



## MINUTES

### **First meeting of the Subgroup on the preparation of a guide of good electoral practice addressing participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process**

**14 September 2022**

**COM** kicked off the meeting with an overview of the objectives and future activity of the subgroup, followed by a roundtable for members to introduce themselves and their previous experience, which revealed a good mix of election-related competences and knowledge of the topic.

**COM** presented its main commitments in the area and relevant references on the topic of participation in elections of persons with disabilities, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights and guidelines issued by the Venice Commission and the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. It also outlined the potential content of the guide and highlighted the need for wide non-prescriptive definitions.

During the open discussions that followed, steered by **COM** with scoping questions, **BE**, **IE** and **FI** suggested expanding the scope of the guide and addressing the guide, besides the Member States, also to election officials and political parties. Participants admitted that the concept of disability should be defined as widely as possible and should include temporary/short term disabilities (**BE**, **FI**, **RO**), mental disabilities (**BE**, **FI**) and the elderly (**EL**).

**IE** expounded on its national practices and the recent changes to the electoral law that extended the scope of special voting arrangements, initially reserved for persons with physical disabilities, to all persons with disabilities. The standard of proof would be reduced to a medical certificate stating that the voter is not able to attend the polling station. **FI** inquired about compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the steps that persons with disabilities would have to take to vote. **IE** clarified that an overall impact assessment was carried out and that the medical certificate would not have to be produced by the voter at the polling station. The future Electoral Commission of **IE** could take a further look at increasing the availability of these voting arrangements.

**FI** mentioned checklists for polling stations with concrete accessibility measures, developed in cooperation with a non-governmental programme for persons with physical disabilities. **BE** pointed to a handbook created by EU Election Watch, an Austrian non-governmental organisation and **IE** referred to their checklist for the

use of polling stations, produced in partnership with the National Disability Authority. 99% of the polling stations in **IE** are accessible. While in **IE** a few buildings that are not wheelchair accessible remain in distant rural areas, voters have the possibility to apply to vote in a polling station that meets accessibility standards.

In connection to the issue of practical barriers that persons with disabilities face when participating in elections, **BE** mentioned the need for more sensitisation of political parties and awareness-raising for candidates with disabilities. **IE** brought up the public funding of political parties linked to gender quotas and hinted to a possible similar approach in the case of candidates with disabilities.

All participants agreed on the importance of the topic and the added value that a guide of good electoral practice could have, not only for national legislators, but for election practitioners, election observers and political parties as well.