



A Booklet about: Watching Elections and Helping People with Disabilities take part in Elections



**Easy-to-Understand
Information**



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Watching Elections and
Helping People
with Disabilities
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This handbook was originally published in 2017 by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) as the [Handbook on Observing and Promoting the Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities](#).

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This book follows the European standards for making information easy to read and understand. Learn more at: www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read/

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Introduction



The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe is called the **OSCE** for short.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is called **ODIHR** for short.

ODIHR is a part of the OSCE.



ODIHR thinks it is important that people with disabilities have the chance to take part in elections.

Observers during the voting process

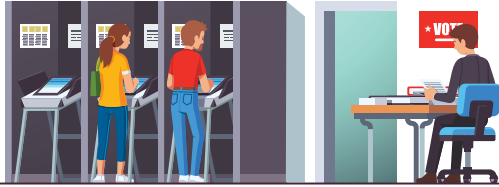


People called ODIHR **election observers** have the job of checking if elections follow **international laws**.

International laws are the rules between different countries that must be followed.



ODIHR election observers have the job of checking to see if people with disabilities get the chance to take part in elections.



This booklet tells readers about the things that help people with disabilities to take part in elections.



This booklet tells ODIHR observers about how to check that people with disabilities get the chance to take part in elections.



Disability

About 1 billion people in the world have a **disability**.

People with **disabilities** have different needs.



A person with a **physical disability** finds it hard to move around.

A person with a physical disability might use a wheelchair.



A person with a **sensory disability** can find it hard to see.

A person with a **sensory disability** can find it hard to hear.



A person with a **psychosocial disability** can feel unwell in their mind.

This means they might feel worried or sad.



A person with an **intellectual disability** can find it hard to learn things.



People with disabilities are a **diverse** group.

Diverse means that people are different from each other.



People with disabilities have different needs.

People with disabilities do not all think the same way about things.

People with disabilities have different ideas.



People with disabilities have different **priorities**.

Priorities are things that are most important to a person.



We need to understand that people with disabilities are diverse.

This will help make sure that people with disabilities are included in elections properly.



The world is changing all the time. People are learning new ways to think about things.

In the past we talked about helping people with disabilities with kindness and charity.



We now know that people with disabilities have the same rights as all people.

This is called **human rights**.

There is a document called the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**.



The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is called the **CRPD** for short.

The **CRPD** is a legal document about human rights for people with disabilities.

The CRPD tells us that people with disabilities have the same rights as all other people.



Part of the CRPD called **Article 29** tells us that people with disabilities have the right to take part in politics and elections.



Part of the CRPD called **Article 12** talks about accepting the decisions that people with disabilities make.

Article 12 also talks about people with disabilities getting some help to make decisions.



Getting help to make decisions is called **supported decision-making**.

Observers during the voting process



ODIHR election observers need to check that countries are doing what the CRPD says.



A person with a disability can take part in elections in lots of ways:

You can take part in politics when you are a **candidate for election**.

A **candidate for election** is a person who wants to work as a politician. A candidate for election wants people to vote for her or him.



You can take part in politics when you work on an **election campaign**.

An **election campaign** is the time before the election when politicians encourage people to vote for them.



You can take part in elections when you **vote**.

**There are four parts
to this booklet**



Chapter 1 talks about the CRPD and other important legal documents from around the world.



Chapter 2 talks about the **barriers** people with disabilities face with elections.

Barriers are the things that make it hard for people with disabilities to take part in elections.

Chapter 2 also talks about ways to help with these barriers.



Chapter 3 talks about each stage of the election.

Chapter 3 also talks about the things ODIHR election observers need to check at each stage of the election.



Chapter 4 talks about the different ways ODIHR election observers check elections.

Chapter 4 also talks about how the ODIHR helps governments.

Chapter 1

The CRPD and other important international documents



Over the years, many important documents have been written about people with disabilities taking part in politics.



Some of these documents are ideas and plans.

Some of these documents are **legal documents**.

Legal documents talk about the rules we have to follow.



The CRPD has the most information about people with disabilities taking part in everyday life and politics.



The OSCE says that a **pluralistic democracy** is the best way to make sure there is democracy and fairness for all groups.

Pluralistic democracy means that different groups of people are represented in politics and public discussion.



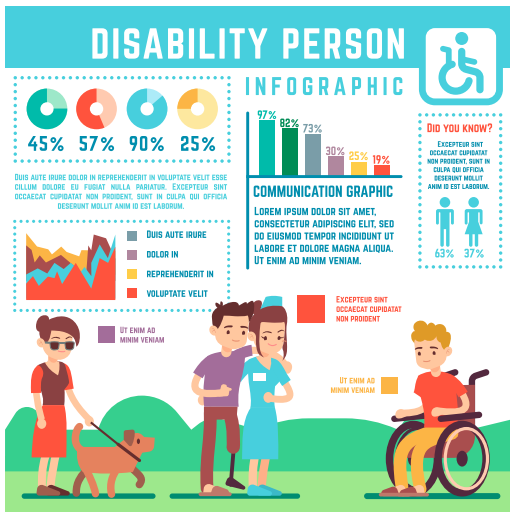
Years ago, people with intellectual **disabilities** could have their right to vote taken away from them.



The CRPD says that this is **discrimination**.

Discrimination is when a person or a group of people are not treated fairly.

The CRPD says that people with disabilities can take part in all parts of elections, without any discrimination.



The CRPD says that it is important to collect pieces of information about people with disabilities.

This information can be used to make good decisions.

The CRPD says that this information must be organised into different parts.

The different parts of information tell us about different types of people with disabilities.

The different parts of information tell us the best ways to help all people with disabilities to take part in politics and elections.



The CRPD says that it is important to talk to people with disabilities about laws and policies about disability.



It is important to get the opinions of people with disabilities about these laws and policies.



The CRPD says that people with disabilities should be able to use all public places and services in the same way as other people.

This is called **accessibility**.



The CRPD says that information needs to be available in ways that people can get it and understand it.

This is also called **accessibility**.



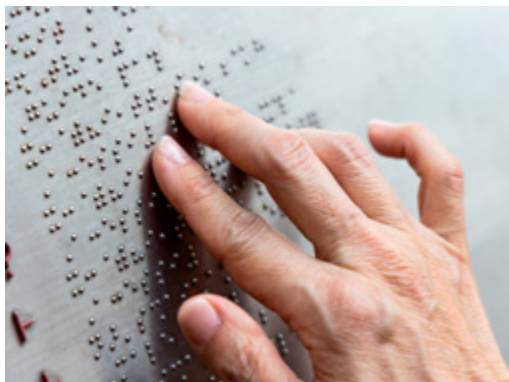
Audio information is information you can hear.

A podcast is a type of audio information.



Visual information is information you can see.

A poster is a type of visual information.



Tactile information is information you can touch.

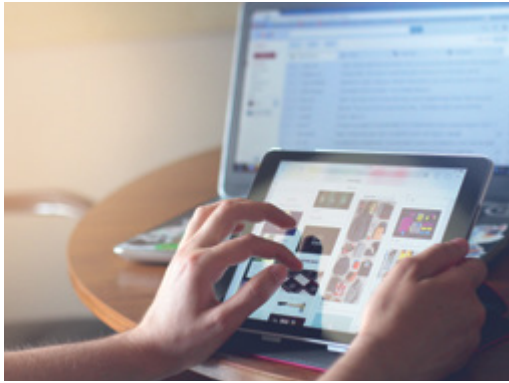
Braille is a type of tactile information.



Large text makes visual information more accessible.

Easy-to-understand information is information that is written down in plain language.

Easy-to-understand information has pictures.

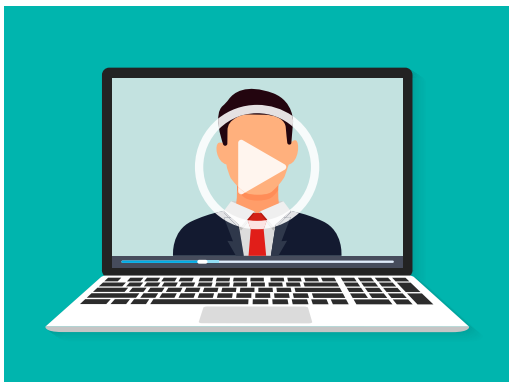


Audio-visual information contains information you can hear and see at the same time.

A video is a type of audio-visual information.



Information should be given in accessible places.



Information can be put on the Internet so that people who cannot travel are still included.



The CRPD says that:

- Information
 - Services
 - Places and
 - Products
- should be made with **universal design**.

Universal design means that environments are set up in a way that all people can use and understand things.



Sometimes a person may have extra needs.

These extra needs mean that information, products, places or services will need to be changed for that person.



These changes are called **reasonable accommodations**.

Reasonable accommodations are changes made to information, products, services or places so that all people can use them.



Part of the CRPD called **Article 29** talks about people with disabilities taking part in politics and elections.

Article 29 talks about easy to understand information being available at every stage of the election.

Article 29 says that **polling stations** need to be wheelchair accessible.



A **polling station** is the place a person goes to vote in an election.



The CRPD says that it is best for people with disabilities to vote at polling stations together with all other people.

This helps make sure their vote is secret.

A secret ballot is an important part of democracy.



Article 29 says that people with visual disabilities should be able to vote at polling station using an **assistive voting device**.

Assistive voting devices are things that make it possible or easier for a person with a disability to vote.



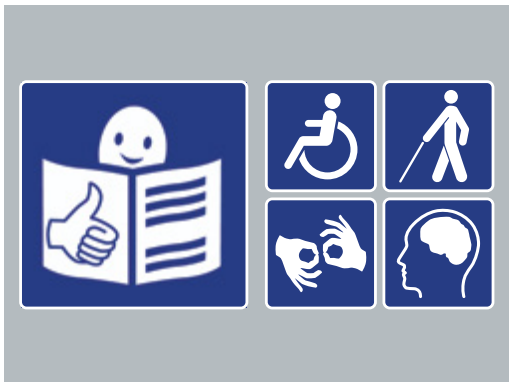
Article 29 also says that a person with a disability can be supported to vote at a polling station by a person they choose themselves.



Political meetings need to be in accessible places for people with disabilities.



This also means that people can take part in meetings using the Internet.



The information at political meetings needs to be accessible so that people with disabilities can understand it.



The information that political parties and candidates give out must be accessible so that people with disabilities can understand it.



When people with disabilities understand different information about politics they can make **informed choices.**

STEREOTYPE

Sometimes people think that people with disabilities are not interested in elections.

This is called a **stereotype**.

A **stereotype** is a belief about a group of people. Stereotypes can often be wrong and harmful for these groups.



The CRPD wants to make sure that people with disabilities are not treated this way.

The CRPD wants the **media** to show people with disabilities taking part in politics.

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Part of the CRPD called **Article 12** talks about accepting the decisions that people with disabilities make.

Article 12 also talks about people with disabilities getting some help to make decisions.



Getting help to make decisions is called **supported decision-making**.



The **European Court of Human Rights** is a court that hears complaints from people who say that their country has taken away one or more of their human rights.



This court is called the **ECtHR** for short.

What the ECtHR says matters to all countries in Europe.



The ECtHR heard a case about people with disabilities in Hungary.



The case is called Kiss vs. Hungary (2010).



The right to vote was taken away from these people because they had an intellectual disability.



The ECtHR said that all people with disabilities cannot be banned from voting.

The ECtHR said that a person with a disability could be tested to see if they are able to vote.



Important organizations have different interpretations about the rights of people with disabilities.

The CRPD says that testing a person with disability before they can vote is discrimination.

The CRPD says that all people with disabilities have the right to vote.

The CRPD disagrees with the ECtHR about testing people with disabilities.

Chapter 2

Barriers to taking part in elections



It is hard to get information about the number of people with disabilities who vote in elections



Some information says that people with disabilities are **under-represented** at all stages of elections.

Under-represented here means that there are not enough people with disabilities taking part in elections.



People with disabilities are under-represented as:

- Voters
- Candidates
- Politicians
- Election Observers
- Elected officials – politicians who make up the government
- Election administrators – people who run elections.



Some reasons why people with disabilities do not participate in elections are:

- Legal barriers – this means that the laws of a country make it too hard for a person with a disability to take part in elections.
- Negative stereotypes about people with disabilities.
- Information about taking part in elections is not accessible.
- There are not enough supports in place for people with disabilities to be part of elections.
- Not enough discussions with people with disabilities.

STEREOTYPE



Disabled People's Organisations are called **DPOs** for short.

DPOs talk about the barriers people with disabilities face.

The decisions and policies made with DPOs are more helpful to people with disabilities.



Disability People's Organisations say that people with disabilities not taking part in elections is because of discrimination.

It means that people with disabilities are **excluded** even more in society.

When people are **excluded** it means that they are left out of something.



People with disabilities are not **consulted** about issues that affect them.

Consulted means to ask the opinions of people with disabilities.



“Nothing About Us without Us” is the name of a campaign.



“Nothing About Us without Us” is about people with disabilities always being included in making important decisions about disability issues.



The CRPD says that people with disabilities and **Disabled People’s Organisations** need to be part of decision-making.



Women with disabilities face a lot of barriers to take part in elections.

There are not enough women with disabilities taking part in politics and elections.

Women with disabilities are an **underrepresented group** in politics.



Topics that are important for women with disabilities are not talked about enough.

These topics include the ability to participate in politics and to control their own lives.

Topics that are important for women with disabilities might be forgotten.

Chapter 3

The different stages of the election



ODIHR election observers need to think about the most important issues for people with disabilities taking part in elections.

This booklet has a list of the most important questions for observers at each stage of the election.



1. Pre-Election – this is the time before the election takes place.



ODIHR is an OSCE institution.

57 countries are members of the OSCE.

ODIHR observes elections in these countries.

Only a few OSCE countries have laws about people with disabilities taking part in elections.

Many countries do not recognize that a lack of universal design is discrimination.

Many countries do not recognize that a lack of reasonable accommodations is discrimination.



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ODIHR election observers need to check that Article 9 of the CRPD is being followed.

Article 9 of the CRPD talks about accessibility.



The places where campaigns and voting take place need to be accessible.

Some important things to have in place are:

- Ramps
- Car-parking for people with disabilities
- Wheelchair accessible bathrooms
- Signs on rooms.



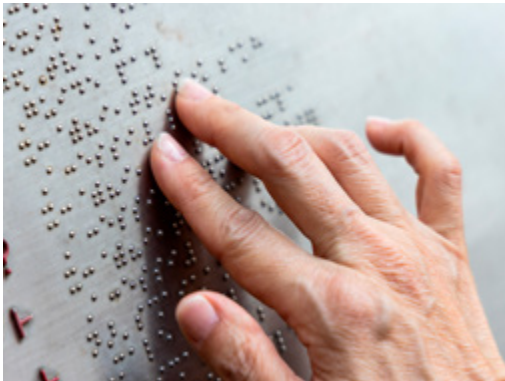


Information about elections needs to be accessible.

Before elections, people need to know about the things that are available to support people with disabilities to vote.

Assistive devices and mobility aids should be available.

Assistive voting devices are things that make it possible or easier for a person with a disability to vote. A mobility aid is an assistive device to help people move.



Article 2 of the CRPD talks about the different ways to communicate with different populations.

Information about elections needs to be in a tactile, audio and visual format.

Tactile information is information you can touch.

Braille is a type of tactile information.



Audio information is information you can hear.

A podcast is a type of audio information.



Visual information is information you can see.

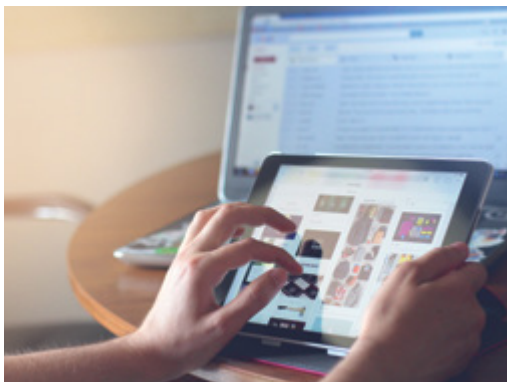
A poster is a type of visual information.

Large text makes visual information more accessible.



Easy-to-understand information is information that is written down in plain language.

Easy-to-understand information has pictures.



Audio-visual information contains information you can hear and see at the same time.

A video is a type of audio visual information.



Information on websites about elections need to follow special rules so that the websites are accessible.



ODIHR observers need to make sure that ballot papers are accessible to all people with disabilities.



Article 9 of the CRPD says that people working on elections need training about disability.



People with disabilities should be consulted before decisions are made about disability issues.

Consulting people with disabilities means to ask about their opinions.



People with disabilities may need more time than other groups to give their opinions.



Consultations with people with disabilities need to take place often.

This will help collect the opinions of people with disabilities.



DPOs should be consulted about the rules for holding elections.

Observers during the voting process



ODIHR election observers need to check if DPOs have been consulted about the management of elections.



ODIHR observers need to check if there are any laws in the country that say a person with a disability cannot vote.

In some countries there are laws that say a person with a disability cannot be a candidate.



When a person with a disability does not have the right to take part in elections, they can make an official complaint.



The media must consult with DPOs.

DPOs can help the media to make sure that information about elections is accessible.

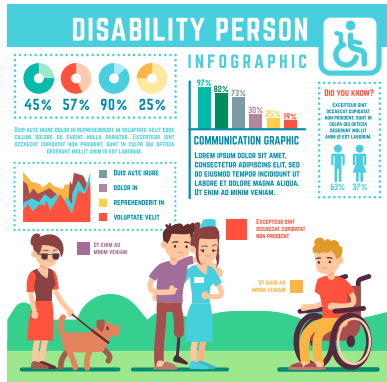


The CRPD says that the media must educate the public about voting in elections.

This education must be accessible to people with disabilities.

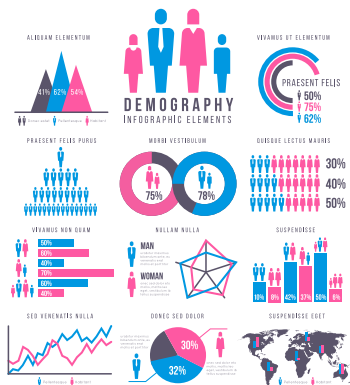


ODIHR observers need to check that it is accessible for people with disabilities to register to vote.



It is very hard to gather information about the different people with disabilities who take part in elections.

People with disabilities have the right to privacy.



It is hard to make sure the best supports are in place when information is not collected about:

- the different types of disabilities that people have
- age
- gender.



A good idea is to ask people about what help they need instead of asking them about their disability.



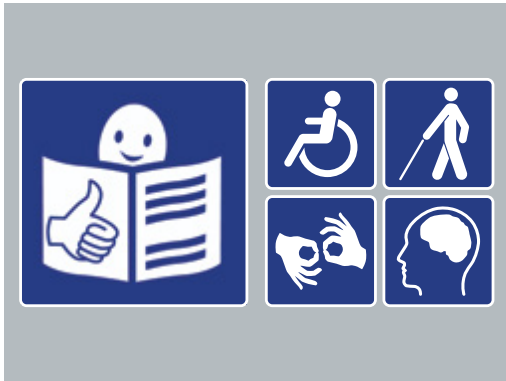
Not many OSCE countries provide help to people with disabilities to be candidates.

It is not always accessible for people with disabilities to be candidates.



A **political party** is a group of politicians who work together because they have the same priorities and ideas.

People with disabilities can also be members of a political party.



Political parties should make information about their plans accessible.



This helps to make sure that people with disabilities can make informed choices.



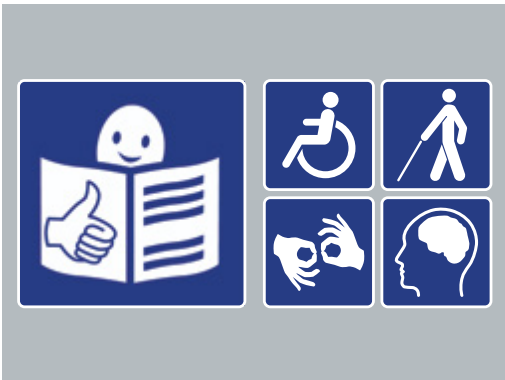
Political parties may need to provide extra help and money to help a person with a disability to be a candidate.



A candidate with disabilities for election may need **reasonable accommodations** such as an assistant for sign language.



2. Election Day – this is the day people vote in an election.



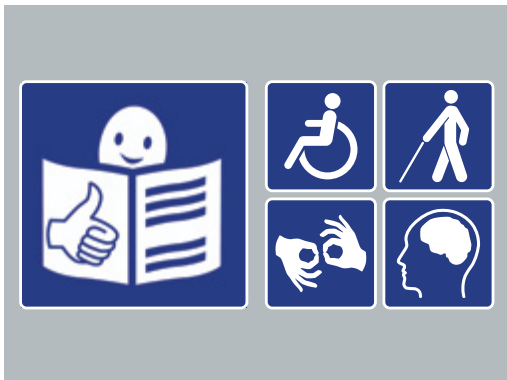
The CRPD says that elections must be organized in an accessible way.



The CRPD says that **universal design** must be followed.



Polling stations must be accessible for all people with disabilities.



Information about voting must be accessible for all people with disabilities.



ODIHR election observers need to check that people with disabilities can get help voting if they need it.



Voting materials and equipment must have universal design.



People with visual disabilities may need a:

- Magnifying glass
- Tactile ballot papers
- Braille ballot guides



People with different disabilities may need a person they choose to assist them to vote.

It is important that the person is chosen by the person with a disability.



If a person like a polling official assists a person with a disability to vote, it might mean that the vote is not secret.



ODIHR election observers need to check what the law says about assisted voting.

ODIHR election observers need to check that a person's vote is secret.



The CRPD says that it is best if people with disabilities vote at polling stations like others.

Sometimes this is not possible.

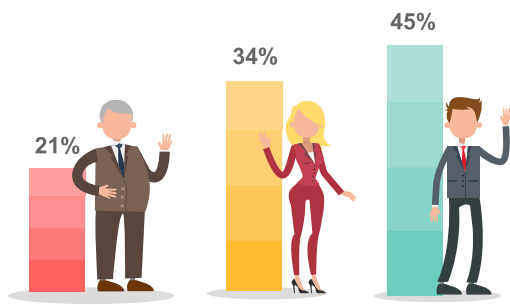


ODIHR election observers need to check that people can vote in other ways.

Other ways of voting are voting by post or mobile voting.



ODIHR election observers need to check that these other ways of voting are done in the best way.

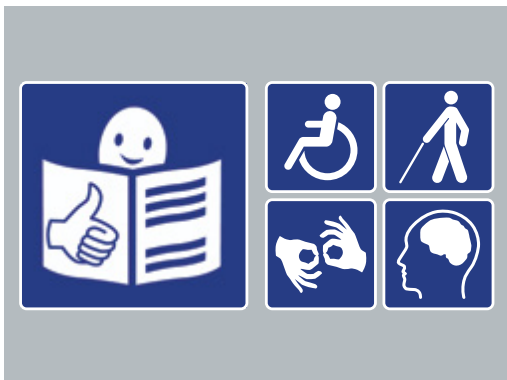


3. After the Election – this is the stage after people have voted.

It is important that people with disabilities know about the results of the elections in **real-time**.



Real-time is the time that election results are given out to the public.



Election results must be given out in accessible formats for people with disabilities to understand.

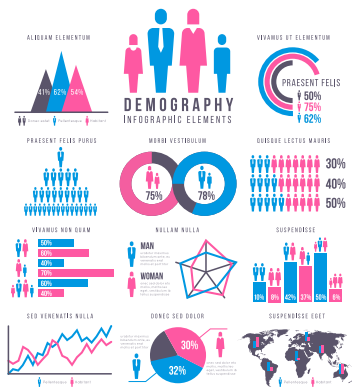


Article 13 of the CRPD talks about things being fair for people with disabilities.

ODIHR observers need to check that there is a way for people with disabilities to make a complaint about an election.

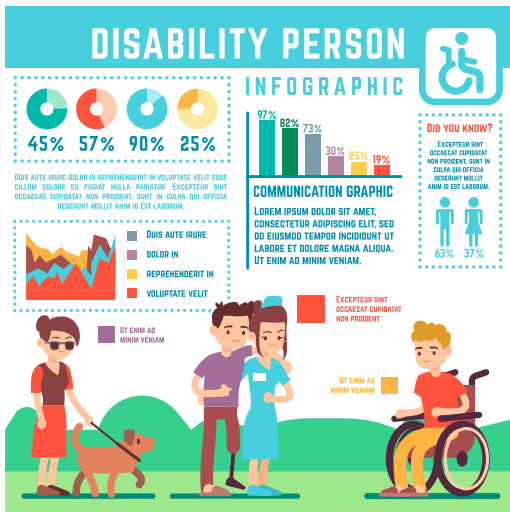


The CRPD is worried that people with disabilities are **under-represented** as candidates and in public organizations.



It is important to collect and publish information about how many people with disabilities were candidates in the election.

It is important to collect and publish information about how many people with disabilities are on the voter list.



It would be helpful if all of the information about people with disabilities taking part in elections was organized into different parts.

The different parts of information tell us about different types of people with disabilities.

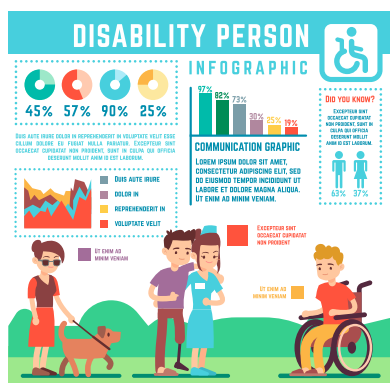
The different pieces of information can be used to make voting more accessible for all people with disabilities.

Chapter 4

The work of ODIHR



People with disabilities taking part in elections is an important part of the CRPD.



It is important to collect information about people with disabilities taking part in elections.

Observers during the voting process



ODIHR sends election observers to different places to see if people with disabilities can take part in an election.

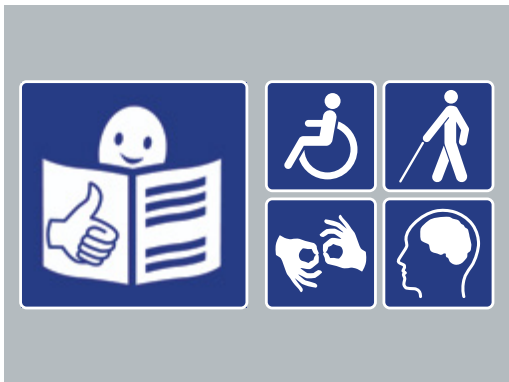


DPOs and citizen observers can also help by collecting information in a country.



The most important issues for people with disabilities to take part in elections are:

- to have a real chance to be a candidate



- to get accessible information about elections,



- to vote without barriers



- to get results of elections in an accessible way.



ODIHR sends a Needs Assessment Mission to a country before an election.

A **Needs Assessment Mission** checks out the pre-election actions and suggests if ODIHR should observe the election.

The **Needs Assessment Mission** will meet with DPOs.



After ODIHR observes an election it writes a report.

The report says whether people with disabilities were able to take part in the election that ODIHR watched.



Follow-Up

ODIHR follows up with countries where it has observed.

ODIHR's **follow-up work** tries to make elections more accessible.

Elections can be made better when people with disabilities are part of politics and elections.



Participation of under-represented groups in politics is important.



ODIHR wants to include underrepresented groups in making elections better.

ODIHR wants to make sure that under-represented groups will be more involved in future elections.



ODIHR wants to consult with DPOs about making elections better.

ODIHR wants national governments to also consult with DPOs on disability issues.



ODIHR wants national governments to do what the CRPD says.



ODIHR election observation helps governments to know more about ways to help people with disabilities to take part in election.



ODIHR election observation means that the election is watched by the ODIHR.

The election is watched to check if people with disabilities get a chance to take part in elections.



ODIHR election observation helps governments to follow what the CRPD says about elections.



This booklet helps to explain the ways to make sure that people with disabilities can take part in elections.

Contacts

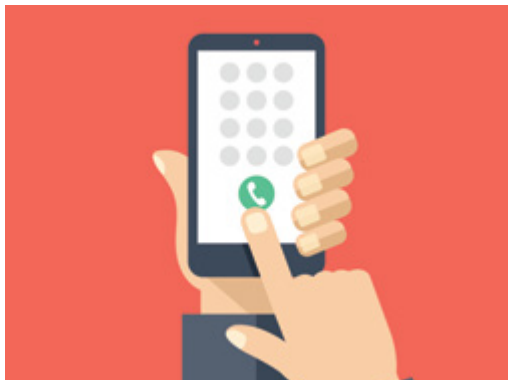


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