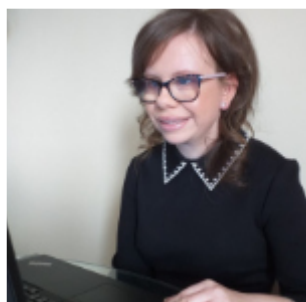




Europe for us

Disability vote



Find explanations for words in **bold** at the end of Europe For Us on pages 33 to 41.

“Europe for us” is available in:

- English
- French
- German
- Hungarian
- Italian
- Dutch
- Romanian
- Spanish
- Ukrainian

Go to www.inclusion-europe.eu/europe-for-us to find the other language versions.

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The disability vote in the 2024 European elections





From June 6 to June 9
the European elections took place.



This was an opportunity
to shape what the European Union
will focus on for the next five years.



Even with some barriers in many EU countries,
the number of voters with disabilities
is expected to be the largest in history.



In 2016,
Denmark passed a law allowing
people with intellectual disabilities
who are under guardianship to vote in elections.

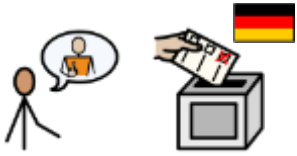
This includes voting for the European Parliament
and local and regional council elections.



In 2018,
Spain changed its law to give adults
under guardianship the right to vote.



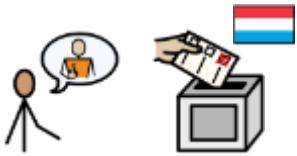
In 2019,
France changed its law,
allowing adults under guardianship to vote.



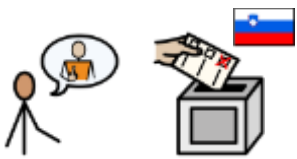
In 2019,
Germany changed its law,
allowing adults under guardianship to vote.



In 2022,
the European Parliament passed a law
to ensure that all EU citizens have the right to vote,
no matter their legal status
or if they are living in institutions.



In 2023,
Luxembourg changed its law,
allowing adults under guardianship to vote.



In 2024,
Slovenia changed its law,
allowing adults under guardianship to vote.



Inclusion Europe strongly encourages
Belgium, Hungary,
Lithuania, Portugal,
Denmark, Romania,
Czechia, Malta,
and especially Estonia, Bulgaria,
Poland, and Cyprus
to change their laws
to allow people with intellectual disabilities to vote.



There is only one democracy,
an inclusive and accessible one.

For everyone, everywhere.

Letter for newly elected Members of European Parliament from Laszlo Bercse





In Europe,
many people with intellectual disabilities
face barriers that restrict
their rights and opportunities.

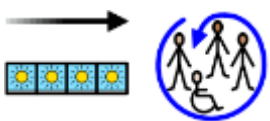
The barriers affect where
they live and their ability to vote.



These restrictions,
while intended to
protect people with disabilities,
often lead to isolation and exclusion.



People with intellectual disabilities
are actively demanding
equal opportunities to learn
and fully engage in society.



In a letter from Laszlo Bercse,
Vice-President of Inclusion Europe,
Laszlo discusses efforts to achieve
equality and to build a more inclusive future for all.

The letter is for newly elected
Members of European Parliament.

Rights and Restrictions



Every adult citizen
has the right to make
decisions about their money,
where they live,
and who they marry.



Sometimes,
to protect people with intellectual disabilities,
some rules are put in place
that limit these rights.



The new Inclusion Indicators report shows
how these restrictions affect the lives of 20 million
people with intellectual disabilities across Europe,
highlighting the need for change.

What about education?



There are 700,000 children
in separate special schools.



There are 20,000 children who
do not have any education at all.

What about employment?



Less than 10% of people
with intellectual disabilities have jobs.

What about housing?



More than 750,000
people with intellectual disabilities
are living in harmful separate institutions.



Another 39,000
people with intellectual disabilities
live in mental hospitals.

All these parts of a
person's life are closely connected.



Taking away their legal rights
can only lead to negative results.



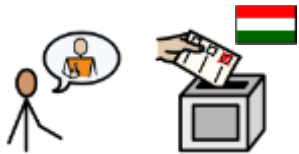
In 2019,
around 800,000
people with intellectual disabilities
couldn't vote or stand for election
because of their disability.



Since then,
the European Parliament
passed a law to make sure that all EU citizens can vote,
no matter what their legal situation
is or if they live in institutions.



In the 2024 European elections,
around 400,000 people under guardianship did not vote.



In Hungary alone,
nearly 50,000 people
under guardianship
were not allowed to vote.



Every person
with intellectual disability
needs the right to vote.



They need decisions made with them,
and not without them.

Some people don't see the issue,
but no one else has to
pass an intelligence level test to vote.

Does this mean that
people with intellectual disabilities
are treated as less important?



People with intellectual disabilities are calling on the newly elected European Parliament to make sure their full participation in society.



They demand the right to vote, including those under legal guardianship.



They are European citizens and they have the right to influence political decisions.



They advocate for supported decision-making, focusing the need for support in making choices.



People with intellectual disabilities want access to a good education.



They also need better help at work and fair pay.



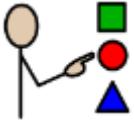
People with intellectual disabilities want real job opportunities.



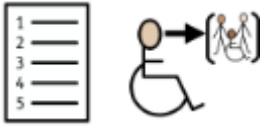
It's important to close institutions.



People with intellectual disabilities want services in the community that help people live on their own and support their families.



People with intellectual disabilities
need to make their own choices.



European Union funds and programmes
need to include people with disabilities.



People with intellectual disabilities insist
on accessible EU documents.



Member States need to follow
the European Accessibility Act.



People with intellectual disabilities are advocating
for stronger and bigger efforts
to implement the European Disability Strategy.



Member States need to support independent living
for people with intellectual disabilities.

European Disability Forum





The European Disability Forum is an organization that advocates for the rights of people with disabilities in Europe.

The European Disability Forum is called EDF for short.



EDF promotes rights and practices that support accessibility, non-discrimination, and full participation for everyone.



Their mission is to build a more inclusive Europe where people with disabilities can live with dignity and enjoy the same rights as everyone else.

For information,
visit their website:

<https://www.edf-fehp.org>



[Read online →](#)

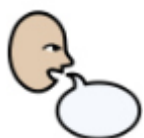
Voters of Europe: Soufiane El Amrani



Soufiane El Amrani works at Inclusion Europe.
He works as an accessibility expert.



Soufiane has been working
at Inclusion Europe since 2008.
He creates easy-to-read materials and gives trainings.



This is a testimony about
the barriers that Soufiane has faced in voting
as a person with intellectual disabilities.



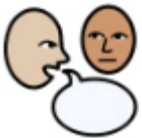
Soufiane talks about the importance of being informed to make the right choices to vote in the European Elections.



Soufiane feels that it is his duty to vote in the European elections to get the people who make decisions to listen to people with intellectual disabilities.



Soufiane says that it is important to him to vote in the European elections.



Soufiane thinks he needs to make his voice heard.

The barriers Soufiane faces in voting

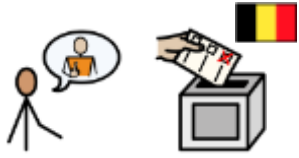


Soufiane has faced many barriers when it comes to voting.

Soufiane didn't vote in the European elections since 2014, because he is under legal guardianship.

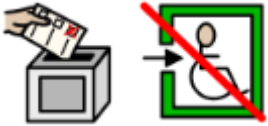


Soufianes' mother is his legal administrator.



In Belgium,
when a person has a legal administrator
their right to vote is taken away.

Soufiane could vote in national,
local and European elections before 2014.



Soufiane says the voting stations were not accessible.

Soufiane says that there was a step that made his access
very hard with a wheelchair.

The computer to cast a vote
was not at the right height for him to vote.



Soufiane says that not having access
in easy-to-read information is a problem.

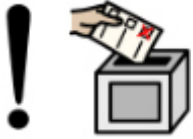


The politicians don't talk in an easy-to-understand way
and it's a problem for people with intellectual disabilities.



Soufiane says that these experiences don't make him feel
like he belongs to a community.

The importance of using your right to vote



It is important to be able to vote.



Everyone has a voice that deserves to be heard.



When you vote it means telling the decision-makers what you want and what they should be working on.



If people with intellectual disabilities are not able to vote their needs are not heard and seen.



If decision-makers don't know what people with intellectual disabilities want to change, then not enough changes will be made.

My message to decision-makers



People with intellectual disabilities have a voice.

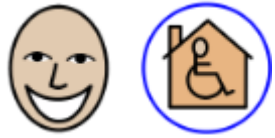
It is the decision-maker's job to make sure their voices are heard.



That's why decision-makers in Belgium should change the law.



Just because Soufiane has a legal administrator and gets support in one area in his life, does not mean that he doesn't care about what happens in the world and cannot contribute to it.



Soufiane has a job, family, friends and hobbies. Soufiane lives alone, independently.



Soufiane can make his own choices in life, independently.



Soufiane is also an American citizen. Soufiane has the right to vote in America.

Soufiane understands how politics work, he should have the right to vote in Belgium.



It is important for decision-makers to tell us what they are doing in easy-to-read.



Soufiane feels that there is still not enough information to explain the different political parties and who would be a good candidate to represent interests of people with intellectual disabilities.



Soufiane also thinks that it is not fair that he and many other people are not part of something that is so important.



He hopes that his right to vote and his right to take part in political life will be respected and given back to him as soon as possible.



[Read online →](#)

Voters of Europe: Mathilde Cotman



Mathilde is a self-advocate
working with Inclusion ASBL.



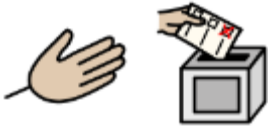
Mathilde knew politics.

She grown up with a mother involved in a political party,
meeting a few people here and there.

At home, she heard a lot about politics.



At 29 years old,
she was preparing to vote for the second time.
Mathilde had prepared to vote in Brussels.



She also said that when she voted for the first time, her mother had helped her. Mathilde had been able to make a choice.



This time, Mathilde did not know who to vote for. She would have liked to vote as she did last time, but her mother was no longer involved in politics.



Mathilde has been interested in the lives of people with disabilities, but she couldn't find a party that talked about it.



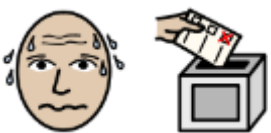
Mathilde said that her mum had come with her to the voting station.



Her mother had explained to her how to vote. Mathilde had been afraid of doing something wrong.



Mathilde was going to vote on June 9. She was going to be accompanied, but she did not know by whom.



Mathilde said that she had been afraid to vote alone. She had been afraid of doing something wrong like voting for a bad person.

Mathilde preferred to go with her mother, sister, or her dad.



She would have preferred to go with someone she could trust. Mathilde preferred to go with relatives who could help her make her choice.



Mathilde will ask her parents to help her decide.



Her dad often talks to Mathilde about politics. To get more information, Mathilde will also look on the Internet.



Mathilde found that most of the sites were not easy-to-read.



She had typed the names of the media on the Internet and had gone to their websites. She said it had helped her.



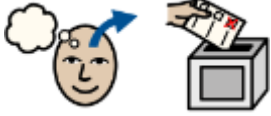
Mathilde also watched the news on TV. She thought that the media would have been better if they had been more inclusive to inform.



Mathilde did not mind that people voted electronically in Brussels. But there were still some challenges.



She said that more help on voting day,
such as signs indicating where to go,
would have been useful.



Mathilde remembers when she voted in 2019.
She was happy.



She felt good to participate
and to know that her voice mattered.



Mathilde watched the election night on TV.



She said that after the results,
she had not been happy.

Mathilde hoped for better outcomes.



She wanted to feel important
and like she belonged when she left the voting booth.
Mathilde wanted to feel like her vote counted.

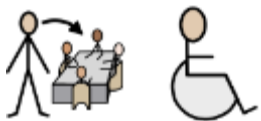


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Voters of Europe: Tamara Byrne



Tamara Byrne is a self-advocate working for Inclusion Ireland.



She represents people with intellectual disabilities in the Youth Committee of the European Disability Forum.



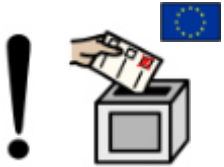
This is a testimonial of Tamara. Tamara shares her voting experiences.



Tamara shares the importance of Europe listening to the voices of people with intellectual disabilities.



Tamara works a lot on human rights, equality, education and decision-making.



Tamara says that it is important to vote in the European elections.

Tamara knows that the politicians are working on the same issues that she is working on.



Tamara says that we need to make sure that the elected Members of the European Parliament will fight for the rights of people with disabilities.



Europe needs to support people with disabilities to participate in politics.



Tamara thinks everyone should get to vote for what they think is important.



Tamara says everyone should have the right to vote. She says it wouldn't be a fair society if some people can vote and others can't.



Article 29 of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**

says that countries must make sure that people with disabilities can participate in politics just like everyone else.



This means we should be able to vote and take part in politics equally.



UNCRPD says that countries need to provide support to people with disabilities to participate in politics if they need it.



For people with intellectual disabilities, It is important that all information is accessible.



Tamara says that they can't vote properly if they don't understand the questions or what the politicians are saying they will do.



Tamara said that there needs to be more politicians with disabilities.



Tamara knows that Spain elected a politician with Down Syndrome to their parliament.



Tamara thinks this is amazing.

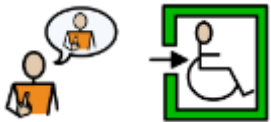


Tamara says that having more people like that would inspire people with disabilities to get into politics more.

Hearing our voices



Tamara says that most politicians have no idea what it's like to live with a disability.



Tamara says we need to make sure they listen to our voices so they can make changes to make the world more accessible for people with disabilities.



Tamara tells the politicians not to forget that there are a lot of disabled people in Europe and they need their vote.



Tamara asks the politicians to make sure people with disabilities are heard.



Tamara also told those who organize elections to put time and effort into making people with disabilities feel important in politics and elections instead of leaving us behind.



Tamara thinks elections are not fair.

Tamara says that if people with disabilities feel like they won't be listened to, they won't bother to vote.



Tamara says everyone needs to give their opinion.

She expresses that people with disabilities need some encouragement and support.

My experiences with voting

Tamara thinks it is important to vote differently.



When Tamara voted in Ireland, she found it hard to understand what the vote was about and what the options were.



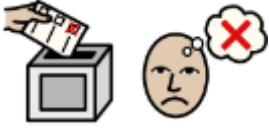
Tamara thinks governments should provide more accessible information about elections.



Tamara says that this information should be easy to understand so, people can make the right choice for them.



Tamara says that all parties and politicians should make their information easy-to-read, so people with disabilities can understand what they will do if they get elected.



When there were elections in Ireland, Tamara saw people voting on the news, but she didn't know how to vote.



Tamara says there should be accessible videos explaining how to vote and take part.



Tamara expresses that this would make the election process easier to understand for people with disabilities.



[Read online →](#)

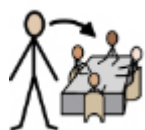
Voters of Europe: Senada Halilčević



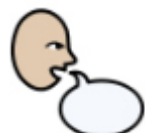
Senada Halilčević is a self-advocate from Croatia.



Senada has been a chair of the European Platform of Self-Advocates (EPSA).



Senada was the Vice-President of Inclusion Europe.



This is a testimonial of Senada.



Senada talks about why accessible voting materials are important, especially for people with intellectual disabilities.

Why it's important for Senada to vote in the European elections?



To Senada it is important to vote in the European elections.



Senada can choose the representative who will speak for her country in the European Parliament.



Senada voted in the 2019 European elections, Senada doesn't think her voice was heard.



She says that everyone should be able to vote because everyone should be able to choose a representative and fight for their rights.



Senada believes that if someone chooses not to vote, they are letting others decide for them and possibly support ideas they don't agree with.

How Europe could better support people with disabilities who want to vote?



Senada hasn't faced any accessibility barriers when voting.



Senada knows some people made mistakes on the ballot, circling the wrong person because these people didn't have the support they needed.

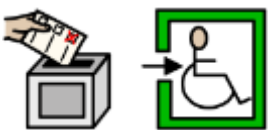


She thinks there should be accessible ballots with a picture or symbol next to each candidate or party.



She says that this would make it easier for people to choose.

How decision-makers should ensure equal access in voting?



Senada says that voting should be accessible so that people can easily get to the voting stations.



The ballots should also be accessible, making it easy for people to mark their choice.

Explanations



Accessible

Something that is easy to use for people with disabilities.
Such as:

- Ramps to get into a building.
- Information in easy-to-read.
- Information in sign language.



Charter of Fundamental Rights

A paper that says what basic rights every person has.
For example, the right to freedom, the right to education.



Commissioner at the European Commission

A Commissioner is a person who is responsible
for a field of work at the European Commission
and manages a lot of people.



Community

People that belong to something.

For example, neighbourhood community.

People who live in the same neighbourhood.

Or religious community.

People who have the same religion.



Community-based services

Support given by people from the community.



Convention

An agreement between countries or

organisations which talks about many topics.



Deinstitutionalisation

Deinstitutionalisation is helping people
to move out of institutions.

It is when the people who lived in institutions get help
so they can live independently in the community.



Educate

Educate means to teach.

It means to make sure people have access to training so they can learn new skills.



European Union

The European Union (in short, EU) is a group of 27 countries.

We call these countries “member states”.

They have joined together to be stronger politically and economically.

The EU makes laws on many important things for the people who live in those countries.

The EU makes laws in different areas.

Some examples are:

- Laws to protect the environment.
- Laws for farmers.
- Laws to protect consumers.

A consumer is someone who buys things.

The EU also makes laws that are important for people with disabilities.

It also made a law that gives people with disabilities more rights when they are travelling.

The EU also gives money to its member states.

Some of this money is used for people with disabilities.



Fund

To give money to someone or to an organisation which helps people or organisations.



Inclusion Europe

Inclusion Europe is an organisation for people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

We fight for their equal rights and inclusion in Europe.
We also want to make a difference to the laws in Europe.
We started in 1988.

We have 79 members in 39 European countries.
We are based in Brussels in Belgium.



Institutions

Institutions are places where people with intellectual disabilities live with other people with intellectual disabilities.

They live apart from other people.

This is what we call “segregated”.

Sometimes this happens against their will.

People who live in institutions have to follow the rules of the institution and cannot decide for themselves.



Intellectual disability

If you have an intellectual disability, that means it is more difficult for you to understand information and learn new skills than it is for other people.

This makes some parts of life harder.

People with intellectual disabilities often need support in learning or at work.

Intellectual disability often starts before you are an adult.

It affects you for your whole life.

There are things that can make life easier
for people with intellectual disabilities.

For example, information in easy-to-read language.

Some people say learning disabilities
instead of intellectual disabilities.



NGO **Non-governmental organizations**

Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs are
generally defined as nonprofit and independent of
governmental influence.



Online Schooling

Online schooling is a way for students to attend
their classes using a computer or another device
to connect to the internet.

These classes happen with the help of online
applications for meetings or online classrooms.



Organisation

A group of people who work for the same thing.



Segregation

Segregation is when someone is set apart from others for an unfair reason.

For example, because of their disability.



Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is when people with intellectual disabilities speak up for themselves.

These people are called self-advocates.



Services

Support for people with disabilities.



Training

A class often given at work where people learn new things.



Ambitions. Rights. Belonging.

Contact us and share your self-advocacy stories!



Website:

inclusion-europe.eu



Email:

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Address:

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