

Voting matters

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Impact paragraphs

The study ‘Voting Matters’ offered an important argument: that only a transformative equality approach to voting rights will prove adequate to confront and overcome the structural and systemic nature of discrimination that persons with disabilities face when attempting to vote in elections. ‘Transformative equality’ means enabling voters with disabilities to develop the skills they need to effectively participate in elections. The objective of this study was to demonstrate that anti-discrimination prohibitions applicable in the context of voting rights of persons with disabilities are only effective when implemented alongside equality measures.

This study’s proposition was to afford opportunities to voters with disabilities and promote changes to the underlying social framework. Currently, this framework denies those with disabilities the chance to exercise genuine choice and generates inequitable outcomes. Our efforts began with garnering a deep understanding of the connection between the right of persons with disabilities to vote secretly and their use of electoral-assistive devices they are entitled to under human rights law, and primarily Article 29(a) CRPD. With its careful integration of legal and social scientific methods and paradigms, this study is able to offer new answers to unanswered research questions in a valid, efficient, and accessible manner.

Rather than making *a priori* claims that providing electoral-assistive devices that enable persons with disabilities to vote secretly and independently is an equality measure for abolishing discrimination in the context of voting, this study offered an epistemic (i.e., valid) reason to support these claims. These reasons emerged from the voting experiences of 42 research participants, including persons with disabilities and election officials from both England and Spain. As such, this study is a new research evidence base that recognises the experiences of participants as a legitimate source of knowledge. Moreover, the findings based on the contributions of the research participants proved valuable for the identification of a range of recommendations for lawmakers and policy-makers from England and Spain, and at the Council of Europe and EU levels, proposed in Chapter VIII.

This study will serve as a key framework, concrete blueprint, and a source of inspiration for those who want to preserve the voting rights of persons with disabilities and confront contemporary challenges to democracy. The actors who could benefit from the conclusions and recommendations that have emerged from this study include persons with disabilities, disability scholars, advocacy organisations, and human rights and disability defenders in general. Based on its findings, these actors can agree that an inclusive and accountable democratic system involves more than formal equality of all voters: it entails adopting positive measures. These measures include providing electoral-assistive devices for the use of voters with disabilities that allow for their voting experience to exist on an equal basis with others. Notably, this study

has provided a wide range of stakeholders (including civil society) with concrete examples of current and emerging electoral-assistive devices used, both within and outside of Europe, to enable persons with disabilities to vote. The goal is for this research to serve as a basis for the development of appropriate measures by States Parties to the CRPD, as well as strategic advocacy actions by persons with disabilities and their representative organisations that address existing discriminatory practices in the context of voting.