Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2155 (2017)[1]

The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Persons with disabilities are scarcely visible on the political stage and are still too often considered and treated as second-class citizens in most Council of Europe member States. The Parliamentary Assembly expresses concern about the fact that persons with disabilities face multiple challenges when trying to exercise their political rights, related to accessibility, inadequate support for the diversity of disabilities, an unjustified link between legal capacity and the right to vote and the frequent reluctance of political parties.

2. Political rights, such as the right to vote, stand for election and be elected, are fundamental human rights. Ensuring respect for the exercise of these rights by persons with disabilities does not mean creating a set of new rights or special rights for a specific category. Guaranteeing the respect of the political rights of persons with disabilities is a democratic issue relevant to the whole population, raising questions about the inclusiveness and efficiency of democratic systems.

3. In this respect, the Assembly recalls that several Council of Europe texts have already underlined the need to ensure full participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, such as Assembly Resolution 1642 (2009) on access to rights for people with disabilities and their full and active participation in society, Assembly Resolution 2039 (2015) on equality and inclusion for people with disabilities and Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)14 to the member States on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life.

4. The Assembly is convinced that the participation of persons with disabilities in political life can contribute to breaking down stereotypes, changing mindsets and combating overall discrimination. Concrete measures can be taken to facilitate access to voting and participation in elections, but they require political and financial commitments.

5. Political parties can play an essential role in tackling the lack of rights awareness and encouraging active participation of persons with disabilities. They can contribute to raising awareness of the importance of inclusion and participation of all, without discrimination, in political life.

6. The Assembly welcomes the adoption of the Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023, which presents an ambitious set of measures promoting the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities and calls for its swift implementation.

7. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member and observer States, and States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly to:

7.1. ratify without delay, for the States which have not yet done so, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which specifies international human rights standards for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, and ensure its full implementation;

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee,* acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 10 March 2017 (see Doc. 14268, report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Mechthild Rawert).

7.2. with regard to legal capacity:

7.2.1. delink the right to vote from legal capacity and full guardianship and, recalling Assembly Resolution 2039 (2015), replace substitute decision-making mechanisms with supported decision-making mechanisms, in respect of their international commitments;

7.2.2. ensure the protection and respect for the political rights of persons living in long-term care establishments;

7.2.3. make complaints mechanisms concerning the right to vote clear and accessible to all, irrespective of a person's legal status;

7.3. with regard to combating discrimination against and stigmatisation of persons with disabilities:

7.3.1. launch awareness-raising campaigns on the political rights of persons with disabilities, together with organisations representing persons with disabilities and disabled persons' organisations, in order to combat and break down stereotypes with regard to their capacity to participate in elections and run as candidates;

7.3.2. encourage visibility and participation of persons with disabilities in electoral debates in the media, and the broadcasting of political programmes and debates in accessible formats;

7.3.3. provide civic education in accessible formats;

7.4. with regard to accessibility of polling stations, information and procedures, including electoral campaigns:

7.4.1. ensure physical accessibility of public buildings, including polling stations, national, regional and local parliaments and government buildings, and guarantee that at least one polling station in every election district provides full accessibility;

7.4.2. ensure the provision of information about electoral processes, voting procedures and political programmes in accessible formats, including in easy-to-read and easy-to-understand versions, with sign interpretation when required, subtitles for videos and Braille versions;

7.4.3. provide ballot papers in accessible formats and tactile voting devices for blind people in at least one polling station in every election district;

7.4.4. consider linking State funding of political parties to their compliance with accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities;

7.5. with regard to assistance with voting and to remote and alternative voting:

7.5.1. provide, when requested, assistance with voting via supported decision making, and respect for the voter's free will;

7.5.2. hold training on non-discrimination and assistance to persons with disabilities for polling station officers and officers in charge of voter registration, in co-operation with organisations representing persons with disabilities and disabled persons' organisations;

7.5.3. prepare and disseminate guidelines on assistance to voters with all kinds of disabilities, in co-operation with organisations representing persons with disabilities and disabled persons' organisations;

7.5.4. set up mobile voting units and propose, when possible, electronic voting for cases where persons with disabilities are not in a position to go to a polling station;

7.6. with regard to active participation in elections:

7.6.1. systematise collection of data on the political participation of persons with disabilities at national and local levels to ensure that relevant support measures are taken;

7.6.2. consider the establishment of quotas for the participation of persons with disabilities in parliamentary and local elections, with a view to increasing participation and representation;

7.6.3. provide candidates with disabilities with additional financial support to cover the extra costs they might incur for carrying out electoral campaigns.

8. The Assembly, bearing in mind its Recommendation 1598 (2003) on the protection of sign languages in the member States of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament Resolution of 23 November 2016 on sign languages and professional sign language interpreters (2016/2952(RSP)), also calls on the member States which have not yet done so to recognise sign language as an official language.

9. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to not only guarantee accessibility of premises but also ensure the broadcasting of parliamentary debates and the provision of information on their websites in accessible formats and, as standard, to cover costs for assistance to parliamentarians with disabilities. It also calls on national parliaments to set up systematic consultations with organisations representing persons with disabilities and disabled persons' organisations for the preparation of any new draft law concerning the rights of persons with disabilities, respecting the principle "Nothing about us without us".

10. The Assembly encourages political parties to demonstrate their commitment to making political life more inclusive and representative by producing and disseminating accessible political manifestos and ensuring accessibility of their meeting premises and events. Political parties should promote participation and offer persons with disabilities electable positions on electoral lists.

11. The Assembly recognises the essential role of organisations representing persons with disabilities and disabled persons' organisations to promote the political participation of persons with disabilities and calls for financial support for awareness-raising projects in this field. Moreover, it encourages further co-operation between parliaments, political parties and these organisations.

12. The Assembly decides to publish easy-to-understand versions of its adopted resolutions and recommendations on the rights of persons with disabilities on its website. The Assembly shall also consider the feasibility of providing these texts in sign language interpretation on its website.