

Smoothing the Pathway to Politics for Disabled People

Equality and Human Rights Commission response to the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities call for evidence on the right of persons with disabilities to participate in decision-making.

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Introduction

1. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) thinks Britain will be a fairer, better country if we harness the potential of everyone in our society, and ensure they have equal opportunity to achieve positions of influence - as our elected officials, judges and the people appointed to the boards of public bodies and private companies.
2. There were three policy initiatives, all co-incidentally published in 2010, to understand the challenges people from different parts of the population including disabled people face in participating in public and political life:
 - Disability Rights: UK (formerly RADAR) conducted the first ever survey of disabled people who are board level directors, departmental directors, or non-executive directors.¹ The findings of the research, which was supported by Lloyds Banking Group, identified a talent pool of 'disabled high fliers', who agreed overwhelmingly that mentoring and support from senior staff were key to their success. However, the research also found that disabled people were significantly less likely to get that kind of mentoring and senior support; and 75% of those disabled people who could keep a disability or health condition hidden at work did so for fear being pigeonholed, stereotyped or stopped from progressing.
 - The Advisory Panel on Judicial Diversity recommended a fundamental shift in approach from a focus on selection processes towards a judicial career that addresses diversity at every stage.² While the report prompted improved participation by women and ethnic minorities in the judiciary, less attention was given to disabled people or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people. The Judicial Appointments Commission's data on judicial appointments, which shows the numbers of disabled people who were recommended for judicial appointments, indicates that self-declared disabled applicants find it no harder to get through the application process than non-disabled people. .³ However, this data doesn't tell us much in isolation of the broader picture of disabled people's representation in the judiciary, which unfortunately isn't available as the official Judicial Diversity Statistics, which look at the diversity of appointed judges, do not cover disability.⁴
 - The House of Commons Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation was convened to consider the disparity between the representation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in the House of Commons and their representation in the UK population at large.

¹ Disability Rights UK, "Doing Seniority Differently," 2010, available at: <http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/doing-seniority-differently-summary>

² Ministry of Justice, Improving Judicial Diversity, May 2011, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/217354/judicial-diversity-report-2010.pdf A report on Magistracy and Disability will soon be available in the Centre for Disability Studies Archive (University of Leeds) -<http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/library/>

³ Judicial Appointments Commission, Statistical Bulletin, 2015, available at: <https://jac.judiciary.gov.uk/news/jac-official-statistics-june-2015>

⁴ Judicial Office Statistics Bulletin, June 2015, available at: <https://www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/judicial-diversity-statistics-20151.pdf>

It delivered 71 conclusions and recommendations, which the Speaker said went “to the heart of the House's future.”⁵

3. All three reviews of the diversity of public and political life in Britain were frustrated by the same problems:
 - the lack of accurate, or in some cases any, data about under-represented groups. This was a particular problem for disability, and consequently it's difficult to establish a complete picture or make comparisons;
 - the lack of attention given to evaluating what works and what does not so that there's no clear evidence about the impact policy and procedural changes have had in practice;
 - initiatives have not always been followed through due to a lack of sustained leadership, or a piecemeal approach with some recommendations being implemented, but not others, ultimately limiting impact.
4. In March 2012, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay, noted that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) heralded a new era for the political participation of disabled people. She welcomed the efforts that many countries have made to enable persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others. However she also noted that disabled people continue to encounter legal, physical and communication barriers in the exercise of their rights under Article 29 of the CRPD.⁶
5. The UN Disability Committee is expected to examine the UK's compliance with CRPD in 2016. Following the UK General Election in May 2015, elections for the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales will also be held in 2016. The EHRC considers this to be an important time to take stock of how implementation of Article 29 of the CRPD – the right to participate in political decision-making – could help to smooth the pathway to politics for disabled people in England, Scotland and Wales.
6. That's why we are focusing on political life in this report, which is our response to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities' call for evidence on the right of persons with disabilities to participate in decision-making.⁷

⁵ House of Commons, Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, January 2010, available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/speakers-conference-on-parliamentary-representation/>

⁶ Fourth annual interactive debate of the Human Rights Council on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Interactive debate on participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, 1 March 2012, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/Pages/politicalpubliclife.aspx>

⁷ Terms of Reference are available here: and in the annex to this report: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/SRDisabilities/Pages/DecisionMaking.aspx>

Summary

7. Five years on from the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation only a handful of its recommendations have been implemented. These include some positive developments for disabled people, for example section 141 of the 1983 Mental Health Act was repealed. This provision had automatically disqualified MPs from office where they had been sectioned for more than six months, has been repealed. Further, an Access to Elected Office Fund was piloted to help disabled people stand for election in England, with similar schemes being explored in Wales and Scotland.
8. Between 2010 and 2015, there has been demonstrable progress in the diversity of MPs: non-white MPs now make up more than 6% of the House of Commons, a 56% increase on 2010; and 29% of MPs are now women - up from 22% in 2010. There are also now 32 openly lesbian, gay or bisexual MPs, the highest number ever. Improvements have been made in the House of Lords, with 11% of those appointed since 2000 declaring that they have a disability. However, it's likely that there has been a decrease in the number of disabled MPs following the General Election in 2015. For example, four declared disabled MPs either retired or lost their seats, leaving only two who have, so far, self-described as being disabled.
9. The UK Government has suggested that to be representative of the 11 million disabled people in the UK, the House of Commons ought to include at least 65 disabled MPs.⁸ However, the exact number of disabled parliamentarians is not known because an important recommendation of the Speaker's Conference - for the House to collect data about under-represented groups – has still not been implemented. The House of Lords Appointments Commission does not survey current peers, or those it appoints. The Scottish and Welsh Parliaments don't collect and publish this data either. A provision in the Equality Act 2010 for political parties to publish diversity data about their candidates has also not been enacted.
10. Disability data is collected at the local government level in England, Scotland and Wales, although response rates from councillors can be low. The disability picture of local government across Great Britain is fairly static. For example 13% of councillors in England declared they had a disability in both 2008 and 2013. Local councillors are also aging, with a significant proportion of councillors across Great Britain aged 65 and over. Local authorities play an important role along the pathway to politics, but they do not always make it easy for disabled people to get involved. Despite equality legislation requiring local authorities to make sure reasonable adjustments are made for councillors and their constituents with disabilities. For example, sign language interpretation, induction loop systems and accessible meeting rooms are not always available or publicised.
11. The Equality and Human Rights Commission's evidence and analysis highlights five key actions to smooth the pathway to politics for disabled people:

⁸ Government Equalities Office, Government Response to the Speaker's Conference on Representation, March 2010, para 9, available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/speakers-conference/7824.pdf>

1. Regular, sensitive and confidential collection of disability data from elected Members of the House of Commons, National Assembly for Wales and Scottish Parliament to ensure disabled members get the support they need to fully participate in public life; and a confidential disability survey of all current Members of the House of Lords.
2. Enactment of s106 of the Equality Act 2010, so that political parties are required to publish diversity data about their candidates.
3. The UK Government should reopen the Access to Elected Office Fund in England, and work with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to explore options for making the scheme, or similar funds, available across Great Britain.
4. The UK, Welsh and Scottish Governments should introduce, or continue, evidence-based, targeted campaigns to tackle barriers and build confidence amongst disabled people interested in standing for elected office
5. All elected bodies, at the national, regional and local level should be leaders in making the practical changes needed to enable disabled people to fully participate in political life, such as making available and advertising sign language interpretation, induction loop systems and accessible meeting rooms for local council meetings.

House of Commons

- **Representation**

12. Article 29 of CRPD requires the UK Government to ensure disabled people can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others. This includes the right to vote and opportunity to be elected.
13. There are over 11 million people with a disability, limiting long term illness or impairment in the UK. The prevalence of disability rises with age. Around 6% of children are disabled, compared to 16% of working age adults and 45% of adults over State Pension age.⁹ The EHRC's basic position, set out in our evidence to the Speaker's Conference, is that a Parliament which reflects the diversity of the nation it represents will result in better legislation and a higher degree of public confidence in the democratic process.¹⁰
14. While disability data about Members of the House of Commons is not collected, anecdotal evidence suggests there was a significant fall in the number of disabled MPs following the 2015 General Election. For example, along with the retirement of Labour MPs David Blunkett and Anne McGuire, there was defeat at the polls for the Liberal Democrat Stephen Lloyd and Labour's Dame Anne Begg. This appears to leave the Conservative MPs Paul Maynard and Robert Halfon as the only MPs who would self-describe as disabled people. However, there are others who have spoken in past Commons debates of their own health conditions and some Members may self-declare in the coming months.
15. This handful of declared disabled MPs, out of 650 in the House of Commons, falls short of being representative of the 16% of working age adults with a disability. This contrasts with the progress that was made in relation to other under-represented groups at the 2015 general election. The proportion of women MPs increased from 21.8% in 2010 to 29.4%¹¹, and in the proportion of MPs who are from an ethnic minority from 4.2% to 6.3%.¹² According to numerous media reports, there are also now 32 openly lesbian, gay or bisexual MPs, the highest number ever.

- **Developments**

16. The EHRC has always supported the idea of an Access to Public Life Fund or the extension of Access to Work entitlements to allow disabled people the same

⁹ UK Government, Family Resources Survey 2011-12, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-resources-survey--2>

¹⁰ EHRC, Submission to the Speaker's Conference, 2009, p.4 <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/our-legal-work/parliamentary-briefings/submission-to-the-speaker-s-conference-on-parliamentary-representation>

¹¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments World Classification, 1 June 2015, available at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> Also see the House of Commons Briefing, Women in Parliament, 19 June 2015, available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01250/SN01250.pdf>

¹² House of Commons, General Election Briefing, 19 July 2015, available at <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7186/CBP-7186.pdf>

opportunities to access politics and public life.¹³ This would need to work in conjunction with procedures put in place by the political parties to ensure that disabled people of all financial means are able to stand for public office, not just receive support for reasonable adjustments once there.

17. The Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund was set up in 2012 and closed for applications on 31st March 2015. The fund offered individual grants of between £250 and exceptionally up to £40,000 to disabled people who want to be considered for selection as candidates for an election, or are planning to stand for election. The average award to applicants was £4,585; the highest award was £39,735 and the lowest award was £130.¹⁴
18. The Fund supported a range of activities that are essential to standing for selection as a candidate by a political party, and activity essential to standing for election (whether for a party or as an independent candidate), for example, canvassing and attending election hustings. In certain circumstances, activity which is not directly linked to "essential" selection/election activity may be considered by the Fund to be reasonable to support. This could include, for example, taking part in a public meeting(s) to discuss local issues, especially if other candidates in the election being contested are expected to attend. The amount of funding disbursed across the country and to different political parties varied, with those in London and the South East of England applying for and receiving the most, and Labour candidates applying for and receiving the most.¹⁵
19. An evaluation of the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund pilot is being undertaken to consider the extent to which the fund removed barriers to disabled people's participation in public life. The independent Administrator of the Fund is preparing a report with data on demand, the different types of support that applicants required, and the extent to which funding helped them compete on level terms with other candidates.
20. The Speaker's Conference found a number of barriers to the selection of candidates which include cost, but also a lack of confidence, time pressures and lack of support. The Conference also identified multiple barrier or disincentives in the selection process for women, people from ethnic minorities and disabled people. There was also a tendency for selection panels to fall back on "more of the same" when selecting, or to promote only "favoured sons."¹⁶ Section 104 of the Equality Act 2010 enables registered political parties to use single-sex shortlists for election candidates, but not shortlists restricted to people with other protected characteristics, such as disability. However, the provision does enable registered political parties to reserve places on electoral shortlists for people with a specific protected characteristic such as disability.

¹³ EHRC, Submission to the Speaker's Conference, 2009, p.19

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/our-legal-work/parliamentary-briefings/submission-to-the-speaker-s-conference-on-parliamentary-representation>

¹⁴ Minister for Women and Equalities, Response to Parliamentary Question, Hansard, 10 June 2010, <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2015-06-02.701.h>

¹⁵ Minister for Women and Equalities, Response to Parliamentary Question, Hansard, 10 June 2010, cW <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2015-06-02.701.h> <http://qna.files.parliament.uk/qna-attachments/348053/original/702%20attachment.pdf>

¹⁶ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 110, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

21. A draft private members bill put forward in 2012 was aimed at assisting those who may not be able to become MPs at present because of their disabilities or their caring responsibilities, but it failed to complete its passage through the UK Parliament and there was no further action as a result.¹⁷ Recommendations from a European Union Fundamental Rights Agency report on the participation of disabled people suggested, amongst other things, live-streamed online or video conferencing to allow MPs to participate in debates remotely.¹⁸
22. Positive measures which have been made to address inequality in political representation include the repeal, from 28 April 2013, of section 141 of the 1983 Mental Health Act that automatically disqualified MPs from office where they had been sectioned for more than six months. In proposing the repeal of section 141, the UK Government said it felt the provision was “symptomatic of an outdated attitude towards mental illness which was out of touch with the modern understanding of mental health. It treated mental ill health differently from physical ill health and sent out the message that people with mental health conditions are not welcome in public life.”¹⁹ The Mental Health (Discrimination) Act 2013 also prevented disqualification of people with mental health problems from serving in the devolved legislatures, as jurors, or company directors. In the EHRC’s analysis, amending the legislation, with a view to reducing discrimination on the basis of disability and increasing disabled people’s ability to participate in public life, would help to harmonise domestic legislation with CRPD Article 29.²⁰
23. The Speaker’s Conference acknowledged that a key pathway to politics is experience working in an MPs office. Historically, such opportunities have been confined to those sufficiently well-resourced to undertake sometimes unpaid work in London, which is one of the most expensive cities in the world. The Speaker’s Conference recommended that each Parliamentary party maintain a list of individuals from under-represented groups to be notified of internships and temporary vacancies arising in Members’ offices.²¹ This recommendation enjoyed cross party support, and the support of the Speaker. The Speaker’s Parliamentary Placements Scheme aims to tackle the culture of unpaid internships by providing a nine month paid work experience placement designed to open up Parliament to people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are interested in politics but who would not be able to afford to work without a wage.²² The Scheme was originally administered by the Social Mobility Foundation and is now supported by the House of Commons Diversity and Inclusion Team. Now in its fourth year, the scheme is small in comparison to the

¹⁷ UK Parliament (2012) Representation of the People (Members' Job Share) Bill, available at: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2012-13/representationofthepeoplemembersjobshare.html>.

¹⁸ 'The right to political participation for persons with disabilities: human rights indicators'

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2013/political-participation-persons-disabilities>

¹⁹ United Kingdom, UK Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, response to the *Thematic Study on Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Political and Public Life* of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, available at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/PoliticalParticipation/States/ResponseUK.doc>

²⁰ Equality and Human Rights Commission, Parliamentary Briefing on the Mental Health (Discrimination) Bill 2012, available at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/our-legal-work/parliamentary-briefings>

²¹ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 42, available at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

²² For more about the 2014/15 scheme, see: <http://www.socialmobility.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Speakers-Parliamentary-Placements-Scheme-Job-Description-Person-Spec.pdf>

size of the House of Commons, placing approximately 10 successful candidates in an MP's office, whereas there are currently 650 MPs. The Scheme is open to people of any age and any location. In previous years, successful candidates have ranged from school leavers, to those in their mid-50s and they moved to London from 10 regions across the UK. As required by the Equality Act 2010, all reasonable adjustment costs for the successful disabled applicants are funded for the duration of the placement.

- **Challenges and Recommendations**

24. Data Collection

25. That there is no legal requirement to collect disability data about candidates or MPs is a barrier to understanding the precise scale and nature of the issue. The EHRC appreciates there are challenges associated with asking about disability in any survey, particularly when this relies on self-definition. It's also important to acknowledge evidence received by the Speaker's Conference that there were "a number of deaf and hard of hearing people in Parliament, and in politics, but they are not particularly open about it, perhaps because they feel they cannot be."²³

26. Recommendation 1: The EHRC considers it important for the House of Commons to obtain much better information about the percentages of Members who belong to under-represented groups, to understand more about their experiences of politics and of the House of Commons, and to support them to fully participate in public life. We'd therefore support implementation of the Speaker's Conference's recommendation for the House of Commons to consider how such information could be collected, regularly, sensitively and appropriately. For example the House of Commons' occupational health department could ask Members to complete confidential questionnaires about their experience of any illness or impairment. Analysis of the anonymised questionnaires could be fed back to the Women and Equalities Select Committee annually, to consider and make recommendations.²⁴

27. Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which would require registered political parties to publish data on the diversity of party candidates seeking selection, was proposed by the Speaker's Conference on parliamentary diversity, and enjoyed cross-party support and the support of the Government of the day. However, it was not enacted by the Coalition Government.

28. Recommendation 2: The EHRC regrets that section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 was not enacted by the Coalition Government, and encourage the current administration to reconsider this position, with a view to ensuring that other initiatives to increase parliamentary diversity are evidence based.

29. Attitudes

²³ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 176, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

²⁴ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 57, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

30. Disability Rights: UK (formerly RADAR) in their submission to the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation noted that having very small numbers of openly disabled MPs presented "two significant problems", which were:

"Firstly, it is all too easy for a non-representative House of Commons to overlook the disability dimension to critical, mainstream policy issues. One third of all British children living in poverty has at least one disabled parent. One third of all British adults with no qualifications experiences disability. Health inequalities are acute between some groups of disabled people and their non-disabled peers (for example, people with long term mental health problems or learning disabilities are more likely to get some killer diseases like stroke and heart disease, more likely to get them young, and likely to die of them faster, than other citizens). Achieving targets on child poverty, skills or health inequalities can only succeed if the disability dimension is addressed. Yet these policy issues tend not to be viewed as "disability issues" by a non-representative House of Commons (with some exceptions). This is a disbenefit not only to disabled people but to Britain as a whole: child poverty and skills strategies that address disability successfully are quite simply more likely to be successful in meeting their overall objectives, because of the numbers involved.

Secondly, the absence of a critical mass of openly disabled MPs risks entrenching the view that disabled people are the passive recipients of public services and public policy—when disabled people can and should be part of the solution and leadership."²⁵

31. Article 29 (b)(i) CRPD requires the UK Government to promote actively an environment in which people with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. The Article also requires governments to encourage disabled people's participation in public affairs. The 2011 report 'Pathways to Politics' was a comprehensive study summarising and evaluating an individual's ability to participate formally in politics through the use of 'push, pull and prevent' factors.²⁶ The report was premised on the fact that, regardless of 'some progress over the last 30 years, elected politicians in Britain still remain highly unrepresentative of the population as a whole' and set out recommendations for increased participation.

32. "Pathways to Politics" identified barriers that prevented people from standing for or becoming elected representatives. A lack of understanding and awareness of disability and the difficulties faced by disabled people in seeking selection and election were perceived to be widespread, both nationally and locally. UK Government research has also found that "political parties although signed up to the principles of supporting prospective disabled candidates achieve elected office, would benefit from support and encouragement to ensure the principles are embedded at all levels of a political party; from the national executive to all

²⁵ Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 27 May 2009, paras 6–7.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/167/167we04.htm>

²⁶ Durose, C., Gains, F., Richardson, L., Combs, R., Broome, K. and Eason, C. (2011) Pathways to politics. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission.

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/research/pathways_to_politics.pdf

local party offices. There can sometimes be a disconnect between national parties' positions on encouraging greater diversity, and the experience of disabled people at local party/local authority level."²⁷

33. The Speaker's Conference heard about 'referred prejudice': the tendency of parties to assume that disabled people would find it difficult to get elected, for instance, because there is a perception of public reluctance to vote for them. However, the Conference found no evidence that disabled people are less likely to be elected than others, once they get through the selection process.²⁸ In September 2011, the UK Government published a summary of responses to a consultation on its proposals for providing additional support for disabled people who are seeking elected positions as MPs, councillors or other elected officials. The report included the UK Government's response.²⁹ The UK Government noted that attitudes were a key issue because "evidence suggests that negative public attitudes can have a high impact on prospective disabled political candidates; for example, in relation to election prospects, concerns over additional resources which may be required, and the electorate's reservations about being represented by a disabled candidate." The UK Government proposed to respond to this by working "more closely with political parties, the Local Government Association (LGA) and disability organisations to develop focused awareness raising."³⁰ This proposal received a medium level of support from respondents, who insisted it should be delivered in parallel with other initiatives.³¹ The Government Equalities Office subsequently published a short guide for political parties on the Equality Act 2010³² and case studies of disabled people in political life.³³

34. Recommendation 3: The EHRC welcomes the efforts the UK Government Equalities Office has made to date to tackle the particular obstacles faced by disabled people who want to become MPs, councillors or other elected officials. We recommend the Government Equalities Office uses the evidence from the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund to determine what further measures may be needed, and how these could be targeted effectively.

35. Financial Support

²⁷ United Kingdom, Government Equalities Office (2011), Chapter 4, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-elected-office-for-disabled-people-a-response-to-the-consultation>

²⁸ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 177, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

²⁹ United Kingdom, Government Equalities Office (2011), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-elected-office-for-disabled-people-a-response-to-the-consultation>

³⁰ United Kingdom, Government Equalities Office (2011), Chapter 4, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-elected-office-for-disabled-people-a-response-to-the-consultation>

³¹ Government Equalities Office (2011) p.4. available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85502/summary-response.pdf

³² Government Equalities Office, Compliance with the Equality Act 2010 Guidance for political parties 2012, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85508/disabled-access-guidance.pdf

³³ Government Equalities Office, Political Life: Disabled People's Stories, 2012, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-life-disabled-peoples-stories>

36. While the reports of the parties themselves suggest candidacy is largely inexpensive, a survey of Conservative candidates in 2006 estimated the cost of candidacy to the individual at £41,550 over an electoral cycle (from the start of a Parliament to its dissolution, normally a period of 4 to 5 years).³⁴ The costs for a disabled candidate are likely to be higher, For example a deaf candidate may have to meet the costs of a British Sign Language Interpreter, or a candidate with a mobility impairment may need to use more taxis than a non-disabled candidate to get to and around the constituency. Conversely, their ability to sustain these costs is likely to be lower as disabled people are more likely to be in low paid employment or in receipt of benefits.

37. Recommendation 4: The Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund was designed to enable disabled candidates to cover the additional costs of the range of activities that are essential to standing for election. An evaluation of the Fund's pilot is being undertaken to consider the extent to which the fund removed barriers to disabled people's participation in public life. The EHRC agrees that such an evaluation is essential for ensuring that its future use is targeted and effective. Subject to the outcome of the evaluation, the EHRC would support the UK Government reopening the Fund, following any changes that may be needed to improve its effectiveness.

House of Lords

- **Representation**

38. The exact number or proportion of Members of the House of Lords with disabilities is unknown.³⁵ The House of Lords Appointment Commission was established in 2000. Their latest Annual Report which covered the period October 2011 to September 2013, as well as papers from the House of Lords library indicated that of the 63 appointments made by the Commission since it was established, seven people had declared a disability (11%).³⁶ Although no data is available to show the number or proportion of Members with a disability, anecdotally it is assumed that disabilities in the House of Lords are common. This was the view of Emma Crewe who, in her study of the House covering the period before, during and immediately after the House of Lords Act 1999, stated that "the number of Peers with physical disabilities is high partly because, with an average age of sixty-eight, conditions such as deafness and arthritis are common."³⁷

³⁴ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 205, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

³⁵ UK Government, Equality Impact Assessment of the House of Lords Bill 2012, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221005/EqualityImpactAssessmentLordsReform.pdf

³⁶ House of Lords Appointment Commission, Annual Report 2011-13 [http://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk/media/28825/annual%20report%20oct%2011-sept%2013%20\(pdf\).pdf](http://lordsappointments.independent.gov.uk/media/28825/annual%20report%20oct%2011-sept%2013%20(pdf).pdf)

³⁷ Emma Crewe, *Lords of Parliament: Manners, Rituals and Politics*, 2005, p 120.

39. The House of Lords Appointments Commission actively seeks to appoint people on merit who are representative of the UK's diversity, and its appointments to date suggest this will have an impact on the diversity of the House of Lords over the long term. However, the Commission does not collate information on the number of members who have a disability, nor are members required to provide information about their ethnicity or religion. As a result, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive picture of diversity within the House of Lords and track progress.
40. Though not elected by the public, Members of the House of Lords play a crucial role in representing the public interest. Proposals for an appointed element in the House of Lords stop short of stating that Peers should be required to act on behalf of any particular groups. Hugh Bochel and Andrew Defty interviewed a number of Members of the House of Lords on the importance of having Peers appointed from previously underrepresented groups, such as disabled people, the authors note that:

“There was relatively little discussion by Peers of symbolic representation. Although many female Peers, a number of Peers from ethnic minorities, and a number of Peers with disabilities were interviewed, few spoke about their symbolic importance, although several did discuss how they ‘acted for’ these groups. However, when the idea was raised there appeared to be little opposition to the politics of presence, and while some Peers thought their role went some way beyond symbolism, they were happy to be perceived in that way. For example, one disabled Peer, who is active in the Chamber in relation to disability issues, conceded that as a woman and somebody who used a wheelchair, she was sometimes seen “as a visible presence rather than as a spokesperson.”³⁸

41. Bochel and Defty also note that:

“While many Peers claim to provide substantive representation for a range of different interests, there is very little evidence about how Peers act to provide substantive representation, and it is therefore difficult to make judgements about the extent to which those interests are actually represented. This is particularly striking when one considers that whilst Peers claimed to represent a diverse range of interests, party affiliation remains the most significant indicator of voting behaviour in the House. It is also not clear who is being represented in this way, and perhaps more importantly who is not.”³⁹

- **Developments**

42. Article 29 (a)(ii) CRPD requires the UK Government to ensure people with disabilities are able to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate. Sections 21 and 22 of the Equality Act 2010 require “reasonable adjustments” to be made for disabled people in many aspects of life in the UK. The Speaker's Conference referred to the “good progress towards meeting the

³⁸ Hugh Bochel and Andrew Defty, ‘A More Representative Chamber: Representation and the House of Lords’, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2012, vol 18 no 1, pp 82–97.

³⁹ Hugh Bochel and Andrew Defty, ‘A More Representative Chamber: Representation and the House of Lords’, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2012, vol 18 no 1, pp 82–97.

needs of disabled Members” in the House of Lords.⁴⁰ The report stated that “Baroness Campbell of Surbiton, a wheelchair user, paid tribute to the support she had been given by the House of Lords authorities, telling the Conference that she had found her need for reasonable adjustments had been “absolutely superbly met by the House authorities [who had] all been extremely positive about my requirements, and have gone out of their way to make things happen”. This includes the provision of a specially-adapted room close to the Lords Chamber.

43. The report also highlighted Baroness Campbell’s request for the House to allow her personal assistant to finish her speeches in the Chamber, because her condition left her short of breath. In 2012, the House of Lords Procedure Committee considered the matter.

“The Committee noted that not agreeing to her request for personal assistance in the Chamber “would limit and ultimately prevent her from taking part in the work of the House. Moreover, the nature of the assistance she requires is such that it is more appropriately provided by her carers, rather than by other Members or by staff of the House. Her request that her assistant be on hand to provide her with personal and practical help is therefore, in our view, a reasonable one in the circumstances. The same principles apply to Lady Campbell’s request that her assistant be authorised to read out speeches on her behalf. Hitherto other Members of the House have finished reading speeches which Lady Campbell has begun. However, we do not consider it appropriate that she should continue to be required to seek the help of other Members in order to be able to participate in the work of the House. We therefore conclude that this request too is a reasonable one in the circumstances: her words, when she cannot herself deliver them, should be spoken by an assistant, employed by her and whose presence will not be recorded in the Official Report. “

44. The report was approved by the House of Lords on 24 July 2012.⁴¹ On 14 November 2012, Baroness Campbell spoke for the first time since the new procedure was adopted. She told the House:

“I am delighted to return to the Chamber today after a long period of illness. I am even more delighted to be accompanied by my assistant. She is a new, stronger voice who will enable me to continue contributing to debates in your Lordships’ House. I thank your Lordships for your understanding and agreeing to this new and unique arrangement. This is equality in action; and it is how we achieve equality that I wish to address in this debate.”⁴²

45. Following the Speaker’s Conference report, the Director of Facilities in the House of Lords provided a memorandum for the Conference that outlined further work that was being carried out to make physical adjustments for Members with disabilities, including:

- the addition of stair nosings, new handrails and ancillary items on doors;

⁴⁰ Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 11 January 2010, HC 239–I of session 2009–10, para 304. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

⁴¹ HL *Hansard*, 24 July 2012, cols 605–8.

⁴² HL *Hansard*, 14 November 2012, col 1541.

- enabling of fire evacuation lifts for wheelchair users and good progress in the development of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for Members with disabilities;
- improving door opening pressures, fitting of further handrails;
- numerous improvements to WCs including replacing most taps with lever mixer taps.

46. In respect of procedure in the Chamber, the report highlighted the following:

- one deaf Member uses a palantype which provides a written version of actual speeches in the Chamber;
- a blind Member uses a Braille reader; and
- the House is working with a voice recognition specialist to investigate whether “VR in reverse” is possible—ie for the software to finish a Member’s speech in their voice should they become unable to do so due to a medical condition.⁴³

- **Challenges and Recommendations**

47. Data Collection

48. The EHRC welcomes that the House of Lords Appointment Commission seeks to appoint on merit peers who are representative of the UK’s diversity. This should help to ensure that the important decisions made in the House of Lords reflect the broad interests of the British public. However, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive picture of diversity within the House of Lords or to track the progress the House of Lords Appointments Commission is making in increasing the representation of disabled people because members are not required to provide information about any disabilities, life limiting illnesses or impairments that they may have.

49. Recommendation 5: To strengthen the House of Lords Appointment Commission’s role in increasing the diversity of Parliament, the EHRC recommends that it should conduct a confidential disability survey of all current peers and to understand what progress is being made and what more may need to be done. All future appointees should also be surveyed on a confidential basis, so that progress can be tracked over time.

Local Government in England

- **Representation**

50. A survey of local councillors in England in 2008 and 2013 shows there has been very little change in the proportion of councillors with certain protected characteristics. The number of councillors with a disability has remained static at 13%. However, there have been changes to the age profile of councillors between the two years, with a nearly 10 percentage point (pp) increase in the proportion of councillors aged 65 and over, rising from 34.3% in 2008 to 43.8% in

⁴³ Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 10 March 2010, HC 449 of session 2009–10, Appendix 2. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/449/44905.htm>

2013. The rise in councillors aged 70+ has been particularly marked, with an equivalent decrease in the proportion of those aged 55-64.⁴⁴

51. Article 29(b)(ii) requires the UK Government to enable people with disabilities to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country. Community participation and 'civil society' have been encouraged by the UK Government in England and Wales through Department for Communities and Local Government funded projects and the Localism Act 2011 which introduced new rights for communities to take greater control in their local areas.

• Challenges and Recommendations

52. In 2010, the Speaker's Conference found that "many disabled people are deterred from any sort of involvement in politics or public life by problems at the most local level, with their councils. Local authorities play an important role along the pathway to politics, but they do not always make it easy for disabled people to get involved."⁴⁵ Despite, at the time, being required to do so under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Councillors Commission, reported in 2007 that some local authorities were failing to make sure that practical help for councillors with disabilities—such things as sign language interpretation at official meetings, induction loop systems and accessible meeting rooms—was available and publicised.⁴⁶

53. Recommendation 6: While it has been suggested that the Access to Work scheme could be used to support with practical help for disabled Councillors, the EHRC agrees with the Speaker's Conference that this scarce funding "intended for use by individuals—should not be used by councils to fund core legal requirements—such as action to make reasonable adjustments to buildings."⁴⁷ We remind local authorities that making reasonable adjustments is a key part of complying with the law, and that steps taken to allow elected members and the public to fully participate in public life should demonstrate exemplar practice.

A. Wales

54. In 2010, approximately one fifth of the working age population in Wales was disabled. Disability increases with age so that one third of people between 55 and pensionable age in Wales have a disability.⁴⁸ Comprehensive data about the diversity of Welsh Assembly Members is not collected, so we don't know how many or what proportion of Members of the Welsh Assembly have a disability.

⁴⁴ Kettlewell, K. and Phillips, L. (2014) Census of Local Authority Councillors 2013. Available at: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGCL01/LGCL01.pdf>. See data table EJ1.2.

⁴⁵ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 182, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

⁴⁶ Representing the future—The report of the Councillors Commission—December 2007, p. 90, available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/document/localgovernment/pdf/583990.pdf>

⁴⁷ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 188, available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

⁴⁸ Welsh Government, Prevalence of Disability 2007-2010, 2011, available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/prevalence-disability/?lang=en>

55. A diversity survey of Welsh councillors was carried out in 2012.⁴⁹ A total of 3,201 responses were collected from 21 local authorities, a response rate of 35%. The majority of elected councillors were over the age of 60; 57% of county councillors and 61% of community councillors although a lower percentage of unelected candidates were of this age, 46%. A higher proportion of elected than unelected candidates were retired: 44 and 35% respectively. The proportion of both elected and unelected candidates who described themselves as having a disability was very similar (14% and 15% respectively).
56. In March in 2014, a report of the Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government made recommendations for the Welsh government, local authorities, the Welsh Local Government Association, political parties, and councillors, to help improve the numbers of young people, women, people from ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay or bisexual people, and people with disabilities standing for election to local government.⁵⁰ As a result of the report, the Welsh Government's Diversity in Democracy Programme, in which councillors mentor people from diverse backgrounds interested in becoming involved in public life, is due for its formal launch on September 17, 2015.⁵¹
57. The Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association developed 'Step Up Cymru,' a mentoring scheme for under-represented groups in which participants were mentored by local councillors and Assembly members. The scheme aimed to increase involvement in democratic society, but ended in 2010.
- 58. Recommendation 8: The EHRC considers that it is important for the National Assembly for Wales to obtain and publish better information about the percentages of Members who belong to under-represented groups, and to know more about their experiences of politics. We'd therefore recommend that the National Assembly for Wales' Equality Policy Unit considers how best to collect, collate and publish equality information about Welsh Assembly Members in a sensitive way.**
- 59. Recommendation 9: One of the Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government recommendations was for the Welsh Government to consider the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office pilot in England and consider operating a similar scheme for the next local elections. The EHRC supports the Welsh Government's commitment to consider the results of the evaluation of the Access to Elected Office Pilot and to engage with groups representing disabled people about operating the scheme in Welsh elections.**
- 60. Recommendation 10: The Speaker's Conference recommended scaling up Step Up Cymru to be UK-wide mentoring scheme to give encouragement to those who might wish to become candidates for elected office at local and**

⁴⁹ Broomfield, J. (2013) Survey of local government candidates 2012. Social Research 20/2013. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/130503-local-government-candidates-survey-en.pdf>

⁵⁰ Welsh Government (2014) On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales. Report of the Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government.

<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/localgov/140305-expert-group-report-en.pdf>

⁵¹ Welsh Government, Diversity in Democracy Programme, available at:

<http://gov.wales/topics/localgovernment/diversity-in-democracy/?lang=en>

national level or be appointed to a public body. The EHRC recommends that the Welsh, Scottish and UK Governments explore the Speaker's Conference recommendation to make it (or an equivalent) a UK-wide scheme.

Scotland

61. One in five people of working age in Scotland has a disability – that's approximately 19% of the population, or one million people. While all five of the main political parties in Scotland have signed up to the "One in Five" Charter to increase diversity in Scottish politics, there is still no requirement to collect equality data about Members of the Scottish Parliament.
62. A survey of Scotland's councillors was carried out in 2013.⁵² The survey was online and the response rate was low at 26%. 73.5% of councillors who responded were aged 50 and above, with 45% aged 60 and over and fewer than 10% under 40. 33% of respondents said they have a disability or health problem that has lasted, or is expected to, last 12 months and limit their day to day activities. 29.8% of councillors have a condition that limits them a little, while 3.2% are limited a lot. 13.6% of councillors who responded provide help or care on a regular basis for someone who is sick, disabled or elderly, and 26.2% of these councillors will have to or have had to make special care arrangements in order to carry out their council business.
63. In 2014, the Scottish Government funded a pilot Parliamentary Internship Scheme which created a series of internships in the Scottish Parliament for disabled graduates. It has also supported an 'Access to Elected Office' project through Inclusion Scotland, building on the Parliamentary Internship pilot to investigate a number of areas including barriers in the 'party career path' and the case for a Scottish version of the Access to Elected office fund. The main outcome of the project will be to create a co-produced blueprint for future work to address the identified barriers.
- 64. Recommendation 11: The EHRC considers that it is important for the Scottish Parliament to obtain and publish better equality data about under-represented groups at Holyrood and to understand more about their challenges in participating in politics at the highest level in Scotland. We'd therefore recommend that the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body considers how best to collect and collate equality information about Members of the Scottish Parliament in a confidential and sensitive way.**
- 65. Recommendation 12: The EHRC supports the work of the Scottish Government and Inclusion Scotland to replicate the Access to Elected Office Project in Scotland, and recommend that a new scheme is put in place to support disabled candidates to stand in forthcoming Scottish Parliament elections.**

⁵² ⁵² Improvement Service (2013) Scotland's Councillors 2013 Research Report
<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/research/Councillor%20Survey%20Report%202013.pdf>

The right to vote

66. Article 29(a)(i) of the CRPD requires the UK Government to ensure that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use for people with disabilities. Individual Electoral Registration (IER) has been introduced in the UK, whereby voters have to be registered individually and provide identification in order to be registered. Additional funding was provided by the UK Government in an attempt 'to support the costs of activities aimed at increasing the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register.'⁵³ Concerns have been expressed that IER is not necessarily positive and that it may impact on the ability of some groups to register to vote, such as those from young and mobile populations, and people who are disabled.
67. Noting that voter turnout in the 2010 general election was low compared with other EU countries (it was only one percentage point higher in 2015), and evidence that the electoral register is only between 85% and 87% complete, the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee announced an inquiry into voter registration and turnout in the UK and considered some radical changes, such as compulsory voting, online voting, and extending the franchise to younger people in order to re-engage British people with politics and elections.⁵⁴
68. Barriers to the process of voting were highlighted by Scope when it carried out a survey of 1,000 polling stations to assess how accessible the 2010 General Election had been for disabled people.⁵⁵ Scope found that two-thirds of polling stations had one or more significant access barriers. The Electoral Commission has since developed guidance for disabled voters and for polling station staff and noted in a news release prior to the 2015 general election that there should be no barriers to someone casting their vote.⁵⁶ Acting Returning Officers have to ensure that the voting process is fully accessible, while polling station staff should have received training on the assistance they can provide voters who wish to vote at a polling station.
69. Article 29(a)(ii) requires the UK Government to protect the right of people with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums, without intimidation, and to stand for elections. Despite the widespread assumption that postal voting is the most accessible way to guarantee this right for disabled

⁵³ White, I. (2015) Individual Electoral Registration. House of Commons Standard Note: SN/PC/06764 (accessed February 2015). <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06764/individual-electoral-registration>

⁵⁴ ⁵⁴ House of Commons (2014) 'Voter engagement in the UK. Fourth report of session 2014-15'. House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. HC 232 [Incorporating HC 1059, Session 2013-14]

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmpolcon/232/232.pdf>

⁵⁵ Scope (2010) Polls Apart 5. Opening elections to disabled people. <http://www.scope.org.uk/Scope/media/Documents/Publication%20Directory/Polls-apart-2010.pdf?ext=.pdf>

⁵⁶ <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/journalist/electoral-commission-media-centre/news-releases/campaigns/voters-with-a-disability-are-reminded-there-should-be-no-barriers-to-them-casting-their-vote-on-7-may?>

voters, almost half of disabled voters who used the postal voting system reported one or more significant access problems.⁵⁷

70. A lack of mental capacity is not deemed an incapacity to vote in the UK, unlike in some other European countries, and people with learning difficulties or mental health conditions who meet the other registration qualifications are eligible to register.⁵⁸ The decision about how to vote must be made by the individual and not by anyone else on their behalf, including someone who may be their carer or generally make decisions for them.

Participation in local decision-making

71. The Speaker's Conference recognised that a key pathway to politics was engagement, in some degree, with local decision-making "the process by which political parties develop their policies to improve society, work to communicate those ideas to others and seek public support to put those ideas into practice."⁵⁹ According to the Citizenship Foundation, the main reasons why people do not become involved in decision-making are: "lack of time; lack of trust; and lack of the knowledge, skills and confidence to make the political process work for them."⁶⁰

72. The Public Sector Equality Duty was introduced in April 2011, harmonising the previous equality duties for race, disability and gender. The duty requires all 'public authorities', (as defined by the Human Rights Act 1998), to have 'due regard' to equality, including disability equality. The duty explicitly recognises that public authorities should have 'due regard' to 'advancing equality of opportunity,' which includes 'steps to take account of people's disabilities.' Whilst the 'general duty' applies to the three nations of Great Britain, the specific duties (regulations that make administrative provisions to help implement the duty) are different in the three nations.

73. The previous Disability Equality Duty was supported by specific duties that required public authorities to involve disabled people in the development of disability strategies. In England, this specific requirement was not replicated in the regulations developed to support the new duty. By contrast, in Wales, there is a specific duty on public authorities to involve people who are representative of one or more of the protected groups in meeting the general duty, setting equality objectives, developing equality plan and assessing the impact of its policies. This may include disabled people but this is not explicitly required.

74. Community participation and 'civil society' have been encouraged by the UK Government in England and Wales through Department for Communities and

⁵⁷ Scope (2010) Polls Apart 5. Opening elections to disabled people.
<http://www.scope.org.uk/Scope/media/Documents/Publication%20Directory/Polls-apart-2010.pdf?ext=.pdf>

⁵⁸ Fundamental Rights Agency (2014) The right to political participation for persons with disabilities.
http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-right-political-participation-persons-disabilities_en.pdf

⁵⁹ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 11, available at:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

⁶⁰ Speakers Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2009, para 27, available at:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/spconf/239/239i.pdf>

Local Government funded projects. The Localism Act 2011 introduced new rights for communities in England to take greater control in their local areas, and the Office of Disability Issues has published guidance for disabled people and their organisations to get involved in local decision-making.⁶¹

⁶¹ Office of Disability Issues, Making the Most of Partnership Boards, available at: <http://www.disabilityinformationzone.co.uk/pdfs/OfficeDisabilityIssues/psb.pdf>

Annex: The right of persons with disabilities to participate in decision-making - Call for submissions

The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas-Aguilar, is currently preparing a study, to be presented at the 31st session of the Human Rights Council (March 2016), on the *right of persons with disabilities to participate in decision-making*.

Specific information request:

English

1. Please provide information on the legislative and policy framework in place in your country related to the status, establishment, resourcing, and functioning of representative organizations of persons with disabilities at the national, regional and local levels;
2. Please provide information on existing legislation and policies aimed at ensuring that persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, including children with disabilities, are consulted and involved in decision-making processes that directly or indirectly concern them;
3. Please provide information on any consultative body or mechanism established to consult and engage with representative organizations of persons with disabilities, including information about their composition, criteria for membership (nomination, appointment, election, etc.) and functioning;
4. Please provide information on the efforts undertaken at national, regional and/or local levels to strengthen the capacity of representative organizations of persons with disabilities, in order to facilitate their participation in legislative, policy and other decision-making processes;
5. Please explain whether and how persons with disabilities participate in monitoring the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (art. 33, para. 3), and in the nomination of experts to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (art. 34, para. 3);
6. Please identify the main challenges faced by the diversity of persons with disabilities in participating in mainstream and disability-specific decision-making processes at the national, regional and local levels, including challenges faced by persons who experience multiple discrimination (e.g., on the basis of disability, age, gender, ethnic origin, geographical location).

Additional questions for civil society:

7. Please provide information on the existence of organizations of persons with disabilities in your country, including organizations of children and women with disabilities, as well as their composition and internal decision-making processes and procedures;
8. Please identify the main challenges faced by the diversity of persons with disabilities as members of mainstream or disability-specific non-governmental organizations, and in participating in the activities of such organizations, including challenges faced by persons who experience multiple discrimination.