

Declaration of the Spanish Presidency of the European Council on Expanding Voting Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Palma (Spain), November 16th, 2023

Guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which the European Union is party to, as a context and frame of reference, and considering that the aforesaid Convention is a human rights treaty that is a catalyst for the equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Noting that, since the **signatory countries** of this Declaration are Member States of the European Union, and that we have ratified the aforesaid Convention, we **wish to contribute to its promotion**, by ensuring the civil and political rights of persons with disabilities, as stated in **Article 29 of the CRPD**, according to which “**States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights** and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others”.

Recalling that the **United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, in its concluding **observations** on the initial report of **the European Union** of October 2015, **recommended** that the European Union, in cooperation with its Member States and organizations representing persons with disabilities **take the necessary measures to enable all persons with all types of disabilities**, including those under guardianship, **to enjoy their right to vote and stand for election**, including by providing accessible communication and facilities.

Taking into account the European Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disability 2021-2030 and its commitment to foster the full political participation of persons with disabilities in the democratic process.

Considering the European Parliament Resolution of 13 December 2022 towards equal rights for persons with disabilities¹ and having regard to the European Economic and Social Committee’s information report of 20 March 2019, entitled “Real rights of persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections”,² according to which nearly 800,000 EU citizens were deprived of their right to vote in elections to the European Parliament due to their disability or mental health problems, and that millions of EU citizens were unable to exercise their right to vote in elections to the European Parliament because of physical or technical barriers or inadequate organizational arrangements, which do not address the needs associated to their disabilities.

¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0435_EN.pdf

² <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/qe-02-19-153-en-n.pdf>

Likewise considering that persons with disabilities under full or partial guardianship are denied the right to vote in thirteen Member States and can only exercise their right to stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament in nine Member States.

Further considering the need to guarantee persons with disabilities the right to vote independently and in secret, the need to ensure that polling stations are accessible to persons with disabilities and the need to involve persons with disabilities in all their diversity, and regardless of their background, in decision-making in the European Union, pursuant to the aforementioned European Parliament Resolution of 13 December 2022 on equal rights for persons with disabilities.

The Spanish Presidency, Member States and stakeholders draw the following declaration hereby undertake to:

1. Promote cooperation between the Member States of the European Union to reach a common understanding on guaranteeing and expanding the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities;
2. Ensure an analysis and a reflection on exercising the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament, enabling all persons with disabilities in the European Union to vote and be elected without any restrictions whatsoever in elections to the European Parliament;
3. Promote and value joint initiatives involving persons with disabilities, in all their diversity and regardless of their background, in EU decision-making;
4. Strengthen the leadership of persons with disabilities through increased support to organizations that represent them to enable meaningful participation and greater influence on decision-making;
5. Encourage the removal of barriers, particularly for digital services, by promoting and adopting common accessibility requirements that favour the effective participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life.
6. Ensure, through reasonable accommodation, the accessibility of the whole electoral process to facilitate the possibility of voting independently and in secret (e.g., providing alternative means of voting, advance voting, tactile stencils, QR codes, or guidance in easy to read, sign language or Braille), and to allow free choice of assistance to cast one's vote.

Finally, as the **CRPD is the most important legal act of the United Nations** relating to persons with disabilities, within our leadership capacity and our roles in the institutional organization of the European Union, **we do hereby declare our firm commitment to promoting** all those projects and **policies** of the European Union that are **aligned with the Convention**.