



DET KONGELIGE BARNE-, LIKESTILLINGS-
OG INKLUDERINGSDEPARTEMENT

The Royal Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion

United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Genève 10
Switzerland

Your ref

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Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities - Human Rights Council resolution 16/15

Reference is made to letter from the High Commissioner for Human Rights dated 28 June 2011. The Norwegian authorities are asked to answer questions from the High Commissioner regarding the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, in connection with a study carried out by the Office of the High Commissioner.

The information and answers from the Norwegian authorities are as follows:

1) Are there any restrictions on the right of persons with disabilities to vote and be elected? If so, what are those restrictions?

Persons with disabilities, regardless of the type of disability, have the same right as other people to vote and to be elected. The Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in all areas of society, including participation in political and public life.

All Norwegian citizens who are 18 by the end of the election year and who are, or at some time have been, registered in the National Population Register as resident in Norway have the right to vote.

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2) What are the steps taken by your Government to ensure that persons with disabilities participate in political and public life?

Voting

Great importance is attached to securing access to vote for persons with disabilities. All polling stations must be accessible for persons with disabilities. This requirement is both stated in The Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act § 9 and the Election Act and Election regulations. The requirement for accessibility is implemented in the Election Regulation §§ 26 and 30.

The Government has established an advisory office (Deltasenteret) that is responsible for providing information and advice on universal design and accessibility. Deltasenteret has published information material on accessible voting.

The Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development has established a pilot scheme to vote online in some municipalities and bought new and universally designed polling stations to be used in the forthcoming elections. Persons with disabilities needing assistance when voting are entitled to be assisted according to the Election Act § 9-5 (5).

Active participation

Lack of physical accessibility can constitute an obstacle for persons with disabilities when it comes to participating in politics. The Norwegian Government considers it to be of vital importance that localities for political activities are accessible. Localities for local and state administration that are open to public (political hearings, public meetings etc.) are obliged to be accessible for all (universally designed) according to The Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act § 9.

Political parties are responsible for making sure that their offices are in line with the accessibility provision in The Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act § 9.

The action plan Norway Universally designed 2025 (2009) expresses the Norwegian government's vision for Norway to be universally designed by 2025. The action plan covers all areas of society and sets up a wide range of tools, covering both public and private sector, to reach the goal. The Authorities encourage persons with disabilities to participate as all other citizens in political and public life. There are welfare services aimed at facilitating political participation for persons with disabilities.

Deltasenteret has recently supported a study carried out by Lillehammer University College that examines the participation of persons with disabilities in politics at local level. (*"Lutter velvilje, men mye gjenstår: Politisk deltakelse blant mennesker med Funksjonsnedsettelse 2011"*). Reference is made to quantitative studies showing that people with disabilities are underrepresented in Norwegian local political assemblies. The analysis shows that neither the physical conditions nor the organising of the

different meetings are particularly well adapted for people with disabilities. The study will be communicated to all political parties in Norway accompanied by guidance in how to organize political activity in an inclusive manner.

The Government gives an annual support of NOK 6 mill (800 000 euro) to the newspaper “Klar tale”, which is an easy-to-read newspaper. “Klar Tale” is easier to read than other newspapers and published on print, CD and Podcast, and as braille-edition every Thursday.

In 2009 The Norwegian Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (NFU) received NOK 100 000 (13 000 euro) in government funding to train and educate persons with developmental disabilities in voting and facilitate voting for persons with developmental disabilities.

- 3) What steps has your Government taken and what mechanisms exist:**
- a. To ensure close and active consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in decision-making processes, including those related to the development of legislation and policy?**

The Government provides financial support for organizations for disabled (approx. 20 million euro annually).

The Government has established a central advisory council that will advise the authorities in all disability issues. The advisory council is politically independent and consists of 15 members with particular insight in questions relating to disability.

There are also local and regional advisory councils on disability issues. An act on this matter was adopted in 2007. According to this act, municipalities and counties shall ensure that the disabled have broad, open access to participation and involvement in matters of particular importance to them. This applies, among other things, to issues of accessibility, discrimination and services for people with disabilities. To achieve this goal, municipalities and counties are to establish councils or other representative arrangements for persons with disabilities.

The government regularly have meetings with Disabled peoples organizations (DPO'S) concerning matters of particular importance to persons with disabilities. Government proposals that can be of interest to or directly concerns persons with disabilities are submitted to DPO's for comments and proposals before decision is made.

- b. To promote participation in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with public and political life?**

As mentioned the Authorities encourage persons with disabilities to participate as all other citizens in political life. Several welfare measures are aimed at facilitating participation in public and political life for disabled.

The Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act prohibits discrimination regarding membership in non-governmental organisations and associations, and the organisations are obliged to accommodate participation for members with disabilities.

c. To promote organizations of persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local level?

The Government supports the activities of interest organizations for persons with disabilities. In Norway there are about 75 DPO's. Most of these organizations are members of the main umbrella organization "Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People (FFO)". Pt FFO has 71 member organizations that count about 335.000 members all together. The interest organizations for persons with disabilities receive annually approx 20 million euro in Government funding.

FFO participate in the following international umbrella organizations for disabled:

- Handikaporganisasjonenes Nordiska Råd (HNR), which is a co-operative venue for Nordic DPO's. Chairs and directors sit on the Council.
- Nordiska Handikappolitiska Rådet (NHPR), a consultative and policy-making institute concerned with affairs of the handicapped for the Nordic Council of Ministers and its collaborating entities.
- European disability forum (EDF), which is an umbrella organization of the disabled in Europe and has more than 50 million members.
- Disabled People International (DPI), international union of the disabled.

In addition DPO's representing groups of persons with disabilities, as f eks the hard of hearing, the visually impaired, are members of their international DPO's.

4) How are people with disabilities and their representative organizations involved in monitoring the Convention?

Norway has signed, but not yet ratified the Convention.

The organisations have been involved in the work to prepare for ratification of the Convention. The organisations also participated in the Norwegian delegation in the negotiations of the Convention.

5) Are statistics collected in relation to the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life? Please provide relevant statistics and data if possible.

There are few relevant statistics on this matter. Statistics provided by the Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud show that the percentage of disabled persons in Municipal Councils is 10%, whilst the average percentage of disabled in the total population is 17% (SALDO 2010).

Lillehammer University College published recently a qualitative study on political representation among people with disabilities (“Lutter velvilje, men mye gjenstår: Politisk deltakelse blant mennesker med funksjonsnedsettelse 2011”) that sheds light on the underrepresentation of people with disabilities in political assemblies.

6) Is your Government involved in international cooperation programmes related to promoting political rights of persons with disabilities? Please describe the ways the programmes are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.

Norway participates in the Council of Europe expert group Committee of Experts on participation of people with disabilities in political and public life (CAPAH-PPL). The committee is subordinate body of European Co-ordination Forum for the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (CAHPAH). The earlier mentioned Deltasenteret participates in this group on behalf of the Norwegian government.

Some years ago Norway adopted a policy to mainstream disability in international cooperation. It is at the moment under evaluation. Norway is committed to the work to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

Most of the funding to promote the rights of people with disabilities goes through the DPO's own entity for international cooperation, the Atlas Alliance.

Norway supports development cooperation between our national disability organisations and disability organisations in developing countries. The main purpose is strengthening disability organisations in developing countries, to enable them to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. Budget allocation about NOK 78 mill (10 mill euro). We consider this an essential part of our efforts to implement article 32 of CRPD. The Atlas Alliance will send their own answer to your request, thus we refer to their answer on their work.

Norway supports the Global Partnership for Disability and Development.

Norway has played an important role in developing humanitarian law and the protection it affords to civilians in armed conflicts. The frameworks established by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (1997) and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (from 2008, in force 1 Aug. 2010), have established a new norm for victim assistance. Norway's support to both demining operations and victims of landmines is also part of our disability efforts.

Norway will continue to work internationally ensuring that persons with disabilities are included at all levels and in all responses to emergencies and conflict situations. By mainstreaming the victim's perspective, we believe that humanitarian organisations and other stakeholders should include persons with disabilities at all levels of planning and implementation, making this an organisational responsibility. We will work internationally in order to include the victim assistance standards in other weapons control instruments along the same lines as in the Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The negotiations on Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) has to address assistance to victims

Norway has supported networks of survivors to provide victim assistance through peer support programs and the training of survivors to advocate changes to laws and policies around the world.

We support to the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability, who has an important task in promoting implementation of the convention. We have seconded to him a senior civil servant with comprehensive experience of disability policy.

In order to strengthen and accelerate efforts to mainstream disability in international cooperation, Norway hosted two international conferences this year.

- Mainstreaming Disability in Development Cooperation, Oslo 29-31 march 2011,
- Disability in Emergencies and Conflicts "Reaching the most vulnerable", Oslo 30-31 May 2011.

Yours sincerely,

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