Facilitating political inclusion of underrepresented groups

Facts, insights and promising practices from case studies on people with disabilities, Roma and other ethnic and linguistic minorities

**EU citizens have the right to participate in European Parliament and municipal elections**

The CRPD defines people with disabilities as including ‘those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’.

Women belonging to underrepresented groups of voters are often confronted with additional difficulties in political participation, such as a lack of voice in mainstream decision-making processes and multiple/intersectional discrimination.

Some EU citizens encounter more difficulties in exercising electoral rights than others, and are underrepresented in political life.

**Challenges faced by underrepresented groups of voters include**

- Legal and administrative challenges
  - Legal restrictions and difficulties in obtaining Member State nationality;
  - (Semi-)automatic disenfranchisement of persons deprived of legal capacity;
  - Low level of implementation of existing regulations and programmes;

- Accessibility barriers
  - Physical inaccessibility of polling stations and buildings where political activities take place;
  - Lack of electoral information in an accessible form and (regional/minority) language;
  - Voter registration procedures which do not take specificities of underrepresented groups into account;

- Institutional(ised) difficulties
  - Lack of political will to facilitate and include underrepresented voters;
  - Systemic and institutionalised discrimination and polarisation;
  - Socio-economic challenges as a preliminary obstacle to political participation;
  - Insufficient financial support

**Did you know?**

The Roma community is Europe’s largest ethnic minority, with an estimated 6 million Roma living within the EU.

In a survey conducted by the EU-CITZEN Network, stakeholders have identified the top three challenges to Roma political participation to be:

- Socio-economic/living conditions
- Education policies
- Discrimination
Some positive initiatives and promising practices to facilitate and promote political participation of underrepresented groups can be witnessed in the EU

Involving (representative organisations of) underrepresented groups in decision-making and policy processes
- e.g. National Council for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities (BG); National Consultative Committee on Travellers (FR)

Governmental policies and strategies specifically addressing political participation of underrepresented groups
- e.g. A Fairer Scotland Action Plan, including Access to Elected Office Fund (UK)

Awareness-raising and voter assistance activities of NGOs and civil society
- e.g. National Council for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities (BG); National Consultative Committee on Travellers (FR)

Legal and electoral accommodations to minority (self-)representation
- e.g. Lowering/exemption from electoral threshold for minority political parties (FI), minority self-government (HU), guaranteed seats for minority parties (RO)

What should be done to facilitate political participation of underrepresented voters?

Providing adequate financial support, e.g.
- Access to campaign financing for candidates from underrepresented groups;
- Access to adequate resources for NGOs and CSOs in facilitating electoral participation;
- Make sufficient resources available for implementation of national strategies;

Maintaining a legal and electoral framework conducive to political inclusion, e.g.
- Abolish legal and institutionalised restrictions to right to vote;
- Ensuring full compliance with legal and fundamental rights standards, including non-discrimination

Address specific challenges and difficulties faced by underrepresented groups, e.g.
- Paying particular attention to the position of women in underrepresented groups;
- Ensuring socio-economic inclusion of Roma and other minorities in general;
- Consider and address the difficulties faced by people with all forms of disabilities (not just physical impairments) in the electoral process;

Ensuring electoral information is available and accessible by all, e.g.
- Ensuring access to electoral information, especially for underrepresented voters;
- Making adequate use of technological and technical tools to facilitate accessibility to information;
- Providing and facilitating information provision in all regional and minority languages;

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Sources cited:

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and the EU-CITZEN Network and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.