighborhood. After performing the first few songs at each location, MILI spoke to voters about the elections, providing information on voting and polling procedures as well as emphasizing how voting empowers citizens and allows them to have a voice in their country's future.

### **Voter Education Pamphlets Distribution Campaign**

During this time, volunteers also distributed 4,000 voter education pamphlets (discussed in the foregoing). The pamphlets outlined information on polling procedures for voters

with disabilities and highlighted the different types of available assistance, step-by-step process of voting and illustrated the process with animations of voters with visual, hearing or physical disabilities.

### **Accessible Polling Stations**

MILI targeted towns that were among the 15 towns where the Union Election Commission (UEC) piloted more accessible polling stations on Election Day. At these polling stations, which were located near schools and hospitals, the UEC provided polling officials who had received disability access training from MILI and other DPOs. At these locations, voters with visual disabilities were also able to use Braille ballot guides when casting their ballots. These guides allowed voters who are blind to cast their ballot independently and in secret.





**NEW ZEALAND**

# NEW ZEALAND: INCLUSIVE VOTER EDUCATION, DISABILITY STRATEGY AND INITIATIVES FOR PwDs

## INTRODUCTION

All the New Zealand citizens have right to have their voice heard and as such, equal access to enrollment and voting at elections. In this context, the Electoral Commission of New Zealand provides efficient and effective electoral assistance in terms of enrollment and voting to persons with disabilities, aboriginals, other categories requiring voter assistance besides women. The initiatives of EC NZ are supported by the provisions of the Elections Act 1993 and the rules made under this Act.

### Access 2020 Disability Strategy

EC NZ has developed Access 2020 strategy taking into account the improvements made during last three elections and integrating them into a long time framework. Through this process, the Commission aims to identify and remove the barriers that the PwDs face at the time of enrollment and exercising their right to vote. The focus of the disability strategy of EC NZ is to support persons with disabilities and their families 'whanau and caregivers' for participation in electoral process.

### Initiatives of EC NZ

EC NZ continued all of its initiatives from the 2011 general election through 2014. Main initiatives include the following:

- information in accessible formats including Braille, large-print, audio format and screen reader files
- information and consultation opportunities in New Zealand Sign Language
- DVD resource kits and facilitation guides for voters with an intellectual disability
- Plain English resources including posters, booklets and DVDs

### Special Voters

#### Special Voters Defined under the Law

As provided under the electoral legislation of New Zealand, a person who is otherwise

qualified to vote may vote as a special voter under inter alia the following conditions:

- A person intends to be absent or is actually absent from the district on the day of polling;
- a person who intends to be outside or is actually outside New Zealand on the polling day;
- a person is unable to attend to vote at any polling place in the district by reason of illness, infirmity, pregnancy, or recent child-birth;
- a person is unable to vote on the polling day by reason of a religious objection;
- a person satisfies the Returning Officer or the issuing officer that on any other ground it will not be practicable for him to vote at a polling place in the district without incurring hardship or serious inconvenience.

Special vote can be cast only as per prescribed procedure under the law.

### **Blind, Disabled or Illiterate Voters**

An elector who is wholly or partially blind or whether because of physical handicap or otherwise, unable to write or has severe difficulty in reading or writing, or is not sufficiently familiar with the English language to vote without assistance, can vote as per

prescribed procedure under the Election laws of New Zealand. The law elaborates the procedure as well as the nature of assistance that may be provided to such voters.

### **Provision of Telephone Dictation to Blind Voters**

EC NZ delivered telephone dictation voting to voters who are blind or visually impaired or have another disability with the result that they are unable to vote independently and in secret at the 2014 General Election.

### **Enrolling and Voting in Sign Language**

The election resources of EC NZ provide information and guidance for enrolling and voting in New Zealand sign language for voters who require this assistance.

### **Hospital Votes**

The electoral regulations define 'Hospital Votes' and provide for electoral assistance to a person who is a patient in any hospital, maternity home etc. Such persons have to apply for a special vote and the assistance is provided as per prescribed procedure to such applicants.

Details of the Access 2020 disability strategy and other disability resources of the Electoral Commission, New Zealand can be accessed at its website for voter information, awareness and educative purposes



# PARAGUAY: VOTER EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

## INTRODUCTION

Paraguay has total Population of 6.8 million of which, population with a disability is estimated at 1million (as per World Health Organization's 15% estimate). Paraguay ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 03 September 2008 and as such recognizes equal access to the persons with a disability for electoral process including voting rights.

### Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities

The Supreme Tribunal of Electoral Justice (STEJ) has done a pioneering work for voter education for PwDs. In this endeavor the STEJ has taken several initiatives in collaboration with civic society organizations. Some of these are listed as below:

#### VE for PwDs through Posters

In 2015, with assistance from Fundación Saraki and the United States Agency for International Development, the produced a large poster to explain the different types of election

accommodations available for people with visual, hearing, intellectual, physical and psychosocial disabilities. During the municipal elections in November 2015, STEJ also produced and distributed posters with large photos and clear instructions to assist/support all voters, including those with disabilities, in understanding the voting process on Election day



#### VE Accessible Voting Guide

In 2015, Fundación Saraki, a Paraguay organization dedicated to supporting the rights

of persons with disabilities and their access to elections produced 'The Accessible Voting Guide', which carries a message "a disability doesn't take away the right to vote" on the cover, explains step-by-step instructions to vote, as well as recommendations to make voting processes more accessible to persons with disabilities. This voter education guide educates and informed persons with disabilities of the regulations in Paraguay that support voters with disabilities. (Details may be seen at <http://www.saraki.org/>)



*Voting Guide*



*Voting Brochures*

## VE Brochures

Fundación Saraki, a Paraguayan organization dedicated to supporting rights of persons with disabilities, produced a number of brochures on access to elections. The brochures aim at providing learning information on assistive devices for PwDs. This resource also elaborates description for the process of voting at home, including who is eligible to do so. (Details may be seen at <http://www.saraki.org/>)

**Learning about Assistive Voting Devices**  
During municipal elections held in Paraguay in November 2015, STEJ provided the polling places with a poster that described different accessibility resources available for persons with disabilities. It included a magnifying glass for voters with low vision, a Braille template and instructions for using it in Braille, a pencil grip for voters with reduced mobility in their hands, instructions with graphics and in sign language for voters who were Deaf or hard-of-hearing, as well as priority waiting for pregnant women, nursing mothers and older adults.



*Voting Brochures*



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# INCLUSIVE ELECTORAL LITERACY IN US

## INTRODUCTION

The rights of the voters with disabilities are duly protected under the Legislative provisions of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Electoral Assistance Commissions has taken several initiatives in the light of said legal provisions to provide equal opportunity to the voters with disabilities in the matters of awareness, voter education and their engagement in the electoral process.

***More than 35 million Americans with disabilities are eligible to vote. The US Election Assistance Commission (EAC) has a strong operational system backed by the legislation, infrastructure and technology to support and facilitate such PwDs and commitment to ensure that the election process, polling places and voting services are accessible for such voters.***

### Legislative Provisions under HAVA and ADA

Section 241 of HAVA provides that the EAC shall, inter alia, conduct studies on election administration issues to the 'Methods of ensuring the accessibility of voting,

registration, polling places, and voting equipment to all voters, including individuals with disabilities (including the blind and visually impaired), Native American or Alaska Native citizens, and voters with limited proficiency in the English language.' The studies are made available to the public and are aimed at promoting effective administration of federal elections. The studies are used to develop a framework most convenient, accessible, and easy to use for voters, including members of the uniformed services and overseas voters, individuals with disabilities, including the blind and visually impaired, and voters with limited proficiency in the English language; will be nondiscriminatory and afford voters an equal opportunity to vote. The legislative provisions, studies and the framework referred to above also include 'Methods of educating voters about the process of registering to vote and voting, the operation of voting mechanisms, the location of polling places, and all other aspects of participating in elections.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Help America Vote Act (HAVA) require that all Americans have the same opportunity to participate in the voting process, privately and independently.

Thus law provides equal opportunity to the voters with disabilities besides the voters from the marginalized sections.

### **Voluntary Guidance on Voter Education for Electoral Process**

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission, in view of the mandate under Section 311 of HAVA, has developed and adopted a series of voluntary guidelines for voter education and election management in collaboration with local election officials and consultative process envisaged under Section 311 of HAVA. These guidelines provide valuable guidance on best practices in strengthening the voter education programmes besides managing efficient and effective elections.

Voter education as such, has a significant impact on voter turnout. Well planned and well designed programmes do motivate and encourage electorate to participate in the electoral process in an enlightened manner and in larger numbers. EAC provides cards for persons with disabilities for easy guidance.

### **EAC's 'A Voter's Guide to Federal Elections'**

Voter Guides are highly informative and simple to read and cover all aspects of electoral process and available on EAC website. The guide is intended to help voters including those with disabilities or besides those from marginalized section to successfully navigate the Federal election process in a holistic manner from registering to vote through casting a ballot on Election Day. In addition to providing the basics of casting a ballot, this guide includes information on voter eligibility, early voting, alternative registration and voting processes for uniformed and overseas citizens, and polling place accommodation that make voting more accessible to all sections of voters. The voter guide is available in eleven

languages: Cherokee, Chinese, Dakota, English, Japanese, Korean, Navajo, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Yupik so as to maximize the voter coverage from all sections of the society.. The Guides provide relevant links for helpful resources to voters on all matters relating to election process.. EAC Voter Guides are made available in the Election Resource Library of the EAC on its website.

Relevant extract from Voter's Guide relating to Voters with disability is given below:

#### ***"IS VOTING ACCESSIBLE FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES?"***

***Most polling places are designed with accommodations to make the voting process more accessible to all voters, including those voters with disabilities.***

***Accessibility accommodations include clearly marked parking spaces, entrances with ramps, and well-marked routes and signage indicating the way to voting locations. Polling places must have voting equipment that is accessible for individuals with disabilities, including non visual accessibility for the blind and visually impaired, in a manner that provides the same opportunity for access and participation (including privacy and independence) as for other voters.***

***If you have questions about the accessibility of your polling place, or if you need information about voting equipment for individuals with disabilities, contact your State or local election office. (See list of Available Resources at the end of this guide.)"***

### **Accessible Voting Technology Initiative**

The EAC's Accessible Voting Technology Initiative (AVTI) supports accessibility research on transformative technologies and approaches. Through the AVTI, the EAC has produced over 45 solutions for assisting voters with disabilities. The initiatives include the EAC's

Military Heroes grant to provide assistance needed for recently injured military personnel to participate in elections.

### **EAC Voter Resources**

One of EAC's primary mandates under the Help America Vote Act is to serve as a central resource for information about elections. Through EAC's national clearinghouse, the public including persons with disabilities can conveniently access information on registering to vote and serving as a poll worker along with studies on how, where and when to vote. EAC maintains the National Mail Voter Registration Form (in seven languages), which can be used in any state to register to vote and update their registration information for a federal election. EAC also provides information on contact information for the state election offices. Resources for Voters may be listed as follows

- Register and Vote in Your State.
- National Mail Voter Registration Form
- Become a Poll Worker
- Overseas and Military Voters
- Voting Accessibility
- Election Calendar
- Election Resource Library
- Helpful Links
- Voter Guides
- Social Media Sites of Election offices
- The Electoral College

### **Resources for Voters with Disabilities**

This comprehensive list of resources for voters with disabilities includes links to voting accessibility laws and regulations and the latest best practices and research pertaining to voters with disabilities and elderly voters.

### **EAC's Resources: Quick Start Series EAC's '6 Tips for Making Voting Accessible'**

The EAC has collaborated with local election officials to develop a series of helpful tips for voter education and election management. This series provides ideas and suggests best practices to help run efficient and effective elections.

### **EAC's '10 Tips for Voters with Disabilities'**

Before you vote in the next election, know the voting process in your State. The following tips from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission examine the options available to help voters with disabilities vote privately and independently.

These tips and examples can help to make voting accessible to everyone including inter alia the voters with a disability.

### **Voting Accessibility**

EAC Commemorates the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by hearing 'How to Make Voting More Accessible for Individuals with Disabilities' The event was intended to explore ways to make voting more accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Commissioners heard testimony from accessibility advocates, experts, and individuals with disabilities regarding the progress made to ensure HAVA's requirement that individuals with disabilities be given the same opportunity to vote freely and independently as other voters

Commissioners met July 28, 2015 to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ADA and explore ways to make voting more accessible for individuals with disabilities. Commissioners heard testimony from

accessibility advocates, experts, and individuals with disabilities regarding the progress made to ensure HAVA's requirement that individuals with disabilities be given the same opportunity to vote freely and independently

as other voters. Partnerships with non-partisans HAVA provides for partnerships with non-partisans for electoral assistance to PwDs and marginalized sections of society.

# YOUR FEDERAL VOTING RIGHTS



**As a Voter with a Disability,  
you have the right to:**

- **Vote privately and independently**
- **Have an accessible polling place** with voting machines for voters with disabilities

**you may either:**

1. **Seek assistance from workers at the polling place** who have been trained to use the accessible voting machine, or
2. **Bring someone to help you vote**

**You may request your local election officials to tell you about any voting aids, voting assistance, and absentee ballot procedures that are available.**

## **Ensure your right to accessible elections**

For more information, contact the  
U.S. Election Assistance Commission  
**By phone at 866-747-1471**  
**By email at [beready16@eac.gov](mailto:beready16@eac.gov)**



# PROFILES



**O.P Rawat**

**Chief Election Commissioner, ECI**

Assuming charge as the Chief Election Commissioner of India in January, 2018, Mr O.P Rawat joined ECI as an Election Commissioner in 2015, prior to which he retired as Secretary to the Govt. of India, Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, Department of Public Enterprises. During his long career as an officer of the Indian Administrative Service, he served at various important portfolios at Centre and State level. As Director/Jt. Secretary in the Defence Ministry he was deputed to South Africa in 1994 as United Nations election observer to oversee first post-apartheid elections in that country. He received Prime Minister's Award in 2010 for excellence in Public Administration for innovative group initiative "Recognition of Forest Rights".



**Sunil Arora**

**Election Commissioner, ECI**

Hailing from the Rajasthan cadre of 1980 Indian Administrative Service batch, Arora, had previously served as Secretary to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting; Chairman and Managing Director to the erstwhile Indian Airlines. Having served in key positions with Air India and the Airports Authority of India Ltd, at various points in his career spanning nearly four decades, Arora was closely associated with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs holding the position of Director-General before being appointed to his present office as the Election Commissioner.



**Ashok Lavasa**

**Election Commissioner, ECI**

Mr Ashok Lavasa joined Election Commission of India on 23rd January 2018. He is a 1980 batch IAS officer and prior to joining Election Commission, he retired as Finance Secretary, Government of India. During his long career as an officer of the Indian Administrative Service, he served at various important positions at the Centre including in Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Civil Aviation etc and in the State of Haryana. He has Masters degree in Literature from Delhi University and an MBA from Southern Cross University in Australia. He is a writer and also an avid Photographer.



**Umesh Sinha**

**Sr. Deputy Election Commissioner, ECI**

Mr Sinha belongs to the Indian Administrative Service and has more than three decades of experience in administration and governance. He has held several important positions like Collector, Chief Development Officer, Commissioner and Secretary in various Departments. As the Senior Deputy Election Commissioner with over 7 years of electoral experience, Mr. Sinha is responsible for the Functional Division and the conduct of Elections throughout the country. He has initiated innovative programmes in the Election Commission of India, and won awards for the same.



**Dharendra Ojha**  
Director General , ECI

Mr Ojha joined the Indian Information Service in 1991 and worked in various departments and ministries including Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Tribal affairs in various capacities. He joined Election Commission of India in 2013 as Director. As incharge of International Cooperation Division, he has been supervising the international exchange programmes and as head of Communications Division he looks after media relation of the Election Commission of India.



**David Lang**  
Assistant Commissioner  
Australian Electoral Commission

David Lang is the Assistant Commissioner, Information Technology and Chief Information Officer at the AEC. Lang has previously served as the Australian Electoral Officer for the State of Western Australia and prior to taking up the role of CIO, Mr Lang managed the AEC's IT Infrastructure team. Prior to joining the AEC in 2010, Mr Lang worked in the private sector as CIO of ORIMA Research, a market research organisation.

Over the last 20 years, he has worked in a number of Information Technology roles within the Australian Government.

**Dasho Ugyen Chewang**  
Election Commissioner  
Election Commission of Bhutan

Appointed as the Election Commissioner of Bhutan on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015, Ugyen Chewang, is an engineer by profession. Completing his Bachelor of Civil Engineering from the Regional Engineering College, University of Sambalpur, Rourkela, Odisha, India, Chewang went on to

graduate with MSc. in Engineering from the Institute of Irrigation and Development Studies, University of Southampton, United Kingdom.

In the past 22 years of his service in various capacities, he has had an extensive contribution in the field of engineering in multiple organizations, including the United Nations- Mission in Sudan. Associated with many nationally as well as internationally funded development projects in Bhutan, Chewang served as the Chief Executive Officer/ Managing Director of the National Housing Development Corporation Limited before being appointed to the Election Commission of Bhutan in 2015.



**Yves Leterme**  
Secretary - General  
International IDEA

Yves Leterme, a Belgian national, is the Secretary-General of the Stockholm-based intergovernmental organization International IDEA. With degrees in Law and Political Sciences from the University of Ghent, prior to his stint with International IDEA, Leterme served as the Prime Minister of Belgium (2007 to 2011) during which the country held the presidency of the European Union and then as Deputy Secretary General of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris (2011 to 2014).



**Leena Rikkilä Tamang**  
Director (Asia-Pacific)  
International IDEA

Director for the Asia and the Pacific region and overseeing country programmes in Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan, Leena Rikkilä Tamang joined International IDEA in 2002. Between 2004-2013, she managed International IDEA's programme on Supporting Constitution-

Building Process in Nepal. Prior to her stint in Nepal, Tamang worked at the South-Asia Programme, including Burma/Myanmar at International IDEA.

She is a member and former chair (2001-2002) of the Network Institute for Global Democracy (NIGD). As a part of her work with NIGD, she coordinated projects promoting North-South Dialogues on democracy and globalization and was involved in the World Social Forum (WSF) process. Tamang is also a former Board Member of Asia-Europe (ASEF) Foundation.

Associated with the University of Tampere, she has worked in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Vietnam, Myanmar and published about democracy at the global level, on women's political participation, and on inclusive democratic processes.



**Antonio Spinelli**  
Head of International IDEA  
Nepal

Head of International IDEA's office in Nepal, Spinelli manages International IDEA's programmes in Nepal and South Asia. His work focuses on electoral processes, political finance, women's political participation and constitution building processes and on expanding International IDEA's work at regional and country level.

Spinelli's previous work includes extensive field experience. Since 1992, he has been engaged in the management of electoral assistance projects, mostly in transitional political and democratic settings, conflict and post-conflict environments and peacekeeping operations, for numerous organizations, among others, the United Nations, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the European Commission.

Spinelli authored the IFES Publication "Strategic Planning for Effective Electoral

Management" and the resulting "Strategic Planning for Electoral Management" Module of the BRIDGE Curriculum, assisting numerous electoral management bodies worldwide in their strategic and operational planning efforts.



**William Sweeney**  
President- CEO  
IFES

William Sweeney is the President and CEO of IFES. Prior to his appointment in 2009 as President, Sweeney served on the Board of Directors at IFES from 1993 to 2001, and as Chairman from 1999 to 2000. He has observed elections in the Philippines (1986), Russia (1994), Nicaragua (1996), Jamaica (1997), Mexico (2012), Kenya (2013), Pakistan (2013), Ukraine (2014), Indonesia (2014), Myanmar (2015), Guatemala (2015), Jordan (2016) and Georgia (2016).

In 2009, Sweeney was awarded an honorary Order of the British Empire for his service to the British Embassy.

Sweeney is a member of the Advisory Committee for International IDEA's Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security. He also serves on the board of directors of the National Foreign Trade Council Foundation.



**Vadim Filipov**  
Member of the Central Electoral  
Commission of the Republic of  
Moldova

Born on December 2, 1986 in Dubasari City, Dubasari Rayon, Republic of Moldova Vadim Filipov is a Master in Law from the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, Faculty of Law. Before joining the Central Electoral Commission of Moldova, Filipov served as a Legal Adviser to Agromasina JSC (2009-10) and later the Councilor of Chisinau City Council from 2015 to 2017.



## **Corneliu Pasat**

**Chief of Communication Public Relations and Mass Media Division**

**Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova**

Serving presently as the Chief of the Communication, Public Relations and Mass Media Division, Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova, Corneliu Pasat began his professional career as an International Relations faculty member of the Moldova State University before his long stint with BRIDGE-Building

Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections as an accredited Workshop Facilitator. As a part of his long career dealing with a range of electoral subjects including- political parties, observers, candidates, mass media, police, representatives of local and central public authorities, Pasat has also been involved in A-WEB's capacity building programme for middle-level electoral officials aside from being instrumental in organizing 9 national elections and referendums.



## **Esau Elliot Chulu**

**Chairperson**

**Electoral Commission of Zambia**

Justice Esau Elliot Chulu is the current Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ). He was appointed Commissioner of the Electoral Commission of Zambia in December 2009.

Before his association with the Electoral Commission, Chulu was an Advocate of the High Court and Supreme Court of Zambia and held various positions namely; Judge in Charge of both Commercial and General Lists - High Court, Lusaka; member of the Editorial Board

of Council of Law Reporting; Chairperson of the Bar/Bench Committee; Chairperson of the Legal Aid Board; and Chief Legal Counsel-Zambian Consolidated Copper Mines Limited (ZCCM). Justice Chulu has also served as Lecturer- Professional Conduct and Ethics at Zambia Institute of Advanced Legal Education (ZIALE).

He is a member of the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association (CMJA) and holds a Bachelor of Law (LLB) obtained from the University of Zambia- UNZA as well as a Masters in Law (LLM) obtained from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) United Kingdom (UK).



## **Dylan Bwalya Kasonde**

**Director – ICT**

**Electoral Commission of Zambia**

Dylan Bwalya Kasonde is an Information Security and ICT Governance expert. He is currently Director – ICT at the Electoral Commission of Zambia. Prior to joining the Commission, he was in charge of ICT Operations at the National Assembly of Zambia (Zambian Parliament).

He holds a Bachelors degree in Electronic Engineering from the University of Zambia, Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Science (MSc) in Strategic Planning from Edinburgh Business School in Scotland. He also holds a postgraduate diploma in Management of Democratic Elections from University of South Africa (UNISA) and certification in Strategic Frameworks for Non-governmental Organisations (SFNO) from Kennedy School of Governance at Harvard University, USA.





**'NO VOTER TO BE LEFT BEHIND'**



**ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA**

Nirvachan Sadan, Ashoka Road, New Delhi-110001