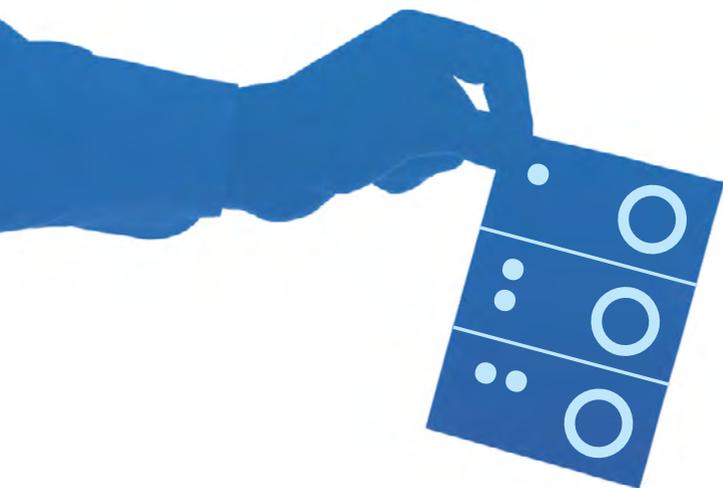




The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

MAKING ELECTIONS **ACCESSIBLE** for Voters with Visual Impairments



THE SITUATION

Accessible Voting Matters

In elections across Europe, voters select their favourite options on a paper ballot. By design, this approach is not **accessible** to most visually impaired voters. Only providing assistants to this group is insufficient to guarantee independent, secret and equal political participation.

PROBLEMS



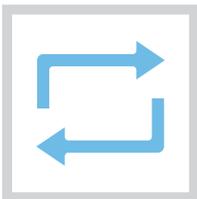
We know persons who have been denied assistance, and cases where the assistant has spoken aloud about the vote.

EBU expert

Voting by stencil is technically impossible. Each ballot is in A5 format with up to 150 candidates listed in small font.

EBU expert

MISMATCH



67% of EBU experts would like to have stencil voting, which 31% of the countries in Europe offer.

79% of EBU experts would like to have electronic voting, which 9% of the countries in Europe offer.

POLICY MAKERS

Improving Laws

The road to accessible voting begins with **good electoral legislation**. Policy makers should set a clear and unified framework. They should ensure the best conditions for assisted voting and advance stencils. To make it easy to vote for everyone, all voting methods should be explored.

UNIFIED LEGISLATION



- Create one law for all elections (presidential, parliamentary, local, European, referenda, etc.) to avoid misunderstandings or mistakes.
- Alternatively, create one law with basic accessibility provisions that apply to all electoral laws.

ASSISTED VOTING



- Allow visually impaired citizens to vote with any person of their choice, including family members and polling volunteers.
- Remove all documentation requirements such as medical certificates or oaths to apply for assisted voting.
- Require assistants to sign a statement that they understand the rules and respect the voter's intents.

POLICY MAKERS

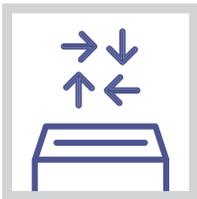
Improving Laws

STENCIL VOTING



- Where possible, introduce stencil voting as an option in all elections.
- Clearly designate the responsible agency for producing stencils, for example the Election Commission.
- Prescribe a unified ballot design that cannot be changed at the local level.
- Mandate by law that ballots are made available in accessible format before the day of the election.

MULTIPLE METHODS



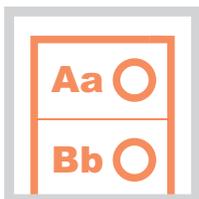
- Allow and advance electronic voting, ensuring that it is accessible and available to all citizens in all polling stations.
- Allow early voting for all citizens, so that they can vote with assistants at polling stations before the day of the election.
- Allow absentee voting for all citizens, so that they can vote from their home, using their custom lighting conditions.

ELECTION COMMISSIONS

Conducting Elections

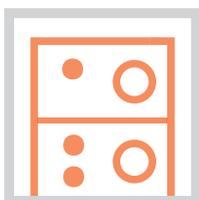
Accessible elections need very **sensible technical decisions** and considerate implementation. Election officials should design an accessible ballot and a useful stencil. They should explore new tools and offer tailored training for volunteers on the rights and needs of visually impaired voters.

BALLOT DESIGN



- Create unified ballot design with defined margins for stencil use, minimum font sizes and legible font types.
- If there are multiple ballots per election, create a noticeable pattern or different titles for ballots set apart by colours.
- Perforate or cut corner to indicate the front side of the ballot.

STENCIL DESIGN



- Equip hard-plastic stencils with Braille and relief large-print in high contrast.
- In countries with large paper ballots, develop reduced formats for all voters.
- Produce audio-files to access ballot information at the polling station.
- Finalise ballots at least 30 days before the election to guarantee sufficient time for production of stencils and audio files.

ELECTION COMMISSIONS

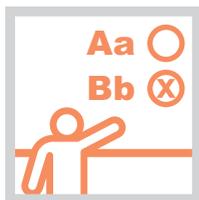
Conducting Elections

NEW TOOLS



- Provide magnifying glasses for partially sighted citizens in all polling stations.
- Provide headphones and playback device in all polling stations.
- Set up a phone hotline before and on election day to provide quick help to election volunteers and voters.
- Trial the use of stamps instead of pens for all voters to support citizens with mobility restrictions.
- Set one voting booth spatially aside, so that voter and assistant can communicate freely with each other.

TRAINING SESSIONS



- Develop mandatory training modules for election officials and volunteers present at the polling station, including training components on political participation of persons with disabilities, in cooperation with experts from organisations of visually impaired persons.
- Provide resources to ensure that all election officials and volunteers complete the training module.

THE WAY FORWARD

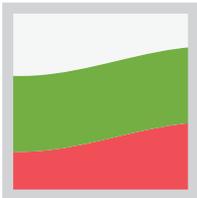
European Success Stories



BPS voters in **Finland** can choose their assistant without any restrictions. There is also one specifically trained assistant in each polling station. Moreover, voters are allowed to cast their ballot before election day by mail from home or at the municipality.



Stencils were first trialled in **Germany** in 1980. The German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted produces the stencils on behalf of the government and receives adequate funding for this task. The stencils are sent to all BPS persons upon request before the elections together with an explanatory CD for each voting district, also produced by the Federation.



Electronic voting is expected to be introduced to **Bulgaria** in the next years. According to the Election Code, voting machines need to include „facilitated access for visually impaired voters“. The highest court also declared that all polling stations must be equipped with voting machines.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

ARTICLE 29

To ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others ... inter alia, by:

- i. Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use;
- ii. Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums ... facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;
- iii. Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice.

ABOUT ACCESSIBLE VOTING

Find our Research Report on Accessible Voting in Europe and more information on our activities under <http://tiny.cc/93vwjz>

CONTACT

European Blind Union
6 rue Gager-Gabillot
75015 Paris
ebu@euroblind.org



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