



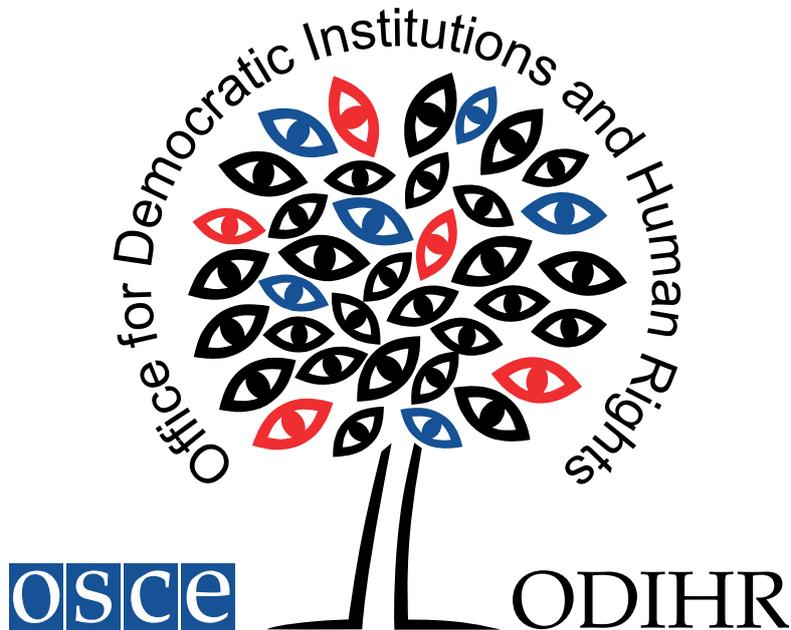
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

**MEETING OF EXPERTS ON PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS  
WITH DISABILITIES IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE**

**Skopje**

**22 June 2017**

**OSCE/ODIHR Meeting Report**



**Warsaw  
July 2017**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>MEETING SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ANNEX 1: AGENDA .....</b>	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
<b>ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>ABOUT THE OSCE/ODIHR .....</b>	<b>10</b>

# MEETING OF EXPERTS ON PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

Skopje  
22 June 2017

## MEETING SUMMARY

On 22 June 2017, OSCE/ODIHR held a meeting of Experts on Participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life. The meeting was organized as part of ODIHR's two-and-a-half year project, "*Our right to participate – Promoting the participation of Persons with Disabilities in political and public life (Phase II)*", which aims to raise awareness and promote more inclusive and participatory societies across the OSCE region.

To ensure that ODIHR's work in the field of disability rights is in line with actual needs and that persons with disabilities are consulted, ODIHR has identified and gathered experts on participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life. The role of this group of experts is to advise ODIHR on disability-related issues and relevant developments in different OSCE participating States (pSs).

The aim of the first meeting of experts on disability rights held in Skopje on 22 June 2017 was twofold: first, to exchange updates on the latest developments and ongoing or future activities undertaken by the participants; and second, to discuss in more detail the core areas of work that ODIHR plans to focus on in the future: participation of persons with disabilities in national parliaments, political parties and strengthening consultation mechanisms between national governments and disabled people's organizations (DPOs).

The meeting gathered 17 participants (9 women and 8 men), including 8 persons with disabilities (3 women and 5 men) from the US, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Finland, Turkey, Ukraine, Serbia, Belgium, Ireland and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Among them were members of parliaments, national experts, representatives of DPOs, experts from other international organizations, such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and members of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The meeting served as a platform for discussions on good practice examples of how to increase the political participation of persons with disabilities in democratic institutions and how to strengthen the impact of national DPOs in policy and law-making processes. In addition, the representatives from IFES and FRA shared their experiences and tools on mainstreaming disability in their respective organizations. Throughout the meeting the experts discussed the most recent disability-related developments at the international level as well as in their countries, while ODIHR staff informed participants about the future work in this field.

The opening remarks were delivered by Mr Jeffrey Goldstein, the Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje and Ms Tiina Kukkamaa-Bah, Chief of the ODIHR Democratic

Governance and Gender Unit, emphasising the need to fight existing prejudices and exclusion of persons with disabilities.

The meeting was then structured in **three panel discussions**, each focusing on a different area of ODIHR's envisaged future work:

- 1) Increasing participation of persons with disabilities in democratic institutions (political parties and parliaments);
- 2) Mainstreaming disability and participation of persons with disabilities within OSCE executive structures;
- 3) Creating an enabling environment – strengthening consultation mechanisms with national DPOs and mainstreaming disability in law-making process.

During the **first panel** discussion, Ms Helga Stevens, member of the European Parliament (EP), highlighted the importance of governments making themselves accessible at different political levels. This requires structural change, rather than *ad hoc* initiatives, which are currently the most common practices. She stressed that “reasonable accommodation” is a form of political participation. Accessibility of all structures of parliaments and committees is crucial to ensure access to the full political process. Ms Stevens noted the importance of active personal involvement and finding at least one MP/political representative who could lead the change. She emphasized that parliaments should serve as a role model for society. Finally, Ms Stevens highlighted some of the positive practice examples from the EP, such as the Sign Language conference at the EP, the work of the EP Disability Intergroup, EP Report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and regular meetings with political leaders and head of staff. The second panel speaker, Mr Chris Henshaw from NDI, highlighted some of the challenges related to the implementation of the UNCRPD at the national level and stressed the importance of political will and parliamentary overview of the implementation of the Convention. At the same time he noted the existing opportunities and importance of cross-party co-operation, mentoring and training of persons with disabilities.

Participants then discussed the need to design initiatives, tailored to the concrete national context, stressing that there is never a one-fits-all solution. In addition, the need to promote the engagement of persons with disabilities at different levels of government, including at local level was emphasized, as it contributes to inclusiveness and opens the doors to participation at the national level.

On legal quota systems, the experts noted that the fact that a person with disabilities will be active in political party or elected in a certain position will not mean that disability as such will be on the political agenda. At the same time, examples where such quotas have had a positive impact were mentioned by some participants. The importance of inter-political party agreement on disability was stressed, noting that disability can be a uniting element across different political parties. Some participants highlighted the positive practice at the national level, where when one political party embraces change, others follow this example. Encouraging positive competition between different political parties could thus help to integrate disability in political party agendas and policies.

Political participation of persons with disabilities is a shared responsibility among different stakeholders and actors. Whilst persons with disabilities themselves need to be active and willing to engage in democratic institutions, other relevant structures, including the administrative staff of political parties and parliaments working “behind the scenes” should be educated and involved, to ensure sustainability and long-lasting improvements to participation.

Overall, in the context of discussing concrete examples of positive practices and lessons learned, participants highlighted the need to:

- Promote social and cultural transformation through awareness raising about disability and participation of persons with disabilities;
- Work to achieve systematic structural change by involving diverse stakeholders;
- Work with political parties, so that their manifestos and political programmes reflect human rights-based rather than medical approaches to disability;
- Encourage cross-party co-operation to ensure that disability is on the political agenda;
- Adapt different action for different contexts;
- Promote the participation of persons with disabilities at different levels of governance;
- Educate, mentor and build the capacity of persons with disabilities, especially youth;
- Create fully accessible parliaments to ensure equal access to full political processes.

As an introduction to the **second panel** discussions, Ms Martha Stickings (FRA) and Ms Virginia Atkinson (IFES) presented disability mainstreaming experiences from their respective organizations. The discussions touched on disability integration in programmatic activities, as well as in other areas, such as procurement, recruitment, project management and communication in the organization. Among the issues highlighted was the importance of conducting trainings (possibly mandatory) for all staff members on disability rights, in addition to specific trainings for those involved in recruitment procedures. Such tools as accessibility checklists for planning events were discussed, in addition to established internal structures for disability mainstreaming, for example a Focal Point and a working group, comprising staff members from different departments. Many parallels were drawn to the lessons learned from gender mainstreaming practices, emphasizing, for instance, the need to involve staff from different departments in discussions on the best ways to integrate disability in existing procedures and practices to ensure successful outcomes. Direct engagement of persons with disabilities in testing any accessibility measures, as well as when developing programmatic activities related to persons with disabilities, was underlined by both speakers.

In addition, Ms Atkinson shared some of the experiences from mainstreaming disability in IFES election observation work, ensuring opportunities for persons with disabilities to work in different national contexts and circumstances.

The **third panel** was initiated by a presentation from Mr Patrick Clark from the European Disability Forum on challenges and good practice examples at the EU and national levels on

consultation mechanisms with DPOs in decision- and law-making processes. Mr Clark noted that, while in general the level of consultation is increasing, the process often lacks consistent approaches and documented procedures. Consultations therefore remain ad hoc across all EU institutions. To address these issues, the European Disability Forum will be calling for the development of a Code of Conduct for the consultation and involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all decision-making procedures of the EU institutions. In addition, Mr Clark noted the need for the EU to provide long-term capacity building to persons with disabilities to allow their meaningful participation in EU processes. Finally, Mr Clark reflected on some of the practices of public consultation in Ireland.

During the discussion on the main obstacles which hamper meaningful dialogue with DPOs at the national level, participants noted the lack of established systematic mechanisms for consultation, weak DPOs due to inadequate funding, insufficient communication among various types of DPOs and the overall shrinking space for the engagement of civil society organizations.

The need for due consultation, including by providing relevant information in accessible formats and allowing sufficient time for DPOs to study these initiatives and provide comments, was particularly emphasized. In addition, it was noted that persons with disabilities should be provided with adequate support to take part in public consultation procedures. An invitation to participate alone will often be insufficient if not accompanied by measures to allow such involvement – for example, providing sign language interpretation during meetings, organizing transport to bring participants to the venue, or other supporting measures.

Capacity building and adequate financial support for DPOs is equally important for quality participation. In some countries, for example Ireland and Slovenia, DPOs receive state funding to support their work, and such practices could be explored further in other OSCE pSs. Finally, participants recognized that an effective national mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the UNCRPD is crucial in ensuring also that Article 29 of the Convention is not neglected at the national level.

In their main conclusions from this panel participants noted the importance of:

- Systematic approaches and documented procedures to consultations, involving men and women and children with disabilities;
- Consultation procedures which allow meaningful participation, by providing sufficient time and adequate, accessible information;
- Adequate support to persons with disabilities and DPOs to facilitate their participation in public consultations;
- Closer communication and co-ordination among different types of DPOs;
- Funding and capacity building of DPOs;
- Effective monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the UNCRPD Convention.

In the concluding session of the meeting, participants shared reflections on disability relevant developments in their respective countries and organizations. It was agreed to organize the next Meeting of Experts on Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in the first half of 2018.

## ANNEX 1: AGENDA



### Meeting of the Experts on Participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life

22 June 2017, Marriott Hotel  
Skopje

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|---------------|---|
| 9.30 - 9.50   | <b>Welcoming remarks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mr Jeffrey Goldstein, Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje</li><li>• Ms Tiina Kukkamaa-Bah, Chief of Democratic Governance and Gender Unit, ODIHR</li></ul>   |
| 9.50 – 10.10  | <b>Updates on ODIHR's future work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ms Anete Erdmane, Associate Project Officer, ODIHR</li></ul>  |
| 10.10 - 11.40 | <b>Presentation of mapping report results and moderated discussion I</b><br><b><i>Increasing participation of persons with disabilities in democratic institutions (political parties and parliaments)</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moderator: Ms Anete Erdmane, Associate Project Officer, ODIHR</li><li>• Encouraging positive practice examples at the national and EU level, Ms Helga Stevens, Member of the European Parliament</li><li>• Increasing political participation at the national level, Mr Chris Henshaw, Senior Resident Director, National Democratic Institute</li></ul> |
| 11.40 – 12.00 | <b>Coffee</b>   |
| 12.00 – 12.45 | <b>Presentations and moderated discussion II</b><br><b>Mainstreaming disability and participation of persons with disabilities within OSCE executive structures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moderator: Ms Tiina Kukkamaa-Bah, Chief of Democratic Governance and Gender Unit, ODIHR</li><li>• Experiences of disability mainstreaming at IFES, Ms Virginia Atkinson, Senior Access and Inclusion Specialist</li><li>• Experiences of disability mainstreaming at EU FRA, Ms Martha Stickings, Research Support Officer</li></ul>  |
| 12.45 – 14.00 | <b>Lunch</b>  |

- 14.00 – 15.20      **Presentation of mapping report results and moderated discussion III**  
*Creating an enabling environment – strengthening consultation mechanisms with national DPOs and mainstreaming disability in law-making process*
- Moderator: Ms Anete Erdmane, Associate Project Officer, ODIHR  
Engagement of DPOs at the national and EU level, Mr Patrick Clarke, Vice-President, European Disability Forum
  -
- 15.20 – 15:40      **Coffee**
- 15:40 – 16:30      **Updates on recent developments (by experts)**
- 16:30 – 17:00      **Concluding remarks**

## **ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**



### *Experts and other participants*

**Ms. Virginia Atkinson**

Senior Access and Inclusion Specialist, International Foundation for Electoral Systems

**Mr. Dastan Bekeshev**

Member of Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic

**Mr. Patrick Clark**

Vice-President, European Disability Forum

**Mr. Chris Henshaw**

Senior Resident Director, National Democratic Institute

**Mr. Yaroslav Hrybalskyi**

Co-ordinator, „Ukraine Without Borders“ Programme

**Ms. Elena Kocoska**

Representative, DPO “Polio Plus”

**Ms. Safak Pavay**

Member of the Turkish Parliament

**Ms. Helga Stevens**

Member of the European Parliament

Vice-Chair, European Conservatives and Reformists Group

Co-Chair Disability Intergroup

**Ms. Martha Stickings**

Social Research Officer, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights

**Mr. Damjan Tatic**

Vice-chair, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**Mr. Tuomas Tuure**

Development Co-operation Secretary, Finnish Threshold Association

**Mr. Asadullo Zikrikhudoev**

Chairperson, National Union of People with Disabilities of Tajikistan

***OSCE Mission to Skopje***

**Ms. Jeffrey Goldstein**

Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje

**Ms. Zhaneta Poposka**

National Rule of Law Officer

***OSCE ODIHR***

**Ms. Tiina Kukkamaa-Bah**

Chief, Democratic Governance and Gender Unit, Democratization Department

**Mr. Anete Erdmane**

Associate Project Officer, Democratic Governance and Gender Unit, Democratization Department

## **ABOUT THE OSCE/ODIHR**

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) is the OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

The OSCE/ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 130 staff.

The OSCE/ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE Commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, the OSCE/ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. The OSCE/ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programs annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

The OSCE/ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights** and fundamental freedoms consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked persons, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance** and **non-discrimination**, the OSCE/ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. The OSCE/ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

The OSCE/ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website ([www.osce.org/odihhr](http://www.osce.org/odihhr)).