

European Election My Opinion My Vote campaign launched

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18 May 2009 19:45

The MOTE – My Opinion My Vote was launched on Monday evening by the Equal Partners Foundation in collaboration with the University of Malta Programme for Inclusive Education.

MOTE is a Grundtvig Multilateral Project financed by the 'Lifelong Learning Programme for European Education, Audiovisual & Culture Agency.'

Outlined by Dr Elena Tanti Burlo and Ms Louise Grech, the project aims to empower people with learning disabilities through active citizenship and participation in political elections and to also encourage such people to form and express an informed opinion or decision just like anyone else.



The campaign also aims to raise awareness amongst those who are in a position to facilitate people with learning difficulties in exercising their political rights.

Where can one draw the line as to who deserved to vote and who didn't, was the question which was raised.

Presently, a clause in the law existed by which people with intellectual disabilities could stand to lose the right to vote.

People with intellectual disabilities are subject to an interdiction, meaning that their vote can be taken away from them unless they contest it.

Should they do so, they are subject to an interview which assesses if they are deemed fit to vote. The interview assesses their level of knowledge of politics, and their awareness of the leaders of the political parties, as well as why elections are held, among things.

However, Dr Tanti Burlo and Ms Grech asked, was this not discriminatory? They maintained that why should someone, simply because they bore features of Down Syndrome, should be asked to prove their ability to vote?

They added confidently that they believed that some of the participants in the campaign, who had taken part in study sessions which familiarised them intimately with what the European Union stood for and what each European Parliament Group had to offer, knew more on the subject than many who did not suffer from any learning disability.

They maintained that in order to avoid discrimination of people with learning disabilities, either everyone should be asked to prove that they are capable of voting, or nobody at all. The former,

they maintained, was not possible.

The campaign itself was carried out across six European countries: Malta, Italy, Hungary, Ireland, Spain and Denmark. Studies were carried out to look into the existing voting rights of people with intellectual impairment of the six countries, and also surveys looking into education for citizenship and how these are viewed and implemented by such people.

The survey carried out locally revealed that there is "good practice" currently in place, but that there is room for a lot of improvement that needs to be carried out in order to enhance the participation of persons with such intellectual disabilities.

However, there are presently no structures in place to help persons with intellectual disabilities to vote truly independently, they said.

In Malta, for example, the concept of a "trusted person" was being worked towards, as currently, Dr Tanti Burlo and Ms Grech said, only a person from the Electoral Commission could assist an individual during voting.

The campaign was also focused at raising the awareness of the importance of voting not only of people with learning and intellectual impairments, but also at those who work with such people, illustrating ways how they can assist them in the decision making and voting process.

[the bottom line, they said, was to give people with such disabilities a chance to participate in their political surroundings by being able to form an opinion and vote according to it.

The launch was attended by PL MEP Kirill Micallef Stafrace and Alternattiva Demokratika President Prof. Arnold Cassola.

