



## **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

**Warsaw, 23 September- 4 October 2013**

### **Working session 11 – Democratic Institutions**

#### **Contribution of the Council of Europe**

#### **Enhancing participation of people with disabilities in political and public life**

The purpose of the Council of Europe programme “Promoting Human Rights – Equality and Diversity” is to widely disseminate, and mainstream in all policy sectors, the new approach to people with disabilities as participative and full-fledged members of society. According to the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 , inclusive societies are built up when the non-discrimination principle applies to every citizen, and the society reflects the diversity of all its members, notably by accepting their participation in political and public life (see Plan’s action line No 1). It is therefore important that people with disabilities can fully exercise their political rights and take active part in electoral and decision-making processes.

It should be noted, however, that people with disabilities are generally underrepresented in political or public affairs, elections or decision-making in Europe. In order to guarantee equal and democratic rights for all individuals without any direct or indirect discrimination, it is incumbent on the governments to identify and eliminate any obstacle impeding participation of people with disabilities in the life of society and to prevent the creation of any new barriers to such participation.

By adopting on 16 November 2011 the Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)14 on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recommends to member states to increase the participation of people with disabilities in political and public life at all levels: local, regional, national and international, with respect for the following principles and measures:

1. equal rights and opportunities;
2. accessibility of:
  - built environment;
  - goods and services;
  - information and communication;
  - voting procedures, ballots and facilities;
3. non-discrimination in the exercise of legal capacity;
4. assistance in decision making and free choice by persons with disabilities;
5. education and training in democratic participation;
6. inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes.

The aim of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)14 is to achieve full equality in participation in elections and representation of all members of society in decision making bodies and

processes, to ensure that the diversity of views and needs is taken into account in national, regional and local legislations, policy development, and administrative practice in the member states.

With a view to facilitating the understanding of the main provisions of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)14 by some members of society, such as persons with intellectual impairments or learning difficulties, the Council of Europe in May 2012 published easy-to-read versions of this Recommendation in English and French.

In that way, the Council of Europe intends also to reach target groups that have traditionally been left out of many political or public activities or processes with a view to increasing their potential of comprehension, expression and participation.

Member States' governments should translate both the formal and the easy-to-read texts of Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)14 into the official language(s) of the respective country and disseminate them as widely as possible.

### **Young people with disabilities**

Within its work on young people's access to social rights and on human rights education with young people, the Youth Department has given a particular focus to the participation of young people with disabilities

A Consultative meeting on 'Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities in the Youth Activities of the Council of Europe' was held in May 2012; the report has served as a basis for various processes related to the inclusion of young people with disabilities, notably for the work of the Committee of Experts on the Rights of People with Disabilities in drafting a Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Children and Youth with Disabilities.

Training courses and study sessions were held with and for organisations representing young people with disabilities, including the European Union of Deaf Youth and the European Network for Independent Living. In addition, other activities in the European Youth Centres of Budapest and Strasbourg are set up for mixed abilities youth groups.

The 2012 edition of Compass – the manual for human rights education with young people – dedicates an entire section to Disability and is the basis for a new handbook for human rights education trainers on inclusion of young people with disabilities in human rights education.

The Youth Department is also conducting a review of the European Youth Centres accessibility, including training measures to host groups of young people with disabilities.