



# Voting Experiences

Among young people with learning disabilities



”My Opinion My Vote” has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

## Colophon

Title: Voting Experiences

Subtitle: among young people with learning disabilities

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Published by My opinion My Vote, November 2009

Homepage: [www.myopinionmyvote.eu](http://www.myopinionmyvote.eu)

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ISBN 9788791888443

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*States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake:*

*a) To ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, 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 without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, 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;*

Excerpt of article 29 in The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## Introduction

It is characteristic of a modern democracy that all adult citizens have an equal opportunity to exercise active political influence. If a certain group of the population do not have access to making use of their right to democratic influence, it will create a democratic deficit in society as a whole.

Participation in elections is one of the opportunities to make use of your rights as a citizen in a democratic society. But not all citizens have the same opportunity to make decisions and take part in elections. For people with learning disabilities<sup>1</sup> it can be extremely difficult to take part in elections, because pamphlets and other information material are not made accessible to this target group, or because people with learning disabilities are not expected to make decisions and are not taught about democracy, elections and political rights. In fact, British and Swedish surveys show that the level of participation in elections by people with learning disabilities is very low compared with the rest of the population<sup>2</sup>. A Danish survey points out that many persons with learning disabilities do not experience a natural expectation of having an opinion of their own or being responsible for themselves during their upbringing or at school. Likewise, many have not been taught about democratic institutions such as decision-making processes and legislation etc.<sup>3</sup>

Political decisions influence the lives of people with learning disabilities in the same way as they influence the lives of everybody else. Looked upon as a group, people with learning disabilities are often one of the population groups whose life conditions are most dependent on political decisions. Nevertheless, people with learning disabilities are still one of the population groups who are most frequently excluded from common practice of democratic functions.

## My Opinion My Vote

An EU project entitled "My opinion My vote – M.O.TE" is currently being implemented between 2008 and 2010. The aim of the project is to increase the political participation among people with learning disabilities.

An Italian organisation for people with learning disabilities Associazione Italiana Persone Down (AIPD) has taken the initiative to create this project, which is funded by the Grundtvig EU Lifelong Learning Programme of European Education, Audiovisual

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<sup>1</sup> In this document the term "learning disability" refers to a range of conditions that are associated with cognitive and intellectual impairments, as commonly understood in the UK (as opposed to the U.S. and Canada where the term "learning disability" is used to describe conditions associated with acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities not due to intellectual impairments. )

<sup>2</sup> Keely m.fl. : Participation in the 2005 general election by adults with intellectual disabilities. Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, Volume 52, Number 3, March 2008 , pp. 175-181(7) and Kjellberg: Participation – Ideology and Everyday Life, The Swedish Institute for Disability Research, 2002 and United Response <http://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/press/every-vote-counts-press-release.htm>

<sup>3</sup> "Veje til reelt medborgerskab. En kortlægning af udviklingshæmmedes vilkår for selvbestemmelse og brugerinddragelse", Henriette Holmskov og Anne Skov, Handicapenheden, Servicestyrelsen 2007.

& Culture Agency. The other participating organisations are The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons from Denmark, Fundacio Projecte AURA and Universitat Ramon Llull from Spain, Sio2 from Italy, Down Syndrome Ireland, Down Foundation from Hungary, University of Malta and Equal Partners Foundation from Malta.

The purpose of the project is to make people with learning disabilities aware of their political rights and create better opportunities for these rights to be exercised. The project is based on the assumption that there are various barriers preventing people with learning disabilities from exercising their political rights on an equal footing with others.

One barrier is lack of awareness and knowledge of political rights among people with learning disabilities, their relatives, and persons in the caring professions. Another barrier is lack of awareness of the importance of political participation by people with learning disabilities in society as a whole. A third barrier is lack of accessibility to elections and the need for the authorities responsible to look upon it as their task to ensure accessibility.

An interview survey of teachers from special and general education and families of people with learning disabilities concerning the democratic education of people with learning disabilities has already been carried out. The report of this survey can be downloaded on [www.myopinionmyvote.eu](http://www.myopinionmyvote.eu).

Furthermore, an awareness campaign was implemented in connection with the last European elections in June 2009. The campaign was targeted towards people with learning disabilities and their support persons. The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of the elections and inform about voting procedures. An awareness campaign concerning political rights in general will also be implemented as part of the project.

Also an educational programme focusing on politics, democracy, and elections aimed at persons with learning disabilities is to be developed. This is to be done in cooperation with people with learning disabilities, teachers and educators. When the programme is developed, it will be available for download from the project webpage [www.myopinionmyvote.eu](http://www.myopinionmyvote.eu).

As part of the project, an advisory group of four adults with learning disabilities is set up in each of the participating countries. The advisory group is to meet three times during the project period and contribute to the development and testing of the results of the project.

### **Interview survey**

A qualitative interview survey of three rounds among 20 persons with learning disabilities from each participating country on exercising political rights is to be carried out during the project period.

This report presents the results of the first interview survey of persons with learning disabilities. The interview survey is focusing on political rights and voting, including decision-making processes when voting, voting on the Election Day, and opportunities of being informed on political issues.

The second interview survey will take place in the autumn and winter of 2009. The interviewees will be asked if they voted at the election for the European Parliament held in June 2009, and how they experienced it. Many of the questions that were used in the first round of interviews will be used again in order to verify whether any changes in views or attitudes have taken place since the first time. Finally, the third interview survey will be carried out in the spring of 2010.

The interviews for this survey were done in each participating country. The interviewers reported the results of the interviews to The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons in Denmark. This report is written on the basis of the national reports provided by the interviewers.

The interviews and national reports for the first survey were done by:

Magdolina Birtha from Down Foundation (Hungary).

Elena Tanti Burlo from University of Malta, Juan Camilleri, Louisa Grech and Ninette Pace from Equal Partners Foundation (Malta).

Tina Mou Jakobsen and Camilla Jydebjerg from The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons (Denmark).

Laura Krauel from Fundacio Projecte Aura (Spain).

Carlotta Leonori from Associazione Italiana Persone Down (AIPD) Head Office, Rome, Jacqueline De Muro from AIPD, Pisa, Claudia Spina from AIPD, Campobasso, Elena Vanotti from AIPD, Bergamo and Roberta Maulà from AIPD, Potenza.

Grainne Murphy from Down Syndrome Ireland (Ireland).

The interviewers mentioned above reported the results of the interviews to The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons in Denmark. This report is written on the basis of the national reports provided by the interviewers.

## Method

The structure and various constituent parts of the M.O.TE project have been laid down by the AIPD. The AIPD has also made the overall design of the interview survey. There are three interview rounds including 20 persons with learning disabilities from each of the participating countries. The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons from Denmark is responsible for the coordination of the interview surveys, development of interviews tools, reporting of the results of the Danish interviews, as well as the results of the interviews of all participating countries.

The survey is designed as a qualitative survey with one-to-one interviews based on a semi-structured interview guide. The reason for choosing one-to-one interviews is that interviewees who are not familiar with voting might feel less motivated or even inhibited about participating actively in the actual interview if the interview is carried out within a group context.

The Equal Opportunities Centre has developed an interview guide. The Centre has drawn on preceding studies of literature on the methods of interviewing persons with learning disabilities when making the interview guide. The literature showed a general recommendation on formulating the questions in a very concrete way. It is emphasised that the questions should – as far as possible - be phrased in such a way that they relate to things, persons, and events familiar to the interviewee. The interview guide is attached in appendix A.

### Interviewing persons with learning disabilities

It always involves methodical considerations to plan qualitative research. One of the deliberations concerns the target group – the group of people that you want to know more about. The deliberations are both about how to best make interviews that will create more knowledge and about how to interview the people that you want to interview. No matter what group is the target for the interviews, a set of deliberations comes with it: How are the questions phrased so that they are understood, how are they culturally, sexually and gender sensitised etc. When interviewing persons with learning disabilities, there is also a set of considerations that concerns the needs and circumstances that can be significant for persons with learning disabilities.

Prior to the interview survey, the Centre has formulated guidelines for interviewing persons with learning disabilities. These guidelines describe how the first interviews of M.O.TE are carried out, and which aspects are important to be aware of in this context. The purpose of the guidelines has been to describe some of the methodical considerations pertaining to interviewing persons with learning disabilities. The purpose was furthermore to ensure some degree of methodological consistency when implementing the interviews as there would probably be different traditions and practices in the six participating countries in connection with the implementation of qualitative interview surveys, see the guidelines in appendix B.

The Centre has drawn on preceding studies of literature on the methods of interviewing persons with learning disabilities when making these guidelines.<sup>4</sup> In the guidelines, it is emphasised that it is important to allow for plenty of time for the interview – both for information meetings and for thoroughly explaining and getting “informed consent”.

The guide specifies the importance of informing the interviewees that all interviews are anonymous, and that they can withdraw from the interviews at any time, just as it is always possible to refuse to answer the questions during the interview.

The guidelines emphasise that it is important to follow up on the interviewee’s impression of being interviewed after the interview. It is important that the interviewees have the opportunity to tell about the interview situation, if something is not quite clear to them, or if they feel uneasy about the situation.

The guidelines call for an information meeting to be held with the interviewees prior to the interview. At these meetings the interviewees are informed of the purpose and the details of the project, as well as the number of participants and interview rounds during the project. Besides, a fact sheet is made, where the project, the interviews and the term “informed consent” are explained in easy-read. The fact sheet also contains information about the interviewer, including contact information. It is possible that a relative or another support person receives the fact sheet, but this should only be done in agreement with the interviewee. It is also emphasised that there are no right or wrong answers, and the interviewee can ask for further details or explanations at any time. Plenty of time is needed for information meetings in order to explain the purpose of the project and the interviews, and also to explain and obtain “informed consent”.

The interview guide and the guidelines have been sent to all project partners for further comments, and The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons has included these comments in the interview tools. Besides, the project partners of all participating countries have piloted the interview guide. The Equal Opportunities Centre has then adapted the interview guide on the basis of these comments.

The interview survey report has been developed as a summary of all the interview transcripts based on the thematics of the interview guide. These thematics have also formed the basis of the report structure of the national reports.

## Recruiting of interviewees

The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons has made guidelines for recruiting the interview group. The guidelines took a starting point in the research design developed by the AIPD. The guidelines stipulated that the interview group should be in the age range of 18-35. At least 30% of the interviewees should be of an age where they either had voted or had been able to vote at least once. There should be an equal representation of men and women, and the group as a whole should represent some diversity in age, ethnicity etc. Furthermore, the group should also present some diversity in reading and processing skills. It was however also stipulated that the criteria should be seen as guiding. The partners should try and meet them to the best of their ability, but

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<sup>4</sup> A list of literature can be seen in the guidelines in appendix B.

if it was not possible to recruit participants that meet all criteria, partners should strive for as good a match as possible. See appendix C for the list of criteria in full.

20 young persons with learning disabilities have been selected in each country to participate in the project. 16 are to participate in the project by participating in both the interview survey and in testing the educational programme also being developed as part of the MO.TE project. Four are to participate in the above as well as in a pilot group that will follow the project closely and participate in project meetings where they will help in the development and testing of the material and surveys of the project. This means that 20 persons with learning disabilities from each participating country have been interviewed. Two exceptions have been made. The Maltese project partners have done 17 interviews due to the fact that three of the interviewees did not show up for the interview. The Hungarian project partner has done 12 interviews because eight of the interviewees dropped out of the project before they were interviewed. In total 109 participants have been interviewed for this survey.

The participants of the interview survey have as a rule been recruited through the participating organisations, see appendix D for a description of the participating organisations. Many of the participating organisations are either disability organisations or organisations that provide services to persons with learning disabilities and their families. These organisations have been able to recruit participants from among their members or service recipients. The Danish organisation is neither a service organisation nor a member organisation and therefore had no members or service recipients to recruit from. Therefore their situation is a little different. See appendix E for an outline from each country describing how the interviewees were recruited as well as the general characteristics of the interview group of each country.

## Voting rights in the participating countries

Participation in national elections has historically been an area where groups of people have been disenfranchised because of their group status. Age, gender, social status and disabilities have all at different times been used as criteria for exclusion from the right to vote. For instance in Denmark, women did not obtain the right to vote until 1915. In Ireland women got the right to vote in 1918, and in Italy it was in 1945.

Historically, people with learning disabilities are a group who have been excluded from voting in most countries. In some countries they still are. In the participating countries the voting rights of people with learning disabilities vary.<sup>5</sup>

In **Ireland, Italy and Spain**, people with leaning disabilities have the right to vote with no exceptions<sup>6</sup>.

In **Denmark**, as a rule, everybody above the age of 18 has the right to vote, although in some cases disability is a ground for restriction of legal capacity. Individuals who have been deprived of legal capacity and thus are in a state of minority do not have the right to vote and therefore may not vote in referendums and elections. But individuals who are placed under other types of guardianship are not deprived of the right to vote.<sup>7 8</sup>

In **Hungary**, the legal form of interdiction is excluding many persons with learning disabilities from exercising their fundamental civic and political rights. There are two types of interdiction in Hungary: the incapacitated (fully) and the restrictive (partial). Fully incapacitated status means, that no contractual capacity is possessed, neither the right to work under legal forms nor to get married officially or exercising political rights, such as voting etc. Restrictive (partial) capacity is limited in certain areas, for example it makes it possible to get employment or to dispose of half of their income (the other half is under the trustee's supervision), but does not allow people to exercise their political rights or the right to get married. In 2006 more than 66,000 people were interdicted (most of them have learning disabilities, some of them have a psychiatric diagnosis) and 66% of them are under fully incapacitated interdiction. There is a proposal for changing the Hungarian Civil Code that also includes a revision of the rules concerning the legal capacity, and the introduction of supported decision-making instead of restriction and exclusion from decision-making.

In **Malta**, the constitution has the following clause:

*No person shall be qualified to be registered as a voter for the election of members of the House of Representatives if - (a) he is interdicted or incapacitated for any mental infirmity by a court in Malta or is otherwise determined in Malta to be of unsound mind;*

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<sup>5</sup> Information about the rules of the participating countries have been provided by the project partners

<sup>6</sup> Irish legislation does not deal with the question of voters with intellectual or learning disabilities. The common law has held that a person must have the legal capacity to vote. In general, legal capacity involves the ability to understand the nature and consequence of the act of voting. There is no system in place for assessing legal capacity.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.statsforvaltning.dk/site.aspx?p=6392>

For many years this clause was also applied to persons with intellectual disability, and the political parties in Malta sought advantage through it by denouncing to the Electoral Commission and the Maltese Courts any person they thought was not fit to vote. In 2002, pressure was put on the political parties to stop this practice and to give the right to vote to persons with intellectual disability. Although there was agreement and consent on behalf of both parties, this practice might still be resorted to at times. Thus the voting right of persons with learning disabilities can be taken away from them. Persons with learning disabilities are told that they cannot be given the vote because of their disability. If they contest it, the person is subjected to an interview to assess their knowledge of politics. If they are aware of the leaders of the political parties, why an election is held and other such information, they will be allowed to vote.

## Results from the interview survey

As described, the interview survey has focused on the interviewees' experiences with participation in elections. The starting point for the questions was the last national election. This starting point was taken to give the interviewees a relatively concrete starting point to help pinpoint the subject matter of the survey.

### Voting history

The interviewees were asked if they voted in the last national general elections. In most of the countries most of the interviewees had voted, however the numbers vary.

<b>Denmark*</b>	Yes: 13 people – 60 %.	No: 6 people – 30 %
<b>Hungary</b>	Yes: 9 people – 75 %.	No: 3 people – 25 %
<b>Ireland</b>	Yes: 20 people – 100 %.	No: 0
<b>Italy</b>	Yes: 15 people – 75 %.	No: 5 people** – 25 %.
<b>Malta</b>	Yes: 11 people – 65 %.	No: 6 people – 35 %
<b>Spain</b>	Yes: 18 people – 90 %.	No: 2 people – 10 %

\* One Danish interviewee is not sure if he has tried voting or not

\*\* 2 of the 5 were not of legal age to vote at the time of the Italian election prior to the interview survey.

The number of participants having voted does not correspond with the English and Swedish research mentioned above. This research indicates considerably lower election turnouts among people with learning disabilities than among the population as a whole.<sup>9</sup> In some countries like Ireland, the election turnout among the participants of this survey seems better than that of the general population. In other countries, the election turnouts are still lower than compared with the population as a whole, but higher than in other surveys. In Denmark for instance, the voter turnout in the population as a whole was 86,6% in the 2007 election.<sup>10</sup> However, it turned out that it was difficult for the interviewees to remember if it was in the last election they had voted, but not difficult to remember if they had tried voting in a general election at some point. This problem arose in many of the participating countries. A yes answer thus reflects that the interviewee has participated in an election at some point, but not necessarily the last election held in the country. Since the interviewees' answers do not necessarily reflect participation in the last or in any one election, the numbers cannot be used to measure voter turnout as such. The figures only show if the interviewees have or have not voted in a general election in their adult life. It must also be emphasized that, due to its methodological foundations, this survey is not representative for the election turnouts for people with learning disabilities, but describes the experiences and views of the people being interviewed and therefore points to problems and perspectives that are relevant for the population group.

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<sup>9</sup> For instance an English survey shows that in the 2001 General Election only 31% of people with learning disabilities voted compared with a national turnout of 59%,

<http://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/press/every-vote-counts-press-release.htm>

<sup>10</sup> [http://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folketingsvalg\\_2007#Valgresultatet](http://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folketingsvalg_2007#Valgresultatet). The 2007 election was the last election held at the time when the majority of the Danish interviews were made.

An important point concerning the nine Hungarian interviewees that have previously voted is that six of the nine are now interdicted. This means they will not be able to vote in future.

### The non voters

20 people from five countries had not voted. One person in Hungary had never been able to vote as she was interdicted soon after her 18th birthday. Another person from Hungary had tried to vote on one occasion, but did not bring his ID card and voting notice with him. Two of the people from Italy had not voted because they were not of legal age to do so at the time of the last election.

The rest express various reasons for not having voted. Several mention a lack of political interest. Other reasons mentioned are difficulties understanding the election procedures or the election process being too difficult, lack in reading skills, not feeling that their vote will really make a difference or not being able to decide who to vote for. One person from Hungary states, *“I was not brave enough to vote”*. A person from Italy states that he is aware of all the difficulties concerning a correct exercise of the right to vote and feels he is not prepared enough to do it properly. He also expresses that he is really interested in the M.O.TE project because it will get him to the needed awareness a good elector should have.

There were also people whose potential interest in voting had been put down or not supported by others:

*“They have told me that I can’t because I have Down syndrome, ”*

*“I spoke to my sister, I told her that I wanted to vote, she said no, that I can’t vote”*

Or by fear of not doing well enough or understanding enough:

*“I don’t know much about it [elections], and I don’t follow it. And I don’t hear much about it. And I don’t think I will understand these things. I think there must be others, who want to or like to or understand it more. Then I would rather that the people who want to and who understands it, that they do it [vote]. If they want to of course. But somebody will want to.”*

Perhaps prompted by participation in the M.O.TE project, most of the interviewees that had not voted expressed that they would like to vote next time they had the chance. Since the interviews were conducted, EU elections have been held in all European countries. In the next round of interviews we will ask the interviewees if they have voted in the EU elections.

### Experiences of voting

We asked those interviewees who had voted questions concerning their experiences of voting. The comments from the interviewees concerning the experience of voting vary

from person to person, but vary distinctively only in a few cases from country to country.

The majority of the interviewees in all of the participating countries who voted liked the process of voting and found it interesting. Many expressed satisfaction with the possibility of having influence in society by voting. Five of the Hungarian voters express exactly this sentiment saying that:

*“I wanted to try to vote and exercise the advantage of my right”*

*“I know that my vote is necessary for a certain politician to get in the Parliament”*

*“I hoped that the government becomes better”*

*“I wanted to help on my country’s better future”*

*“My vote makes my country better”.*

The Italian voters also expressed this sentiment strongly as eight of the 15 who voted refer to being deeply touched while voting, because they felt it was an important action.

It was also stressed that:

*” Yes, going to vote is worthy and really important for us because that way we [people with learning disabilities] can show that our voice is as important as others’ voices.*

*”It is important to vote, perhaps they will listen to us, if we use our right to vote”.*

Many interviewees furthermore express great satisfaction if the party they have voted for has done well in the elections, feeling this as sort of a personal victory. The same goes if the party did poorly. This makes some interviewees feel that they voted for the wrong party.

In Hungary, some who did not find the voting process difficult expressed disappointment because the politicians had not lived up to the expectations after the election. This added some disappointment to the voting experience: *”Nothing has come true that they promised. Promising is easy, but they keep only a few of them.”*

The people who did not like to vote or were indifferent to the experience also stated various reasons for this. Some think of it as *“just something you have to do”* or a *“civic duty”*. It was also stated that the act of voting was not of great importance *“because it will not change things because the politicians don’t listen much to the requests of people with learning disabilities.”*

A few seem to have felt somewhat pressured into voting, stating that:

*“I live with my mother, I am not really involved in the politics issue, but if I have to go, I have to go”*

*“My father told me that I should go vote”.*

### **The process of voting and the ballotpaper**

Voting is a process that requires skills that can be affected by a learning disability e.g. the ability to read, write, and process information. People with learning disabilities may therefore require accommodation to make the process of voting accessible to them. We wanted to try and ascertain whether the interviewees who had voted had experienced the process as accessible. We therefore asked the interviewees if they found voting to be easy or difficult, what they thought about the ballot paper, and if they had any help/accommodation voting.

The majority of participants in all the countries stated that they did not find it difficult to vote. This differs somewhat in Denmark where half of the voters state that they found it difficult to vote.

Despite the fact that most stated that they found voting not difficult, many interviewees also stated that the ballot paper was hard to read and understand.

*"I think it was a bit difficult, because [when] you get this ballot paper in your hand, it is a bit difficult, and where shall I put my cross? It is so that I know – I knew already - who I would vote for, but if you had reading difficulties or the like, or if you were not interested in politics .... Normally, I am not interested in politics either, so I watch the politicians on the telly, but I am not interested as such."*

Ireland was an exception as all the interviewees in Ireland found the ballot paper easy to use. The Hungarian voters also found the ballot paper understandable and usable. Only one of the Hungarian interviewees who had voted found the ballot paper hard to understand.

Some of the interviewees from Italy had prepared the voting process in advance by being presented with the ballot paper before the election, either at home or through the AIPD, and this had made the understanding of the ballot paper a great deal easier for them.

Many of the interviewees stressed that it would have been very helpful to have photos of the candidates on the ballot, and that this would have made voting easier. This sentiment seems to be shared by the voters in all the participating countries:

*"It would be great if they put the photos of the politicians, as, then, I would be able to see their faces and would know who they are."*

The Irish ballot does have photos of the candidates. The photos are probably part of the reason that all the Irish interviewees commented that the ballot papers were easy to understand. Some also stressed that it was the pictures that helped them understand the ballot paper.

Some of the interviewees from several countries also expressed a wish for the typing on the ballot to be in a larger font. The Danish interviewees also felt that it would be of help if the logos of the parties were on the ballot. Spain has logos on their ballot papers, but these are printed in black and white. The Spanish interviewees suggested that the logos should be printed in colour. Italy also has logos on the ballot, but some of the interviewees found that they were printed too small, which made them hard to decipher. Malta and Hungary also have logos on the ballot paper.

The interviewees find that a large size font, pictures and logos would be of great assistance to people who do not read. It is also suggested by the Danish and Maltese interviewees that it should be possible to have the ballot paper read aloud. One Hungarian interviewee also pointed out the importance of making ballot papers for blind people in Braille. E-voting is also suggested:

*“Well, when you are standing in the polling booth, then you have to tick the box and you have to think really fast. Because other people are waiting to get in. If you were sitting at home by your own computer, then you could spend between half an hour and two hours reading through everything, and maybe having the text enlarged, thinking about whether to vote for the one party or the other.”*

### **Getting help**

For some people with learning disabilities, having help in the polling station and in the polling booth can be a necessary form of accommodation. All countries have election officials present at the polling station that can help by answering questions and providing guidelines before the voter enters the polling booth. The extent of help offered varies from country to country.<sup>11</sup> In some countries many of the interviewees have had help, and in others few or none have had help.

In **Italy**, it is up to the staff of the polling station to help the electors with information and guidance, but only until they enter the polling booth, and not inside the polling booth. This is because the Italian electoral law states that only people with physical disabilities can be accompanied in the polling booth and can express their vote assisted by an accompanying person. Consequently, none of the interviewees had help at the actual voting although some did receive help prior to voting.

In **Ireland**, none of the interviewees had help at the actual voting although some did receive help prior to voting and asserted that they needed some help to know where to cross and got this before entering the polling station. In Ireland, it is possible to get help to conduct the actual act of voting since the presiding officer can assist you if you have a reading or writing disability that prevents you from voting without help. During this procedure, the presiding officer and the personation agents go with you to a part of the polling station where a conversation in normal tones cannot be overheard. If necessary, the presiding officer will suspend entry to the polling station and have the station cleared to ensure that no other person can overhear how you vote. The presence of the personation agents ensures and confirms that the presiding officer complies with your instructions. It is a protection for the voter and for the presiding officer. As with all other people involved in a poll, there is a statutory obligation on personation agents to maintain the secrecy of the ballot.

In **Denmark**, just two of the interviewees who voted stated that they had help voting. In Denmark voters with a disability can have help in the polling booth. At the time of the last election, before the interviews took place, the help would be provided by two election officials. Since then, the law has been changed. Now it is possible for the voter

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<sup>11</sup> The project partners have provided information about the rules concerning help at the polling station and in the polling booth in the participating countries.

to choose his or her own helper. Apart from the personally appointed helper, an official also has to be present.

In **Malta**, if a person requires help, this person will advise the electoral commissioner present that he/she requires help to vote upon entry into the polling station. They will then wait for the room to empty of the voters casting their vote, and then the doors are closed so that person can receive help to vote. Therefore, they will be voting behind closed doors. The person is then asked what kind of help he/she needs. Some just need the commissioner to read out the names to them, and they will indicate against whom they wish to place the vote no 1, and then proceed to indicate the rest, no 2, 3 etc. If more help is needed, the pictures of the people contesting the election are shown, and the choice is made from the pictures. The persons who cannot write will have the electoral commissioner fill in their ballot paper. Representatives of the major parties witness this as well so that there are no abuses. No one else can accompany the person who is going to vote. There is no help in the polling booth, as such, as the polling station becomes the polling booth. There are no criteria to receive help with voting. If a person indicates that he/she wishes to be helped, then he/she will receive the help necessary. This is available not only to persons with disability, but also to persons who are illiterate, or elderly. Seven of the Maltese interviewees got help at the polling station to accomplish voting:

*“The commissioner in the polling station helped me with the voting”*

*“I told other people (commissioner) who I wished to vote for”*

*“Picked persons from photos for whom to vote then told the commissioner who to vote for.”*

Others had help prior to going to vote as one explains: *“My mum showed me what I had to do, and I voted alone”*. Just two of the Maltese interviewees stated that they needed no help at all.

In **Spain**, four people had help in the polling booth. 14 did not need help. In Spain you cannot have help to vote. There are volunteers of the different political parties who orientate the people inside the polling place, but these volunteers are not allowed to help you with the ballot paper.

In **Hungary**, it is not possible to get help in the pooling booth. The Hungarian interviewees were asked how they had obtained knowledge about how to vote. The answers show that the interviewees got their knowledge about how to vote from three different sources. The most dominant source was that they asked and got informed at the polling station before they voted. Secondly, they asked their parents or their families, and last but not least, they have orientated themselves (reading newspaper, orientation brochures, watching TV etc). Many Hungarian interviewees emphasized that they experienced the officials at the polling station as kind, patient and helpful. There was however one case where the interviewee felt that she was treated as a *“complete idiot”*.

## Getting registered and polling cards

Before you can vote you, have to be registered to vote. The registration system varies from country to country. The questions in the interview guide concerning voter registration have therefore been subject to an adjustment from each participating partner doing interviews. All the interviewees, the voters as well as the non-voters, were asked the questions about registration and/or polling cards. The purpose of the questions was to get an idea as to the accessibility of the registration process.

In **Italy, Denmark and Ireland**, citizens get a polling card by mail with his/her personal data and the address of the polling place where he/she has to go and vote.

In **Italy**, 16 out of the 20 interviewees are aware of what a polling card is, how they obtain it, and how to use it. The remaining persons do not know what it is and think they just need their ID card to vote. From those in the former group, only five were responsible for their polling card themselves, six knew where their parents kept it, the rest knew their parents kept it somewhere, but they didn't know where.

In **Denmark**, most of the interviewees voting had received a poll card and knew what it was. One interviewee received a poll card, but did not know what it meant, and therefore he went down to the polling station on Election Day and asked the election officials. Others had asked their parents what the polling card was, and how it was used. It seems a bit different as regards the interviewees who had not voted. Some had received a poll card and knew what it meant, whereas others did not remember if they had received the poll card, did not know what a poll card was or had asked for an explanation. The interviewees who had asked someone what a poll card is had all asked their parents.

The **Irish** interviewees were all registered to vote and have had no problems in regard to this particular issue.

In order to vote in **Spain**, it is essential to be registered. Voting rights are exercised by the staff in the section in which the elector is registered according to the Census and the Bureau of Elections. The right to vote is shown by entries in the certified copies of electoral rolls or census specific certification, and in both cases, by the identification of voters, which is implemented by national identity card, passport or driver's license. The Spanish interviewees have not been asked questions concerning registration.

In **Malta**, people are automatically registered to vote when they reach 18 years of age. Voting documents are received automatically by post, unless you have had taken away your voting rights by the court system. 11 of the interviewees had received voting documents, six had not. Only one of the persons who had received voting documents did not know what the documents were for.

In **Hungary**, people who are 18 and not interdicted are automatically being registered to vote. Their names are put on a list that is sent to the polling station. The main problem in Hungary is that more than half of the people with learning disabilities are under interdiction so they do not possess the right to vote.

This year during the EP election, the Hungarian M.O.TE project partner set out to test how interdiction works in practice. They wanted to find out if people that are interdicted

are really not on list of voters. Also they wanted to see how the officials at the voting station would respond to an interdicted person coming to vote. It turned out that interdicted people are not on the list of voters. The woman at the polling station called the Ministry of Home Affairs, because firstly she did not understand why the persons who had turned up to vote were not on the list. It was unintelligible, as they could prove with their personal documents that they lived in that voting district. When she has had the answer from the ministry, she was really polite when she told the persons: "*Unfortunately, you do not have the right to vote*". The persons who had showed up to test their interdictions were disappointed, but not surprised, as they knew that they were interdicted.

## Deciding for whom to vote

Part of voting is deciding for whom to vote. We also asked the interviewees if they found the process of deciding difficult. Where many of the interviewees who had voted found this easy, the opposite was the case when asked about deciding who to vote for. Deciding for whom to vote was something that many interviewees talked about as being the difficult part of voting. This was especially the case among the **Irish, Danish** and **Maltese** interviewees.

The answers from the interviewees show that many of the issues faced by people with learning disabilities are the same as those faced by all people deciding which political party to side with. It was explained that it is difficult to see through all the things the politicians say and find out what they really intend to do if they are elected. One of the Danish interviewees felt that all the Danish politicians were promising the same things no matter what party they belonged to. Other issues were related to trust and political transparency:

*"I have voted according to the promises, because I believed in politicians."*

*"Nothing has come true that they promised. Promising is easy, but they keep only a few of them"*

Because many had a difficult time deciding for whom to vote, many sought help making this decision by talking to other people about it. Those who talked to others prior to making the decision had mostly talked to their family.

*"It took me some time to stay thinking; sometimes my dad gives me a paper and tries to help me. He writes the numbers next to whom I like and tells me – vote as you want – and I take the paper and I stay copying it."*

This sometimes presents itself as somewhat problematic for some of the interviewees who talk about on one hand wanting to vote as the parents or the family, but on the other hand wanting to assert themselves and voting for someone else.

Others were quite happy with being in sync with the family.

*"All my family members always vote the same, we like this party"*

*“As our whole family vote for the same party, it is not necessary to speak about it because we already know it”*

Very few had talked to people other than family about for whom to vote, and many expressed that talking about for whom to vote was a very private thing as the vote is private and secret.

This was also the reason given from some of the interviewees who had not talked to anyone about their decision for not doing this:

*”I wanted to keep it to myself”*

In **Hungary** and **Spain**, most of the interviewees had not talked to anybody about for whom to vote though some had.

In **Hungary**, only three interviewees answered that they talked to someone about who to vote for. In all three cases they talked to their families. There were two factors that influenced the Hungarian interviewees’ decision-making process of who to vote for: First, a general motivation to make Hungary’s future better by voting for a political party or a politician that ensures changes, and secondly, the information from the media that had affected their opinion. Besides, this one interviewee answered that her decision was based on her daily mood.

In **Spain**, the majority of the interviewees who voted said they did not talk to anybody about who they were going to vote for. However, they do confirm that in the days before the election they were talking about politics in their house.

*“We speak sometimes about who to vote for, but as the vote is secret, I won’t tell you who I voted for”*

In **Spain**, half of the interviewees stated that they had voted the same as the rest of their family because it is what they agree to at home, and they vote for the political party they consider themselves more familiar with. The other half voted as they considered fit and were very aware of the confidentiality of the vote.

*”I know that I am impressionable, I often believe that people say to me. I have voted according to the promises, because I believed in politicians.”*

In **Italy**, the interviewees did not find who to vote for difficult. Almost all the interviewees (14) reported that choosing who to vote for was quite easy, and they had no doubts while voting. 12 of the Italian interviewees reported that they had decided who to vote for after having asked their relatives for advice, listened to their discussions about politics, read programmes of each party together with relatives and analyzed the news. Only four assert they made their own choice without involving family members or others in the decision. They reported having listened to the news or having read newspapers to get information. Two of the Italian interviewees had chosen the candidate he liked the best, the others according to the candidates position on the subject of employment.

## Getting information

Talking to the family and family influence was one way many of the interviewees obtained knowledge and formed an opinion as to who to vote for. But most also used other sources of information.

In the period prior to an election, information about the election, the parties and the politicians are available from many sources, the most prominent probably being TV and the newspapers. We wanted to try and find out to what extent the interviewees had sought knowledge about the election and about the different views and opinions from the parties and politicians running in the election from these sources or others. We therefore asked the interviewees if they had seen something on the TV or read something in the newspapers about the general election. We also asked questions to try to find out if the interviewees knew something about the views about the different political parties, and how they had obtained knowledge about these views.

It is important to stress that the questions have not been designed to test the political knowledge of the interviewees. There is no right amount of political knowledge that one must possess to be a voter just like there is no right amount of political interest. People vote for various reasons and with various backgrounds, and so of course also our interviewees. However, political interest or even political knowledge may reflect on one's decision as to whether one votes or does not vote. It may also reflect on one's experience of voting. The questions are therefore included to help bring nuance and depth to the answers concerning voting experiences and voting history.

Another important issue concerning information is accessibility. This issue is of special importance to people with disabilities, as many people with disabilities are in need of information that has been made accessible in a form that accommodates them and takes into consideration the needs arising from their disability. This issue indeed encompasses people with learning disabilities. For people with learning disabilities to have full access to information, this will often need to be designed in a way that allows access for persons who may have reading and comprehension difficulties. The questions are therefore also a way to try and find out if people with learning disabilities experience the available information as relevant and appropriate for their needs.

All the interviewees, both the voters and the non-voters were asked the questions about information.

We had questions concerning election specific information and also questions concerning information in a broader context, e.g. the news in general, general politics etc.

Many of the interviewees said that they found it quite hard to find out what views the political parties and/or politicians have, both in general and on the specific subjects that were of special interest to them:

*“It is a difficult question to answer because everything is very confused”,*

*“I feel they all say the same things”.*

*“There are many parties to choose from. But I didn’t know what one party could do better than another. I just don’t know.”*

Some answers reflected that the inaccessibility also had something to do with the way people with disabilities and people with learning disabilities in particular are a disenfranchised group:

*“I think it is hard to figure out, because I get the feeling, that there are neither money nor votes in our group. I mean the politicians are clearly not interested in doing something for us.”*

*“I said this before, people with disabilities should not be labeled and we can have a voice in our own country sometimes but they don’t get it when it comes to jobs, it’s like the employers, they see the Down syndrome but no us”.... “I don’t think so, I mean they don’t come to the door about people’s disabilities”.*

Others stressed the inaccessibility of the information in the form it was delivered: *It is hard to understand the election news on TV.*

Others found the political information more accessible and listened especially for the parties’ stance on particular subjects:

*“When I listen to them, when I see the news, I see what the MP is saying about the country - Social Policy and that and I enjoy listening. I try to understand what they are saying.”*

*“I listen to what they have to say about work.”*

Some of the Italian interviewees reported that especially the TV ads that the parties run in the days up to an election were influential on their knowledge about the stance of the different political parties and subsequently on their decision on who to vote for.

In Ireland, it is common for contesting politicians to make house calls in their constituency, and this was a source of knowledge mentioned. In general, the Irish interviewees who provided more detailed answers had a visit from a political representative in their home in the time up to an election.

Most of the interviewees in all the countries watched news on the television and as such had this as a source of knowledge although it was also explained by quite a few that it can be hard to understand the news on TV.

Newspapers were a lot less frequented as a source of news and information. Some explaining this with the fact that they do not read: *I can’t read. Also I like the news [on TV], because they use a lot of pictures and stuff like that.*

## Talking about politics

As mentioned above, a great many of the interviewees mentioned their family as a source of knowledge and influence in deciding who to vote for. We also asked the interviewees if they talked about politics and elections in general, i.e. not necessarily leading up to an election or in connection with trying to decide for whom to vote. This question revealed that there seem to be national differences.

In **Denmark** and **Spain**, most of the interviewees do not talk about politics.

In **Italy**, half of the interviewees talk about politics. The rest do not speak about politics for several reasons: Either they are not interested, or because they find it boring, or because they find it is too difficult a subject to deal with. Most of those who speak about politics speak to family members. Only two of the interviewees talk to their friends about politics.

In **Malta** and **Ireland**, most of the interviewees talk about politics. In **Ireland**, over half of the interviewees stated that they would talk about voting and elections with the family. A small number of interviewees stated that they would discuss elections with people at work and/or friends.

In **Malta**, eight stated that they talked to the family, five that they talked to friends, and three that they had talked to staff members about politics. In Malta, however, one had the following experience of talking about politics: *[We talked about] whether I can vote, and she said no that I can't vote.*

## Topics of political interest

It is often assumed that people with disabilities will be mostly interested in disability politics having accessibility, accommodation and non-discrimination as their main points of political interest. There is, however, no reason to assume that people with disabilities have any other political interest than the population in general, i.e. a political interest covering a wide spectrum of subjects. We talked to the interviewees about the topics of their political interest by asking them what they would decide if they got to govern their country.

The answers to this question vary as much as one might expect. Some mention topics that belong within the topic of disability politics, but most of the topics mentioned have nothing to do with disability issues.

In **Denmark**, some of the topics mentioned are unemployment, crime, food prices, education, accommodation, and work opportunities for people with disabilities and taxes. One interviewee advocates for people with learning disabilities to be met in another way:

*“If I was to decide, then I would like that you as a person with disabilities or as a person with learning disabilities got taken seriously, and that you were listened to as a person [...] Sometimes you have the experience that it is hard to be heard and to be taken seriously.”*

In **Italy**, the topics mentioned were: traffic, pollution, taxes, housing for homeless people, parking fines, street lighting, crime, immigration and speed limits. A couple of interviewees also addressed the topic of political participation:

*“Everybody must feel free to express his own opinion”*

*“All the people with Down syndrome must vote.”*

In **Malta**, the topics were work, travel, families in need, pollution and animal welfare:

*“If I were minister – I’d help people more, like families in need. We need to keep the environment clean, plant more trees to make Malta greener. We should care for the environment. Good to keep some green areas and not to keep building without control.”*

*“I would stress the environment so that it is kept clean. I would like to build a shelter for animals so that they will not be abandoned..”*

In **Spain**, recycling, discrimination, spending, jobs and architectural barriers were some of the topics mentioned:

*“More jobs; to eliminate the architectural barriers and more acceptance for people with disability.”*

*“That there would not be so much discrimination and that they would take a better care of us.”*

In **Ireland**, over half responded with “*I wouldn’t change anything*”. Five interviewees detailed what decisions they would make for the country. The strongest emerging theme here was the considered necessary provision of additional services and supports for people with disabilities:

*“More transport for people with disabilities”*

*“I’d like to run for people with disabilities throughout Ireland and work for access, public signs, bus passes, old age pensioners and nursing homes.”*

*“More jobs and colleges for people with disabilities so they can move out of home”.*

Most of the **Hungarian** interviewees did not answer this question. Three answered, and their focus was making Hungary “*a better place*” or “*making Hungary’s future better*”.

## Conclusion – putting voting experiences among young people with learning disabilities into perspective

Most of the interviewees in this survey had voted at some point in their adult life. This does not correspond with English and Swedish studies that show that the voter turnout among people with learning disabilities is much lower compared to the voter turnout in the population in general.<sup>12</sup> It is, however, not possible to ascertain from this survey if the interviewees voted in the last election held in their country due to the fact that not all interviewees were able to remember if this was the case. The high amount of voters in this survey is therefore no estimation of voter turnout as such, merely a number on how many had voted at some point in their life.

20 people from five countries had not voted. One did not vote because of interdiction. Two did not vote because they were not of age to vote at the time of the last election. The rest of the non-voters expressed various reasons for not voting. One was lack of political interest, but lack of accessibility and political apathy were also mentioned as reasons.

Generally, the interviewees of the survey were interested in political matters. Most of the interviewees had voted, looked upon voting as important and had ideas as to how to better society. Many interviewees also talked about politics in general, i.e. not necessarily leading up to an election or in connection with trying to decide for whom to vote.

### The process of voting

Voting is a process that requires skills that can be affected by a learning disability, e.g. the ability to read, write and process information. People with learning disabilities may therefore require accommodation to make the process of voting accessible to them.

The majority of participants in all the countries stated that they did not find it difficult to vote. When asked more questions about voting, it did however emerge that many interviewees found that the ballot paper was hard to read and understand. The interviewees from Ireland differ in this respect, as they did not find the ballot paper difficult to use. The Irish ballot paper has pictures of the candidates, and several of the interviewees explained that this is what made the Irish ballot paper easy to use. In accordance with this finding, pictures on the ballot paper were suggested by many of the interviewees from the other countries as something that would make the ballot paper a lot easier to use. Other suggestions for making a more accessible ballot paper were

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<sup>12</sup> Keely m.fl. : Participation in the 2005 general election by adults with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, Volume 52, Number 3, March 2008 , pp. 175-181(7) and Kjellberg: Participation – Ideology and Everyday Life, The Swedish Institute for Disability Research, 2002 and United Response <http://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/press/every-vote-counts-press-release.htm>

writing in a large font and the use of party logos in colour on the ballot paper. E-voting was also mentioned as a way to make the election procedures more accessible.

For some people with learning disabilities, having help in the polling station and in the polling booth can be a necessary form of accommodation. Difficulties getting help to vote was however not a theme that stood out as especially problematic. In general, the people needing help had the required support, and the people that did not get help did not experience a need for help. The survey, however, also shows that some people with learning disabilities can need accommodation in the form of help in the polling booth. In the countries where help with the actual voting is not a possibility (Italy and Hungary), some citizens will without doubt have difficulties voting, perhaps even to a degree where they are excluded from the process of voting.

Before you can vote, you have to be registered to vote. It varies in the participating countries how you get registered to vote. In none of the countries did the registration process stand out as problematic. The exception to this is Hungary. Here some of the interviewees had experienced not being registered due to interdiction. The problem for these interviewees is not the registration, but the interdiction. The use of interdiction is an important problem that needs to be addressed. Hopefully, a project like the M.O.TE project can help to alleviate some of disenfranchisement experienced by people with learning disabilities. Information and education is in all likelihood the most viable way to confront the thinking that leads to the exclusion of people with learning disabilities from political and civil rights.

### **Deciding for whom to vote – the accessibility of political opinion**

The most difficult part of voting was not connected to the actual voting or the voting procedures, but rather to deciding for whom to vote. This assessment would most likely be shared by most voters and is thus not specific to people with learning disabilities.

In fact, some of the reasons given for this show that many of the issues faced by people with learning disabilities are the same as the issues faced by all people deciding which political party to side with. It was expressed that it is difficult to see through all the things the politicians say and find out what they really intend to do if they are elected, and that all the politicians promise the same things no matter what party they belonged to. Other issues concerned trust and political transparency.

Having a learning disability can however make it especially difficult to obtain and understand information for which reason the problem warrants closer reflection in this regard.

The level of knowledge about the views of the political parties was generally low. Most interviewees stated that they found it quite hard to find out what views the political parties and/or politicians have both in general and on the specific subjects that were of special interest to them.

The interviewees found politics generally inaccessible. One reason for this is lack of accessibility to information and especially to information about politics. Not just to written material, but to the presenting of ideas in general. The political ideas were

represented in a way that was experienced as confusing and difficult to understand, and the parties and politicians were perceived as “all saying the same things”.

Some interviewees stressed that the inaccessibility of politics also had something to do with the way people with disabilities and people with learning disabilities in particular are a disenfranchised and a disempowered group. The sentiment was that politicians are not interested in communicating their views to people with learning disabilities.

One way to address the inaccessibility to politics is to produce election and campaigning material in a manner that is accessible to people with learning disabilities, for instance using an easy-to-read format with a limited amount of text presenting only one idea at a time and using pictures to support the text.<sup>13</sup> Political party organisations in Sweden, England, Scotland and Wales have already undertaken this task and have shown that it is possible to do.<sup>14</sup> As part of the M.O.TE project, information materials were made in connection with the EU elections in June 2009. Two leaflets were produced. One targeted people with learning disabilities with information about the elections and how to vote. The other was targeted at support persons of people with learning disabilities calling for support for the right to vote for people with learning disabilities and urging that the information and knowledge necessary be provided.<sup>15</sup>

Another important way of addressing the deficit in information among people with learning disabilities is to make sure that sources of accessible information are available. It can for instance be newspapers made with text that is easy to read and understand – newspapers like this all ready exist in several countries.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, as part of the M.O.TE project, an educational programme about politics and voting is being designed. The programme specifically targets people with learning disabilities and aims to provide a better understanding of politics, democracy, political parties etc. The results of the survey indicate a strong need for more educational initiatives like this.

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<sup>13</sup> Guidelines in English on how to produce material in easy read can be found at <http://www.mencap.org.uk/document.asp?id=1579> and <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Pages/HowtouseEasyWordsandPictures.aspx?k=easy%20words> and [www.inclusion-europe.org/documents/107.pdf](http://www.inclusion-europe.org/documents/107.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Centrum för lättläst: Rösta på oss! i valet 2006 (2006), <http://www.lattlast.se/pub/4647/R%C3%B6sta%20p%C3%A5%20oss!-pdf.pdf>  
Learning Disability Alliance, Scotland: Our Easy Read guide to the Political Parties manifestoes for the 2007 Scottish Parliament And Scottish Local Councils Elections, (2007). Disability Rights Commission: "Getting involved in a political party. Information for people with learning disabilities", <http://www.library.nhs.uk/learningdisabilities/ViewResource.aspx?resID=268630>  
Mencap Wales: Partners in Politics, The Scottish National Party. [http://www.symbolworld.org/eLive/election\\_special/snp/manifesto.pdf](http://www.symbolworld.org/eLive/election_special/snp/manifesto.pdf)  
The party of Wales: <http://www.plaidcymru.org/uploads/publications/277.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> The leaflets can be read and downloaded from [www.myopinionmyvote.eu](http://www.myopinionmyvote.eu)

<sup>16</sup> In Denmark <http://www.paaletdansk.dk/> and <http://www.ligetil.nu/>, In Finland <http://papunet.net/ll-sidor/ll-bladet.html>, in Sweden <http://8sidor.lattlast.se/?page=42> Denmark also have a TV production company TV Glad ([www.tvglad.dk](http://www.tvglad.dk)) that produces television made by and for people with learning disabilities

## Deciding for whom to vote - talking about politics

Many of the interviewees had talked to their families about politics and who to vote for in the process of making that decision. Many also talked politics with the family in general, i.e. not necessarily leading up to an election.

Family influence was thus mentioned by many of the interviewees as an important factor in forming political opinions. This is however the case for most people. For instance, one study shows that, in general, people are much more likely to change their votes in a particular direction if those with whom they discuss political issues support that direction, especially if they are members of the interviewees' family and are the individuals with whom they discuss politics most.<sup>17</sup>

On a more worrying note, some interviewees did not vote mainly because they had their potential interest in voting put down or not supported by family members or others. Others seem to have voted not out of a personal choice, but because of familial pressures. This shows that there is still a need of education, not only of people with learning disabilities, but of their families and of society in general to do away with the prejudices still connected to people with learning disabilities making use of their right to vote. As part of the M.O.TE project, two awareness-raising campaigns are launched. As mentioned above, one was already done in connection with the EU elections in June 2008. The other is still pending. Both these campaigns are addressed to people with learning disabilities themselves and persons who support them. The results of the survey support the need of these initiatives.

## National differences

Doing a survey with the same content with the same target group at the same time in six countries gives a unique opportunity to detect national differences in behaviour and opinion. The survey results from the six participating countries actually show very few significant national differences. However, there were a few that emerged.

Interdiction is used much more in Hungary than in the other countries, but in spite of this, most of the Hungarian interviewees had voted at some point in their life. However, at the time of the survey, six of the Hungarian interviewees were interdicted and will thus not be able to participate in elections in future.

Denmark is the country where fewest of the interviewees had voted. Only 60% of the participants had voted in Denmark. At the same time, Denmark is a country that has a relatively high voter turnout in elections, for instance the voter turnout in the population as a whole was 86.6% in the 2007 election. The fact that only 60% of the interviewees had voted could likely reflect a general low voter turnout among people with learning disabilities.

The majority of the interviewees in all of the participating countries who had voted had liked the process of voting and found it interesting. Many of the interviewees expressed

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<sup>17</sup> 'People Who Talk Together Vote Together': An Exploration of Contextual Effects in Great Britain  
Charles Pattie; Ron Johnston, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 1467-8306, Volume 90, Issue 1, 2000, Pages 41 – 66

satisfaction with the possibility of having influence in society by voting. But the Hungarian voters and the Italian voters expressed this especially strongly. Eight of the fifteen Italian interviewees who had voted thus referred to being deeply touched while voting, because they felt it was an important civic action.

Many interviewees talked about politics in general, i.e. not necessarily during election time or in connection with trying to decide for whom to vote. This was however one of the objects of national difference. Malta and Ireland had more interviewees talking about politics than the other countries. In Denmark and Spain, most of the interviewees do not talk about politics. This could be due to many reasons. It could mirror a tendency in the population as a whole, but it could also have to do with a lack of education or expectation in relation to people with learning disabilities. It should in any case warrant some reflection especially since studies point to a correlation between talking about politics, political knowledge, forming political opinions and engaging politically.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> How Feeling Free to Talk Affects Ordinary Political Conversation, Purposeful Argumentation, and Civic Participation. Joohan Kim Robert Wyatt and Elihu Katz in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77(1), 99-114, 2000 and News, Talk, Opinion, Participation: The Part Played by Conversation in Deliberative Democracy. Joohan Kim, Robert Wyatt and Elihu Katz. *Political Communication*, 16, 361-385, 1999, The Role of Communication in Public Opinion Processes: Understanding the Impacts of Intrapersonal, Media, and Social Filters, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 2007 19(3):287-312

# Appendix

## A: Interview guide

### **Interview guide for one-to-one interviews**

As I told you at the information meeting, I would like to interview you about voting in elections. I am also going to interview other people about voting in elections. I am making a project together with some other countries in Europe about voting in elections. We would like to find how to explain what democracy and elections is, and how to have your say in (country).

It is important to remember that there are no correct answers – no rights and wrongs. What I would like to know is your experience about voting, so you can tell me the things that you find are important – also if you have never voted in elections.

The interview will be so that I ask you some questions, which you may answer. If there is something that you do not understand, you are welcome to tell me. And it is quite ok if there is something you do not want to answer. If you would like a break during the interview, just let me know.

None of the things you say are told to anybody. When I have listened to the tape and written down what you have said, I remove your name from the paper, so no one knows what you have said, but only your opinion about the things.

### **Questions**

#### **Participation in elections**

To begin with I will ask you some questions about the last election. Do you remember if you voted the last time there was an election in [country]?

#### **For interviewees who voted**

Questions about the previous election

- What was it like to vote?
- Was it easy or difficult to vote? Why?
- Did you get any help to vote?
- Was the ballot paper easy or difficult to understand? Why?
- How would you have liked it to be?
  - o With pictures or party logo
  - o With photos
  - o Read to you
  - o Large print
  - o On computer

### **Questions about deciding who to vote for**

- Was it easy or difficult to decide who to vote for?
- Did you talk to anyone about who to vote for? If yes: Who did you talk to?

### ***For interviewees who did not vote***

- Did you talk to anyone about voting?
- Would you like to vote next time?

### ***All interviewees***

#### **Information about the election**

- Do you know what the political parties think about things that are important to you?
- Did you know this before the election?

#### **Polling card and registration as a voter**

- *Each country formulates questions about the polling card and voter registration which are relevant to the specific context, e.g. “Have you received a polling card?” “Have you registered as a voter?” etc.*

#### **General questions**

- Do you talk to anyone about politics and about voting at elections?
- If yes: Who? Friends? Staff? Family? If yes, what did you talk about?
- What about your friends and family. Do they vote?
- Do you watch the news?
- Do you read the paper?
- Do you think it is interesting who makes decisions about the way that [country] is run?
- If you were making all the decisions in [country], what would you decide to do?

#### **For countries where you have to register**

- Are you registered as a voter?
- Why/why not?
- If no: Have you talked to anyone about being registered as a voter?

**Round off**

Have you any questions about the things we have talked about? Were any of the questions difficult to answer? Or were there questions you did not understand? What do you think of being interviewed? Would you like to be interviewed again?

## **B: Interview guidelines**

### **Guidelines for interviewing people with learning disabilities**

These guidelines describe how the first interviews of M.O.TE are carried out, and which aspects are important to be aware of in this context. Careful consideration is necessary when interviewing people with learning disabilities. Many of them are dependent on daily help from professionals and relatives. That is why the first contact will involve professionals and/or relatives too. It is important to keep in mind that this may influence the interview situation in such a way that the interviewee may try to please in certain situations. Therefore, it is important to explain that it is the words and experience of the interviewee him/herself that are interesting. In order to secure methodological consistency within all interviews, it is very important that all interviewers adhere to the guidelines.

### **Form of interview**

The interviews are carried through face-to-face – one interviewer and one interviewee (one-to-one). The background of choosing this form of interview is that interviewees who are not familiar with voting can feel less motivated or even inhibited about participating actively in the actual interview with too many persons present.

The interviews are carried out on the basis of a semi-structured interview guide. The reason for this is that it should be possible to ask more detailed questions or to rephrase the questions if the interviewee seems to need that. When the question requires a yes/no answer, the question should be clarified through a further question from the interviewer: “Why?” The interview is taped and subsequently transcribed.

It is important to allow for plenty of time for the interview – time for explaining the purpose of the project as well as the procedure of the interview before the actual interview is started. Before the interview, there should be plenty of time to explain the term “informed consent” and to obtain such from the interviewee. In this way the situation should be made clear to the interviewee, and he/she should be provided with sufficient information so that he/she is able to weigh the pros and cons and give an answer by choice and not by force.

It should also be explained that there are no right or wrong answers, but it is important to hear the views of the interviewee about general elections, and that the interviewee can ask for further details or explanations at any time.

### **Interview guide**

The interview guide is based on the following considerations:

- The questions should – as far as possible – be phrased in such a way that they relate to things, persons and events familiar to the interviewee.
- Both the interview as a whole and the questions should be as clear as possible.

- The main part of the questions should probably be phrased as open questions. If they are closed, few and clear categories of answers should be used.
- Questions should only relate to one issue at a time.
- Time and numbers are difficult for many people with learning disabilities. Therefore, such questions should be avoided.
- The interviewer should be aware of the fact that interviewees tend to choose the last option, and therefore the options should be randomised.

### **Information meetings**

Prior to the interview, information meetings are held with the interviewees selected. At these meetings, the interviewees are informed of the purpose and the details of the project, as well as the number of participants and interview rounds during the project.

Besides, a fact sheet is made, where the project, the interview round and the term “informed consent” are explained in easy-read. The fact sheet also contains information about the interviewer, including contact information. The interviewee can keep the fact sheet so that he/she can remember what the project is about and perhaps answer questions at a later time.

Plenty of time is needed for information meetings in order to explain the purpose of the project and the interviews, and also to explain and obtain informed consent.

Information on the project, the survey, informed consent and the interview itself may be divided into two meetings so that the interviewee can keep concentration. The fact sheet will also help to connect the two meetings. The fact sheet is run through prior to each of the three interviews.

It is possible for the interviewee that relatives or other support persons receive the mentioned fact sheet, but this should only be done in agreement with the interviewees.

### **Locality**

The interview takes place in the interviewee’s home, unless he/she wants the interview to take place at another locality. Already at the information meeting, it should be possible for the interviewee to say where he/she wants the interview to take place, in order to make the environment of the interview as safe as possible. If the locality of the interview is not agreed upon at the information meeting, the interviewee should be contacted just before the interview.

### **Anonymity**

The interviewee is informed in detail that all interviews are anonymous, meaning that it must not be possible to see from the material who has answered which questions. Before the interview, the interviewee should also be informed that he/she can withdraw

from the interview at any time, just as it is always possible to refuse to answer the questions.

It is important to take time to explain what confidence and anonymity mean. Always ask the interviewee if there is something he/she will ask or is in doubt about before the interview.

### **Presence of support person**

If the interviewee wants the presence of a support person, it should be possible. It is important to make sure that it is the interviewee who answers the questions, and not the support person. However, it can be advisable to offer the support person the opportunity to participate in the interview in such a way that he/she can help to clarify questions by relating them to the life and interests of the interviewee. If the interview is carried out in the presence of a support person, it is important to make sure that the support person is aware of the fact that the interviewee speaks anonymously so that information given during the interview is not passed on to other persons than the support person – no matter what kind of information it is.

### **Timeframe for the interviews**

Some interviewees might find it hard to concentrate for hours. It is recommended that the interviews take no more than an hour at a maximum. A pause can be included if the interviewee needs it. Allow time for explaining the purpose of the project and the interview to the interviewee if he/she needs to be briefed just before the interview.

### **Using pictures or symbols**

During each interview, the interviewee should have the opportunity to look at pictures/symbols supporting the specific meaning of the questions - also for interviewees who are not familiar with polling, or interviewees who might feel insecure during the interview. When using pictures/symbols, the political and cultural differences between the participating countries have to be taken into consideration, and it is important that the pictures/symbols relate to the actual context of the interview. Therefore, the interviewers are responsible for producing pictures/symbols that are used during the interviews.

### **Round-off (end of the interview)**

When the interview is over, follow-up questions are asked about the interviewee's experience of being interviewed. It is important that the interviewee gets the opportunity to tell about his/her impression of the interview situation and to ask questions about unclear aspects of the interview situation or other questions that he/she might find relevant.

To many people with learning disabilities, it can be a matter of both satisfaction and insecurity that someone you don't know is listening to you in other ways than you are used to. It is very important be careful when rounding off the interview so that the interviewee does not get the impression that you have become a new friend.

After the interview, time should be allowed for explaining the follow-up on the interview, what is the next step of the survey etc. It should be explained to the interviewee that the survey reports are sent to them.

## **Payment**

In the literature mentioned in the bibliography about interviewing people with learning disabilities, there are some arguments for paying people with learning disabilities for participating. But there are different viewpoints on this and different traditions in terms of payments. It is recommended that the partners of M.O.TE decide themselves whether to pay the interviewees in accordance with the traditions in each participating country.

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## **C: Criteria for the selection of interviewees**

### **Criteria for recruiting the 16 participants in the interview survey and the educational programme**

Criteria are to be seen as guiding. The partners should try and meet them to the best of their ability, but if it is not possible to recruit participants that meet all criteria, partners should strive for as good a match as possible.

The interviewees should be found via personal introductions, not by randomised contacts.

Letter about the project and the poll in easy-read is sent to relevant organisations and places of education, living or employment and/or posted in newsletters or WebPages. Call for people with learning disabilities in the right age frame to participate in the polls and educational programme.

Criteria for selection:

50% women, 50% men

Age group 18-35. Participants should cover the age range.

At least 30% (including the two in the other group) of the interviewees are of an age where they either have voted or have been able to vote at least once.

The group as a whole should represent some diversity in age, ethnicity etc.

The group should also present some diversity in reading and processing skills.

Interest in the subject matter. Able to participate in both interviews and educational programme.

### **Criteria for recruiting the four people participating in both the interview survey, the educational programme and in the pilot group**

Criteria are to be seen as guiding. The partners should try and meet them to the best of their ability, but if it is not possible to recruit participants that meet all criteria, partners should strive for as good a match as possible.

The interviewees should be found via personal introductions or prior acquaintance, not by randomised contacts

Mild to moderate learning disability.

Two men, two women

Aged between 18 and 35 years. Two are of an age where they could have voted or have voted at least once.

Basic reading skills.

Have participated in project work, research and likewise before.

Are interested in the subject matter.

Can travel without private support person.

English skills are a plus, but it is not probable that all the participants will possess English skills.

It will be a plus if there is some diversity in the group. We will therefore recommend that the partner organisations report the characteristics of their participants so that we can work together to create a group that represents some diversity in age, ethnicity etc.

## D: The project partners

### **AIPD, Italy**

The association of people with Down syndrome, their parents and guardians (AIPD) was officially established in Rome in 1979.

The association's main objectives comprise the following:

- Provision of expert advice on all aspects of Down syndrome to families, social workers, and teachers.
- Promotion of full social and work inclusion for people with Down syndrome.
- Circulation of up-to-date information on Down syndrome to social workers, organisations, and members of the public
- Advocate for best practice
- Provision of the most accurate information relating to Down syndrome to the general public
- Development and promotion of programmes aimed at achieving a fuller public appreciation and acceptance of persons with Down syndrome, their needs and individual roles in society.
- Advocate on behalf of members and their families

The AIPD provide the following services:

- 'Telephone D' - a telephone consultancy service
- Information and consultancy service
- School and work inclusion observatories
- Legal Advice service
- Library. AIPD are members of 'The European Down Syndrome Association' (EDSA).

The AIPD has conducted the Italian interviews.

### **Down Foundation, Hungary**

The Down Foundation was established in 1992 as a result of union of parents. Its aim is to improve the quality of life of persons with intellectual disability as guided by the principles of integration. Presently, the Down Foundation plays an instrumental role in the provision of education for people with intellectual disability in Hungary.

Individualised advice and support services are provided to members and their families.

This organisation runs 'gap filling' institutes and programmes, which support members and their families (according to their differing needs), for example:

- Two temporary residence halls
- Day-time hall
- Residence halls
- 'Down Ambulance'

- Specialised dentistry services
- Early-development centre
- Specialised 'Down-Nurse' service.

Down Foundation has conducted the Hungarian interviews.

### **Down Syndrome Ireland**

Down Syndrome Ireland (DSI) is a national charity supporting people with Down syndrome and their families. The organisation's mission is to support people with Down syndrome in making their futures as complete as possible by providing them with the necessary structures to fulfil their potential.

DSI was founded in 1971 as a support group for parents and carers of people with Down syndrome. However, the remit and profile of the organisation has evolved significantly. A professionally staffed national office has over the last decade developed alongside the organisation's voluntary committees.

The national office of DSI includes a team of specialists, a fundraising department and a members support / administration section all headed up by a chief executive officer. The DSI team provide both direct and indirect services to members, professionals and the wider public. The team of specialists are referred to as the 'National Resource Team' and comprise the following expert services:

- Early Intervention
- Education
- Medical
- Counselling/ Psychotherapy/ Drama Therapy
- Independence

Down Syndrome Ireland has conducted the Irish interviews.

### **Equal Opportunities Centre For Disabled People, Denmark**

By parliamentary resolution B 43 of 1993 it was decided to establish an Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons under the Danish Disability Council.

The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons is to monitor developments in the equalisation of disabled people and non-disabled people. Moreover, the Centre's task is to draw the authorities' attention to areas and situations where there are not equal opportunities for disabled people and non-disabled people. The Centre is also to publish information on the subject of equal opportunities for disabled persons in the Danish society.

The Centre is financed by the Danish State and obtains its funds via the Ministry of Social Affairs. An independent executive committee made up of an equal number of representatives from the organisations for disabled persons and from the public authorities guarantees the autonomy of the Centre. The Centre has no formal legal

competence, but exercises its influence by documenting problems relating to equal opportunities.

The Centre was established at the request of the Danish Disability Council, and it is in charge of the secretarial function of the Danish Disability Council.

The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons is responsible for the coordination of the interview surveys, development of interviews tools, conducting the Danish interviews and reporting of the results of the Danish interviews, as well as the results of the interviews of all the participating countries.

### **Equal Partners Foundation, Malta**

Equal Partners is a parent-run, non-profit foundation providing support to over 200 partner families with children and adults with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

Following the social model of disability as a guiding philosophy, all the support programmes are individualised and are delivered in the natural environment where the individual requires support, i.e. in homes, schools, places of work and recreation, and the community at large. It is in these places that one can find our partners receiving support.

Equal Partners seeks to support people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties towards an independent and meaningful life within an inclusive society.

Equal Partners has conducted the Maltese interviews together with University of Malta, Faculty of Education, Department of Psychology for Inclusive Education.

### **Project Aura, Spain**

Project Aura is a non-profit organisation. The objective of Project Aura is to improve the quality of life of its members through social and work inclusion programmes.

Project Aura comprises four programmes:

1. A social skills and personal autonomy programme
2. An individualised employment-training programme in the work place (with a job coach for the necessary time)
3. A follow-up programme and ongoing training to ensure continued growth in a given employment position
4. Independent living programme.

Since 1989 Project Aura has provided advice and support services based on the individual capabilities of its participants. The organisation follows the methodology of 'Supported Employment'.

Project Aura is also active in the design and implementation of quality systems, certification and labelling standards according to EU and ISO standards in the employment and education sectors.

Project Aura has conducted the Spanish interviews.

### **Ramon Llull University - Blanquerna Faculty of Psychology Education and Sport Sciences, Spain**

The Blanquerna Faculty of Psychology, Education and Sport Sciences (Ramon Llull University, Barcelona) is an institution that provides training in education, psychology, sport sciences and speech therapy, whilst offering possibilities for practical experience in the professional world through projects and research.

Their aim is to ensure the highest quality of teaching through tuition in small groups, including tutorials and seminars.

The curricula available are:

- Teacher Training Degree (Specialties Pre-school Education; Primary Education; Special Needs Education; Musical Education; Foreign Language Teaching – English; Physical Education)
- Degree in Speech & Language Therapy
- Degree in Psychology
- Degree in Sports Science
- Doctorate (Phd) and Postgraduate Studies
- Masters Degree in “Early Intervention and Family”

Ramon Llull has not participated in the interview survey, but participates in other parts of the M.O.TE project.

### **SIO 2 Srl, Italy**

Sio2 srl. is a company providing hardware and software consultancy services. The organisation’s main client group comprise those in the fields of disability and social disadvantage.

SIO 2 Srl has not participated in the interview survey. SIO 2 Srl has established and maintains the M.O.TE project webpage [www.myopinionmyvote.eu](http://www.myopinionmyvote.eu)

### **University of Malta. Faculty of Education, Department of Psychology for Inclusive Education**

The programme for inclusive education at the University of Malta is responsible for training and research in the fields of disability and general learning disabilities. It has been instrumental in the creation of courses and study units in the field of inclusive education both in general and with respect to specific areas of disability and learning difficulties, e.g. children with autism, Down syndrome, dyslexia and children requiring the use of alternative and augmentative means of communication (AAC).

The programme collaborates with an NGO (Equal Partner Foundation and Dar tal-Providenza) acting as consultants and conducting training and research in specific schools. The department is regularly involved in organising seminars and workshops in these areas. The programme further engages in international liaison with foreign universities including the University of Padova, Istituto Universitario delle Scienze Motorie, the University of Anaheim and St. Mary’s College, Belfast.

The department has been successful in running the 'Comenius Project' entitled 'See-It' in collaboration with Holland and Ireland, which has been instrumental in setting up courses and services in alternative and augmentative communication.

University of Malta, Faculty of Education, Department of Psychology for Inclusive Education has conducted the Maltese interviews together with Equal Partners.

## E: Outline of the recruiting of interviewees in each participating country

Below is an outline from each country describing how the interviewees were recruited as well as the general characteristics of the interview group of each country.<sup>19</sup>

### **Denmark**

The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons has conducted the interviews and recruited participants for the project.

The Centre has contacted seven sheltered workplaces in Denmark with an inquiry for recruiting interviewees for the interview survey. Two of these workshops did not have employees in the target group in question, but the remaining five workshops have sent a positive reply.

The Centre has later sent a poster to the sheltered workshops, written in easy-read format, with information on the project and the interview survey itself. If the interviewees themselves were not able to read the poster, the Centre asked a contact person from the staff to read the text of the poster aloud at information or morning meetings etc. The interviewees have not been asked to decide whether they wanted to take part in the survey on the basis of the poster, but the Centre has later held information meetings with persons who expressed interest in participating in the project. On the basis of this information meeting, the potential interviewees could then decide whether they wanted to take part in the interview survey.

The advisory group set up to contribute to the development and testing of the project outcome have also been interviewed. In all, seven women and thirteen men have been interviewed.

### **Hungary**

The Down Foundation has conducted the interviews and recruited participants for the project.

Interviews were done with the 20 participants of the Down Foundation's training programme at different places of the Hungarian Down Foundation. Most of the interviewees were interviewed at their sheltered workplace, and the others were interviewed in their homes. After some training sessions, some participants decided not to continue the training. In the report made by the Hungarian Partner after the interviews, the answers of the twelve participants, who had been participating in the educational programme since the beginning, were analysed. Half of the participants who were interviewed were men, half were women.

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<sup>19</sup>The information appears in the length and form it was supplied by the project partners.

## **Ireland**

Down Syndrome Ireland has conducted the interviews and recruited participants for the project.

Participants were recruited through *Down Syndrome Ireland* (national organisation for persons with Down syndrome and their families in Ireland). Participants were already enrolled and taking part in a personal development-training programme, in preparation for the *World Down Syndrome Congress 2009* (to be hosted by Ireland). Participants were provided in person with a brief overview of the project and asked if they would be interested in participating in the voter education programme. Interested participants were then provided with written information about the project and a follow-up phone call was made to each of the respective families.

Participants are aged between nineteen and thirty-nine years of age. Ten male and female adults were recruited from across Ireland. Up-to-date psychological assessment results were not available. All participants have Down syndrome.

## **Italy**

The AIPD has conducted the interviews and recruited participants for the project.

Participants were recruited through the AIPD, national organization for people with Down syndrome and their parents in Italy, which has 40 branches all over the country.

The national office of AIPD has suggested four among its branches to take part in the project as working groups in the poll and in the educational programme, together with four members forming the pilot group coming from the Roman branch. When choosing the branches, the following criteria have been adopted: distribution all over the country (north, centre and south), number of full age members, number of experienced leaders in the field having worked on the subject and willing to apply the educational programme proposed in the project.

Every branch has chosen four members following shared criteria: people interested in the subject, equal number of men and women, equal number of “young electors” (18 – 24 years of age) and of “experienced electors” (above 25), also those who, being major, had not exerted so far their right to vote, but who expressed a clear wish, and whose families were ready to support them in exercising their right. The selected “electors” have been invited by phone to a meeting to introduce the project, to explain the final goals, the different steps, and how and when they would be involved.

Thus, the Italian sample is composed by 20 people, 10 women and 10 men, 10 between 18 and 24, and 10 were 25 and over.

## **Malta**

The Equal Partners Foundation and The University of Malta have conducted the interviews and recruited participants for the project.

The poll was carried out with 17 interviewees instead of 20 as three of them did not turn up, and it was difficult to find others to replace them at short notice.

The persons interviewed were between 18 and 40 years old, living at different locations in Malta. Nine men and eight women were interviewed. Most have Down Syndrome, two have other learning disabilities. Their learning disabilities are mild to moderate.

The participants were recruited through the Equal Partners Foundation or through the Down Syndrome Association.

## **Spain**

All the interviewees belong to the Foundation Project Aura. 20 users of the Aura Project have been interviewed. The age of the interviewees ranges between 26 and 42 years. 12 of the interviewees were women, eight were men. All the interviewees live in Barcelona city or in the metropolitan area.