



People with disabilities taking part in politics

**A study by the Office of the High Commissioner
for Human Rights of the United Nations**

An easy to read version



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1. Introduction

This is a study about how people with disabilities take part in politics.



This study was written by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations.

The United Nations is a group of countries that work to make the world a better place.



Almost all the countries in the world are part of the United Nations.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is part of the United Nations. In short, we call it OHCHR.



The OHCHR deals with rights at the United Nations. It wants all people to enjoy all their rights.

2. Political rights

All people who have the nationality of a country are called citizens.



All citizens have the right to have a say in how their country is run.

This means they have political rights.

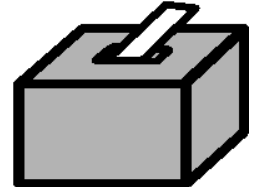
Political rights are for example:



- **The right to vote in elections**

In elections, citizens choose who will run their country, their region or their city.

For example, citizens elect their Members of Parliament.



- **The right to become a candidate in elections**

Everyone has the right to stand for elections.

This means that everyone can be a candidate in elections.

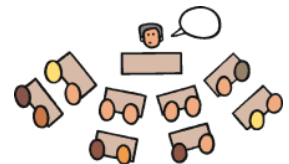
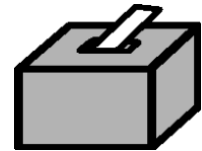


A person with a disability should also be able to be a candidate, if he or she fulfils the conditions, as any other citizen.

This means other citizens can vote for you in elections.

When you get enough votes, you become a representative.

For example, a Member of Parliament is a representative who has been elected.



- **The right to take part in politics**

Citizens can take part in politics.

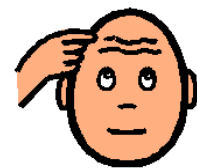
It means they can have a say in the way their country is run.

This is when citizens become involved in politics, or when they give their opinions on important decisions.



But citizens can also have a say in how their country is run when they vote in elections.

By voting, citizens choose who they want to run the country.



- **Get a job in the public service**

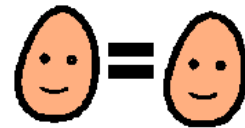
Public service means all offices where people work for their country and its citizens.

For example, police officers are part of the public service.

Governments should make sure that all people have equal chances to get a job in the public service.

This means the conditions to get the job must be the same for everyone.

People with disabilities should also have the chance to apply for jobs in the public service.



3. What the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities says

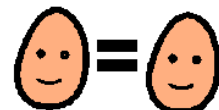
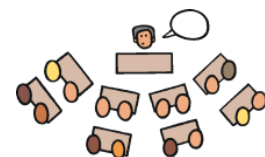
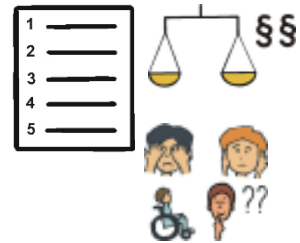
The Convention of the United Nations on the rights of persons with disabilities is a list of rights that people with disabilities have.

The Convention is made up of different parts called articles.

Normally, each article stands for one right.

Article 29 is about the right to take part in politics. This article says that all people with disabilities have the same right to take part in politics as other citizens.

The Convention also asks governments to make sure that people with disabilities have the same chances to take part in politics as anyone else.



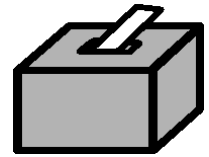
This means they have to support people with disabilities.

By taking part in politics,
people with disabilities can make sure that
governments make laws and decisions that
are good for people with disabilities.



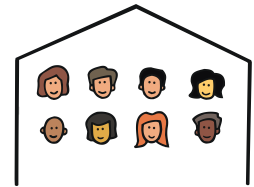
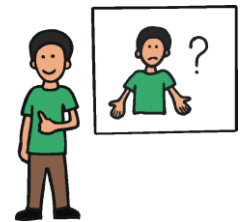
The right to vote and stand for elections is very important.
It gives people with disabilities a chance
to make important decisions.

It also means that people with disabilities are equal
before the law with other citizens.



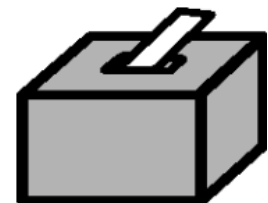
Governments have to encourage people with disabilities to
be more involved in the community by

- joining organisations of people interested in politics
- joining political parties
- getting together and forming organisations of people with disabilities.



4. The right to vote for all!

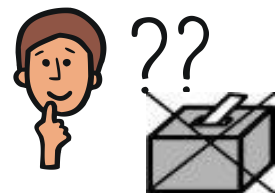
The Convention says that everyone has the right
to vote.



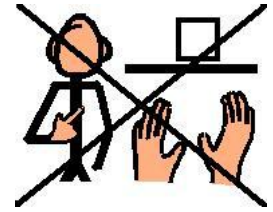
This means that all people with disabilities,
have the same right to vote as other citizens.



However, in many countries,
people with intellectual disabilities and mental health
problems cannot vote.



This is because they are under guardianship.
They do not have legal capacity.
This means that the law does not allow them
to make important decisions in their lives.



This is discrimination.
Discrimination is when you are treated badly or unfairly
because you are different from other people.
For example, because you have a disability.



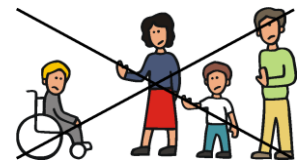
This is against article 29 of the Convention.
Laws should treat all people fairly.



Therefore people with disabilities should have
the same right to vote.
No one should declare a person incapable of voting.
No one should test if a person with a disability
is able to vote.



However, only in few countries like Austria and Canada,
laws say that all people can vote.
Some countries, like the Czech Republic are changing
their laws to make sure everyone can vote

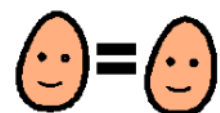


5. The right to stand for elections and be involved in politics

People with disabilities have the right
to stand for elections as any other citizens.



This means nobody can be stopped from
becoming a candidate because of a disability.



In many countries, people with disabilities under guardianship cannot stand for elections.



This is against article 29 of the Convention. People with disabilities have the right to stand for elections.



And they also have the right to get extra support to have the same chances as candidates without a disability.

People with disabilities who are elected should get the support they need to do their job well.



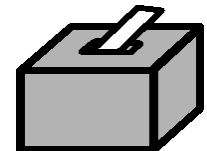
Governments should encourage people with disabilities to stand for elections and get involved in politics.



They could use new technologies to make it easier for people with disabilities to get involved in politics.

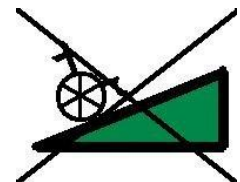
6. Accessible elections

People with disabilities often find it hard to take part in elections.



For example:

- The polling station is hard to find and enter.
- People do not know about their right to vote or stand for elections.
- Information about elections and voting is difficult to understand.



The Convention says that governments must make sure that people with disabilities have access to elections.



This means:

- Making sure that the ways of voting and the voting papers are easy to use and understand.
- Making sure people with disabilities can vote in secret as other citizens.
- Allowing a person with disability to choose someone to help them express their choice in elections, like an assistant.



Many countries try to make it easier for people with disabilities to take part in elections.

- Some countries train people who organise elections to support people with disabilities.
- Some countries make the polling stations accessible. Some countries allow people with disabilities to vote in other places.



It is important that these other places are only used when it is not possible or very difficult to vote normally.



All polling stations should be made accessible.

- Some countries, like Finland or France make the information about elections easy to use and understandable for all.



- Some countries have campaigns to tell people with disabilities about their right to vote.
- Most countries allow people with disabilities to choose someone to help them vote.



But all countries must still make efforts to allow people with disabilities to take part in elections.

7. Involving people with disabilities in politics

The Convention asks governments to involve people with disabilities when making decisions about their lives.



Some governments also support organisations of people with disabilities.



This is to make sure they can help the government with things that are important to people with disabilities.

For example, these organisations can tell the government if things are bad for people with disabilities or if they are good and help them.



8. Collecting information

Governments should find information about:

- how many people with disabilities take part in politics
- what makes it difficult for people with disabilities to take part,
- what support people with disabilities need to take part.



However, only very few governments have got this information.

In some countries, like Australia or Germany, governments plan to find out this information soon.

9. Working together

Countries should work together to make it easier for people with disabilities to take part in politics. However, only very few countries do that.

For example Australia helped to make elections in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines more accessible.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

People with disabilities have the same political rights as other citizens.

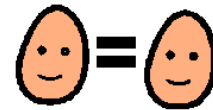
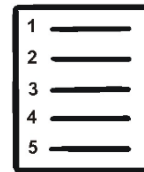
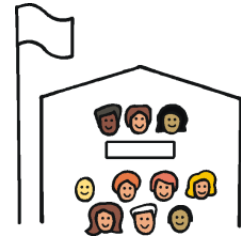
Stopping people with disabilities from having these rights is discrimination.

Laws in most countries still say that people with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems cannot vote.

This is because they are under guardianship. They do not have legal capacity.

These countries must change their laws!

They must also make sure that people with disabilities get all the support they need to enjoy their political rights.



Many countries try to make it easier for people with disabilities to take part in elections as anyone else.

But much more needs to be done!

People with disabilities still have many difficulties when it comes to elections.



In some countries, people with disabilities can choose a person to help them vote.

It is important that such a person lets the person with a disability vote for who he or she wants.



People with disabilities want to vote as anyone else!