

Accessibility Guidelines to Voting District Committees

Accessibility

Polling places must be accessible to all voters. Accessibility must be ensured in terms of both the physical and information space. In multi-storeyed buildings, the ground floor and premises as close to the entrance of the building as possible must be preferred as the location for a polling place. It is the task of the rural municipality or city secretary to ensure that polling places are located in accessible buildings or to support voting district committees in making the adjustments needed for accessibility. It is the task of the voting district committee to ensure that all voters can exercise their right to vote in a polling place.

For this purpose, the voting district committee must observe the following before opening a polling place:

- Where in the vicinity of the building are parking spaces for the vehicles of disabled people?
- Is the route from the parking area to the building passable and obstacle-free for people using wheelchairs and other mobility aids?
- Is the building accessible by a ramp?
- Does the outer door of the building open automatically or can it be opened easily?
- Is the route from the outer doors to the polling place of sufficient width (minimum 1.5 m)?
- Is the route from the outer door to the polling place obstacle-free for people using wheelchairs and other mobility aids?
- Is it possible to vote in a wheelchair or in a sitting position in the polling place?
- Do the interior premises have sufficient lighting?
- Is there enough space for people using wheelchairs and other mobility aids to move around the polling place?
- Are there seats (including chairs without armrests) for voters who may need to rest in the polling place?

The conditions described must be ensured throughout the whole time the polling place is open.

Assisting voters

Accessible buildings and premises must be preferred when choosing polling places. Where it is impossible to ensure this fully in practice, the voting district committee must consider how to ensure the maximum independent movement of disabled people. In the event of obstacles, the voting district committee must be ready to assist disabled voters in entering and exiting the polling place and carrying out voting actions.

Where there are obstacles for disabled people in entering the building and moving around the building, clear information on the provision of assistance must be ensured. The contact telephone number of the voting district committee must be easily noticeable, available on the web and on display upon entry into the building. The voting district committee must keep the telephone line open (call, SMS) and be ready to instruct and assist voters in entering the building. The voting district committee ensures the safe and unhindered movement of voters in the building.

By way of exception, where it is impossible to move to the polling place, the voting district committee can take the ballot box, the ballot paper and the signing sheet to the voter outside

the building. For this purpose, first, the voter's right to vote must be checked against the list of voters on the basis of the voter's identity document. At least two members of the voting district committee must be present at the performance of the relevant voting action. The secrecy of voting must be ensured.

If a voter is unable to complete their ballot paper themselves due to a physical disability, a member of the voting district committee may do so at the voter's request and in the voter's presence. If a voter is unable to deposit their ballot paper in the ballot box themselves due to a physical disability, a member of the voting district committee may do so at the voter's request and in the voter's presence. The voter may ask for assistance from another voter but not a candidate of the electoral district of their residence in the completion of their ballot paper and in depositing it in the ballot box.

Voters with a visual impairment

Voters with a visual impairment (the partially-sighted and the blind) can move around with a guide dog or an assistant, or using a white cane. Magnifiers that enable the lists of candidates to be read more easily are provided for the partially-sighted in polling places. The magnifiers must be available throughout the whole time a polling place is open. A polling place must have at least one copy of the list of candidates that is not fixed on the wall and that can therefore be read with a magnifier more easily. It is recommended to mark the access route for the blind from the outer door to the polling place with signs.

The following must be taken into account when communicating with voters with a visual impairment:

- Be prepared to assist the voter with moving according to the instructions given by the voter.
- Be prepared to read out the list of candidates at the request of the voter.
- Give instructions as clearly and simply as possible.
- The guide dogs of the blind must not be distracted.

Voters with a hearing impairment

Voters with a hearing impairment (the hard-of-hearing and the deaf) use a wide variety of ways to communicate, including sign language. The sign language interpretation service is also available for deaf people who use sign language as their native language, and it can be used when communicating in a polling place as necessary on the initiative of a deaf person. This enables to communicate with a deaf person via telephone connection. The secrecy of voting must be ensured and the service must not be used in a voting booth.

The following must be taken into account when communicating with voters with a hearing impairment:

- You need to draw attention to yourself before communicating – gently touch the person's shoulder or wave to them.
- Face the voter and keep eye contact while communicating.
- Speak clearly and at a normal speed, and use usual facial expressions.
- Stay calm and repeat what you have said if necessary. Do not raise your voice or shout.
- If you are not understood, be prepared to provide explanations in other words.
- Be prepared to present the text in writing.
- If necessary, ask additional questions to check that the person has understood you.

Voters with a mobility impairment

Voters with a mobility impairment can move by using various mobility aids, for example in a wheelchair or with the help of a walking frame, crutches or a cane. A table with a screen has been prepared for voters with a mobility impairment to vote in a polling place. It is important to ensure that voters who use a wheelchair can approach the table to complete their ballot paper. The screen ensures the secrecy of voting for voters. The list of the candidates of the electoral district has been fixed to the inside of the screen at a height convenient for the voter or a printout of the list has been placed on the table.

The following must be taken into account when communicating with voters with a mobility impairment:

- Find out how you can assist and act according to the guidance given.