



## **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Conference**

**Warsaw, 24 September- 5 October 2012**

**Working session 15 and 16 – 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:
  - 2.1. built environment;
  - 2.2. goods and services;
  - 2.3. information and communication;
  - 2.4. 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.