



Voting Experiences II

Among people with learning disabilities



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

- a) To ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, inter alia, by:*
 - i. Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use;*
 - ii. Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;*
 - iii. Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice;*

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

Introduction

It is characteristic of a modern democracy that all adult citizens have an equal opportunity to exercise active political influence. When a cohort of the population is denied their right to exercise democratic influence, it creates a democratic deficit in society as a whole.

Participation in elections is a primary opportunity to exercise your rights as a citizen in a democratic society. Not all citizens, however, have the same opportunity to make decisions and take part in elections. For people with learning disabilities¹ it can be extremely difficult to take part in elections, because electoral materials are not made in an accessible format for this target group. It can also be hypothesized that people with learning disabilities are not expected to make decisions and as a result are often not afforded the opportunity to learn about democracy, elections and political rights. British and Swedish surveys show that the level of participation in elections by people with learning disabilities is very low compared with the rest of the population.² A Danish survey points out that many people with learning disabilities do not experience a natural expectation of having an opinion of their own or being responsible for themselves during their upbringing or at school. Likewise, many have not been taught about democratic conventions such as decision-making processes and legislation etc.³

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

My Opinion My Vote

An EU project entitled “My opinion My vote – M.O.TE” is currently being implemented (2008 -2010). The aim of the project is to increase political participation among people with learning disabilities.

An Italian organisation for people with learning disabilities, Associazione Italiana Persone Down (AIPD), has taken the initiative to create this project, which is funded by

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

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

³ “Veje til reelt medborgerskab. En kortlægning af udviklingshæmmedes vilkår for selvbestemmelse og brugerinddragelse”, Henriette Holmskov og Anne Skov, Handicapenheden, Servicestyrelsen 2007.

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

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

One barrier is lack of awareness and knowledge of political rights among people with learning disabilities, their relatives and persons in the caring professions. Another barrier is lack of awareness of the importance of political participation by people with learning disabilities in society as a whole. A third barrier is the lack of accessible electoral information and the need for the relevant authorities to ensure the accessibility of public and political information.

A survey pertaining to civic, political and social education practices with people with learning disabilities was conducted with teachers from special and mainstream education settings. A further survey was conducted with families of people with learning disabilities relating to political awareness and education. The report of this survey can be downloaded from www.myopinionmyvote.eu.

An awareness campaign was implemented in conjunction with the last European elections in June 2009. The campaign was targeted towards people with learning disabilities and those working in the field of learning disability. The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of the elections and inform electors about voting procedures. An awareness campaign focused on political rights in general will also be implemented as part of the project.

An education programme focusing on politics, democracy and elections is being developed for use with people with learning disabilities. The programme is being developed in collaboration with people with learning disabilities and respective professionals. When the programme is developed and tested, it will be available for download from the project website: www.myopinionmyvote.eu.

As part of the project, advisory groups were set up comprising four adults with learning disabilities per country. The advisory group meet three times during the project period and contribute to the development and testing of the results of the project.

Interview survey

A qualitative interview survey of three rounds will be carried out with twenty persons with learning disabilities in each of the six participating countries. The interviews pertain to political awareness among people with learning disabilities.

This report presents the results of the second interview survey. The interview survey was focused specifically on political rights and voting, including decision-making

processes when voting, voting on the Election Day, and the availability of accessible political information.

The second interview survey took place in the autumn and winter of 2009. The interviewees were asked if they voted in the election for the European Parliament held in June 2009, and if so, what their experience was like. Many of the questions that were used in the first round of interviews were used again in order to verify whether any changes in views or attitudes took place since the first interview. The third interview survey will be carried out during the spring of 2010.

The interviews were carried out in each of the participating countries. The interviewers submitted the results of the respective national interviews to The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons in Denmark. The six national reports form the basis for this report.

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

Magdolna Birtha, Orsolya Leveleki and Krisztina Lakatos from Down Foundation (Hungary).

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

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

Laura Krauel from Fundacio Projecte Aura (Spain).

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

Grainne Murphy from Down Syndrome Ireland(DSI).

Method

The structure and various fundamental parts of the M.O.TE project have been laid down by AIPD. AIPD has also made the overall design of the interview survey. A qualitative interview survey of three rounds will be carried out with twenty persons with learning disabilities in each of the six participating countries. The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons from Denmark is responsible for the coordination of the interview surveys, development of interviews tools and reporting the results of the European interviews.

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

The Equal Opportunities Centre has developed an interview guide. The Centre has drawn on foregoing studies from literature on the methods of interviewing persons with learning disabilities. The literature showed a general recommendation on formulating the questions in a very concrete way. It is emphasised that the questions should, in as much as is possible be phrased in such a way that they relate to things, persons, and events familiar to the interviewee. The interview guide for the second interview round is attached in appendix A, and the interview guide for the first interview round is attached in appendix B.

Interviewing people with learning disabilities

Methodical considerations must always be contemplated when planning qualitative research. The deliberations are twofold and relate to how to best prepare the interviews so as to acquire the most information from the target group and how to conduct the interviews effectively. Regardless of the target group being interviewed, considerations should always be made with respect to the format and nature of the interviews. Such considerations will generally include the following: Appropriate phrasing of the questions, cultural, sexual and gender sensitivity etc. When interviewing persons with learning disabilities, more specific considerations pertaining to an individual's needs and circumstance may be required.

Prior to the interview survey, the Centre formulated guidelines for interviewing persons with learning disabilities. These guidelines describe how the interviews of M.O.TE are to be carried out and indicate which aspects are important to be aware of in this context. The purpose of the guidelines has been to describe some of the methodical considerations pertaining to conducting interviews with persons with learning disabilities. Furthermore, the guidelines ensure a degree of methodological consistency given the different cultural contexts the interviews are taking place in, see the guidelines in appendix C.

The Centre has drawn on foregoing studies from literature on the methods of interviewing persons with learning disabilities to make these guidelines.⁴ The guidelines emphasise that it is important to allow sufficient time for the interview – both for information meetings and acquiring “informed consent”.

The guide specifies the importance of informing the interviewees that all interviews are anonymous and advises that they can withdraw from the interviews at any time or refuse to answer any questions during the interview.

The guidelines emphasise that it is important to enquire about the interviewees’ impression of being interviewed on completion of the interview. It is important that the interviewees have the opportunity to reflect on and communicate their experience of the interview situation.

The guidelines call for an information meeting to be held with the interviewees prior to the interview. At these meetings the interviewees are informed of the purpose and the details of the project, as well as the number of participants and interview rounds involved in the project. Easy-to-read information is presented to each participant, detailing the project objectives, the interview, informed consent and the interviewer’s contact information. It is emphasised at this meeting to interviewees that there are no right or wrong answers, and the interviewee can ask for further details or explanations at any time. Sufficient time should be allocated for information meetings.

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

Recruiting interviewees

The Equal Opportunities Centre for Disabled Persons prepared guidelines for recruiting the interview group. The guidelines stipulated that the interview group should be in the age range of eighteen to thirty-five. At least 30 % of the interviewees should be of an age where they either had voted or had been able to vote at least once before. There should be an equal representation of men and women, and the group as a whole should represent some diversity in age and ethnicity etc. Furthermore, the group should also present some diversity in reading and processing skills. It was however also stipulated that the criteria should be seen only as a guide with non-obligatory adherence to all recommendations. See appendix D for the list of criteria in full.

Twenty persons with learning disabilities have been selected in each country to participate in the project. Sixteen are to participate in the project by participating in both the interview survey and testing the education programme. Four are to participate in the above-mentioned areas as well as in the pilot group activities that follow the project closely and participate in project meetings where they advise in relation to the

⁴ A list of literature can be seen in the guidelines in appendix B.

development and testing of the materials and surveys of the project. This means that twenty persons with learning disabilities from each participating country have been interviewed. Two exceptions were made in Ireland and Malta. Both countries carried out nineteen interviews. The Hungarian project partner carried out twenty interviews, but only analysed fifteen interviews, since five interviewees are deemed fully incapacitated by the state (fully interdicted). This means that the person is not allowed to exercise political rights. In total 118 participants have been interviewed for this survey.

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

Voting rights in the participating countries

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

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

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

In **Denmark**, as a rule, everybody above the age of eighteen has the right to vote, although in some cases disability is a ground for restriction of legal capacity. Individuals who have been deprived of legal capacity therefore do not have the right to vote. Individuals who are placed under other types of guardianship are not deprived the right to vote.⁷

In **Hungary**, the legal form of interdiction excludes many persons with learning disabilities from exercising their fundamental civic and political rights. There are two types of interdiction in Hungary: the incapacitated (fully) and the restrictive (partial). Fully incapacitated status means that no contractual capacity is held pertaining to the right to work under legal forms, to get married officially or exercise democratic rights etc. Restrictive or partial capacity is limited to certain areas, for example a person may be employed to freely utilise half of their income with the other half being under the trustee's supervision. Restricted capacity does not allow people to exercise their democratic rights or marry. In 2006 more than 66,000 people were interdicted (most of them had a learning disability, and some had psychiatric diagnosis) 66 % of those interdicted are deemed fully incapacitated. There is a proposal for changing the Hungarian Civil Code that also includes a revision of the rules concerning the legal capacity, and the introduction of supported decision-making instead of restriction and exclusion from decision-making.

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

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

⁵ Information about the rules of the participating countries have been provided by the project partners

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

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

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

Results from the interview survey

As described, the interview survey has focused on the interviewees' experiences of participation in elections. The starting point for the questions was the election for the European Parliament. This starting point was taken to give the interviewees a relatively concrete starting point.

Voting history

The interviewees were asked if they voted in the election for the European Parliament in June 2009. In most of the countries, most of the interviewees had voted, however the numbers vary.

Second interview round:

Denmark*	Yes: 10 people – 50 %	No: 8 people – 40 %
Hungary	Yes: 5 people – 33 %	No: 10 people** – 66 %
Ireland	Yes: 18 people – 95 %	No: 1 person – 5 %
Italy	Yes: 19 people – 95 %	No: 1 person – 5 %
Malta	Yes: 13 people – 72 %	No: 5 people*** – 27 %
Spain	Yes: 14 people – 70 %	No: 6 people – 30 %

* Two Danish interviewees were not sure if they had voted or not.

** The ten Hungarian interviewees are interdicted and not allowed to vote.

*** One interviewee was not of legal age to vote at the time when the elections took place.

In the first interview round the interviewees were asked if they voted in the last national general elections. Most of the interviewees had also in this instance voted.

First interview round:

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

* One Danish interviewee was not sure if he had tried voting or not.

** Two of the five were not of legal age to vote at the time of the Italian election prior to the interview survey.

The number of participants having voted in the two elections does not correspond with the English and Swedish research mentioned above. Those bodies of research indicate considerably lower election turnouts among people with learning disabilities when

compared to the population as a whole.⁸ In some countries such as Ireland, the election turnout among the participants of the two interview rounds seems better than that of the general population. In other countries, the election turnouts are still lower when compared to the general population, but higher than in other surveys. However, it turned out that it was difficult for the interviewees to remember if it was in the last election they had voted. Interviewees did not find it difficult to remember if they had tried voting in a general election at some point. This problem arose in many of the participating countries. In some countries, there were several occasions for voting besides the European Parliament Elections which created confusion for interviewees. For example, in Ireland, the most recent election at the time of interview was not the European Parliament Elections, but a referendum related to the Lisbon treaty. A yes answer thus reflects that the interviewee has participated in an election at some point, but not necessarily the last European election held in the country. Since the interviewees' answers do not necessarily reflect participation in the last or in any election, the numbers cannot be used to measure voter turnout as such. The figures only show if the interviewees have or have not voted in a general election in their adult life. It must also be emphasised that, due to its methodological foundations, this survey is not representative of the election turnouts for people with learning disabilities, but describes the experiences and views of the people being interviewed and therefore points to problems and perspectives that are relevant to the population group.

The non-voters

31 interviewees did not vote in the European Parliament Elections. In addition, one interviewee from Malta was not of legal age to vote at the time when the elections took place.

Some of the interviewees who did not vote were not allowed to vote because of their disability. That is the case of two interviewees from Malta, four interviewees from Spain and ten interviewees from Hungary. Two of the interviewees from Hungary explained that they decided to show up at the polling station and tried to vote even though they were not allowed to. The staff at the polling station said that they were not allowed to vote according to the Hungarian legal regulations, i.e. they are interdicted. The interviewees were rather disappointed, and one of them explained:

“The lady at the polling station was really nice, but the situation was indeed humiliating”

The rest of the interviewees gave various reasons for not voting. One explained that he was not interested in politics, another explained that she did not feel that the EU was of personal interest to her. One did not know who to vote for. Among other interviewees there were more practical reasons for not voting, e.g. that the interviewee was not at home on Election Day.

⁸ For instance an English survey shows that in the 2001 General Election only 31 % of people with learning disabilities voted compared with a national turnout of 59 %, <http://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/press/every-vote-counts-press-release.htm>

In the first interview round twenty people from five countries had not voted. In addition, two from Italy did not vote because they were not of the legal age to do so at the time of the last election.

Only one person was interdicted and not able to vote. Similar to the second interview round, the rest of the interviewees expressed various reasons for not having voted. Several mentioned a lack of political interest. Other reasons mentioned were difficulties in understanding the election procedures, lack of reading skills or not feeling that their vote would really make a difference. A person from Italy stated that he was aware of all the difficulties related to exercising his right to vote adequately and felt he was not prepared enough to do it properly. He also expressed that he was really interested in the M.O.TE project because it would help him reach the required level of awareness that a good elector should have.

In the first interview round there were also people whose potential interest in voting had been put down or not supported by others:

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

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

Perhaps prompted by participation in the M.O.TE project, most of the interviewees that had not voted expressed both in the first and the second interview rounds that they would like to vote the next time they had the chance. A few interviewees explained that they did not quite know if they would vote again. One interviewee from Denmark said:

“I’m not so good at politics. If I had known better, I might have voted.”

In the other interview round, we also chose to ask more questions about the interviewees’ knowledge of the election. The interviewees who did not vote were thus asked if they knew that there was going to be an election, and if they knew how and when it was to take place. In the countries where the interviewees answered the question, the vast majority said that they knew that there was going to be an election, and that they knew how and when it was to take place. Nothing seems to indicate that this could be the reason for people with learning disabilities not voting.

Experiences of voting

We asked the interviewees who had voted questions regarding their experiences of voting. Interviewees’ experience of voting varied from person to person, but varied distinctively only in a few cases from country to country.

In the first and the second interview rounds, the majority of the interviewees who voted liked the process of voting and found it interesting. Many expressed satisfaction with the possibility of having influence in society by voting.

In Malta, the thirteen interviewees who voted said that they felt “happy”, “good”, and “slightly scared” when voting, Two said they were “unsure”. Nine of the Italian voters referred to being deeply touched while voting, because they felt it was an important action. Another Italian voter remarked that:

“Voting is very important because I am not young anymore, and it is my right to vote for the candidate I prefer!”

The process of voting

Voting is a process that requires skills, the development of which may or may not be affected by a person having a learning disability, e.g. the ability to read, write and process information. People with learning disabilities may therefore require accommodations to be in place to make the process of voting more accessible to them. We aimed to ascertain whether the interviewees who had voted had experienced the process as accessible. We therefore asked the interviewees if they found voting to be easy or difficult, we asked for their views on the ballot paper, and if they had any help/accommodations in place when voting.

Some of the interviewees found the physical act of voting straightforward while others found it difficult to vote.

In Ireland the interviewees explained that the physical act of voting was straightforward and attributed this to the format and content of the ballot paper.

In Malta eight interviewees said it was not difficult to vote while five said that they found it rather challenging. The reasons they cited were “small print”, “no photos” and “too many names/information” on the ballot paper causing confusion and some anxiety when making one’s choice.

In Denmark only three interviewees found it easy to vote, whereas ten found it difficult. Two described it as in-between. Those who found it easy to vote could not really explain why it was easy. The ten persons who found it difficult explained that the practical part of it was difficult, and that the ballot paper was long and confusing. They further explained that it was difficult to find out what the political parties stood for and to decide who to vote for indicating that practical circumstances and the process of decision-making made the act of voting difficult.

In the first interview round the majority of participants in all the countries stated that they did not find it difficult to vote. That differed somewhat in Denmark where half of the voters stated that they found it difficult to vote.

The ballot paper

In the first and second interview rounds, many interviewees stated that the ballot paper was hard to understand. The interviewees in Denmark who found the ballot paper difficult explained that it was long, confusing with too many names and political parties - thus making it difficult for the interviewees to find the candidate or the party they would like to vote for. One Danish interviewee explained it in the following way,

“I knew who I wanted to vote for, but as already said, I could not find him on it [the list]. So I just marked a political party.”

Ireland was an exception as all the interviewees in Ireland found the ballot paper easy to use. In Spain thirteen out of fourteen voters also found the ballot paper easy to understand. Most of the interviewees from Italy found the ballot paper quite clear because they had seen it before, either at home or through specific activities in the M.O.TE project, and this had made the understanding of the ballot paper a great deal easier for them.

Many of the interviewees stressed that it would have been very helpful to have photos of the candidates on the ballot, and that this would have made voting easier. One Maltese interviewee explained it in the following way,

“It would be much better for us if they put the photos of the candidates, as I would be able to see their faces and easily tell who they are.”

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

Some of the interviewees also found that it would be helpful if the logo of the parties was printed on the ballot paper. Others found that it would be an advantage if the font was larger or if the text could be read aloud. Opinions differed on the matter of e-voting. Some disclosed that it would be an advantage, whereas others stated that they feel more secure voting on paper.

Getting help

For some people with learning disabilities, having help available at the polling station and in the polling booths may be necessary. All countries have election officials present at the polling station that can help by answering questions and providing guidelines before the voter enters the polling booth. The extent of help offered varies from country to country.⁹ In one country many of the interviewees have had help, but in the other countries few or none have had help.

In **Italy**, it is up to the staff of the polling station to help the electors with information and guidance, but only before they enter the polling booth, and not inside the polling booth. This is because the Italian electoral law states that only people with physical disabilities can be accompanied in the polling booth and can express their vote while assisted by an accompanying person. Consequently, none of the interviewees had help in the first interview round although some did receive help prior to voting. In the second interview round two interviewees explained that they entered the polling booth with their parents and got help in that way though the law does not permit such an action.

In **Ireland**, none of the interviewees had help in the first or the second interview rounds. In the first interview round some did receive help prior to voting and asserted that they required some help in relation to where to put the cross. They availed of this help before entering the polling station. In Ireland, it is possible to get help to conduct the actual act

⁹ The project partners have provided information about the rules concerning help at the polling station and in the polling booth.

of voting since the presiding officer can assist you if you have a reading or writing disability that prevents you from voting without help. During this procedure, the presiding officer and the personation agents go with you to a part of the polling station where a conversation in normal tones cannot be overheard. If necessary, the presiding officer will suspend entry to the polling station and have the station cleared to ensure that no other person can overhear how you vote. The presence of the personation agents ensures and confirms that the presiding officer complies with your instructions. It is a protection for the voter and for the presiding officer. As with all other people involved in a poll, there is a statutory obligation on personation agents to maintain the secrecy of the ballot.

In **Denmark**, just two of the interviewees in the first interview round stated that they had help voting. During the second interview round, the vast majority of the interviewees said that they had not had any help when voting. One interviewee had been helped, and another was told how to vote by post. A third interviewee indicated that she had needed help, but it is unclear if she really was helped. In Denmark, voters with a disability can have help in the polling booth. At the time of the first interview round, the help would be provided by two election officials. Since then, the law has been changed. Now it is possible for the voter to choose his or her own helper. Apart from the personally appointed helper, an official also has to be present.

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

“My mum showed me what I had to do, and I voted alone”.

Just two of the Maltese interviewees stated that they needed no help at all. In the second interview round, ten out of the thirteen Maltese interviewees who voted said that they sought help during the voting procedure:

“The commissioner in the polling station helped me to vote as I wished.”

“I showed him (the commissioner) the photo and they showed me where to place the number 1.”

In **Spain**, four interviewees in the first interview round had help in the polling booth. Fourteen did not need help. In the second interview round, two interviewees asked for help to vote, one of them asked his/hers parents, and the other one asked his brother. Twelve interviewees did not need any help to vote. In Spain you cannot have help to vote. There are volunteers from the different political parties who orientate the people inside the polling place, but these volunteers are not allowed to help you with the ballot paper.

In **Hungary**, it is not possible to get help in the pooling booth. In the second interview, one of the interviewees required assistance to vote, and he was accompanied to the polling station by a personal helper of the Hungarian Down Foundation.

During the second interview round, the interviewees were also asked if they found the personnel at the polling station helpful. The question was not asked in the first interview round. In Denmark, two interviewees found that the personnel had not been very helpful, or that they had not the time to offer any help. The rest of the interviewees found that the personnel had been helpful, or they had not noticed if they were helpful because they did not need help. One interviewee said as follows,

“I did not ask them, for I wanted to do it myself.”

In the other countries, the interviewees were not asked or did not answer this question.

Finding out when and where the EU election took place

During the second interview round, we also chose to go deeper into the question of voting by asking the interviewees how they found out that there was an election taking place, and how they found out where and when they were going to vote.

Most of the Maltese interviewees (eleven out of thirteen) knew that the EU elections were going to take place, due to the frequent TV coverage and billboards that were put up all over the island. Voters did not go to the polling station unaccompanied, they went with parents or other relatives. Finding the polling station was therefore not an issue for the Maltese interviewees.

In Denmark most of the interviewees explained that they had found out through TV and the media in general that there was an election taking place. Some had been told by others. A few did not remember how they were informed or could not explain. As to when the election took place, most of them also explained that they were informed through the media. Several of them could not remember or explain how they found out when the election was taking place. Most of them were informed of the location through the polling card, whereas others were informed by talking to others.

In Hungary, the interviewees used two main information sources to learn about the elections: the TV and the newspapers. Only one person had a different source: *“I have learned from my mother that the elections would be held.”* All five voters received their voting notice, this is how they knew where to go to vote.

In Italy most of the interviewees (sixteen) reported they had learned when the EU elections took place through newspapers and television news. The rest were told by her/his parents. Some of them (six) declared they had learned through the M.O.TE

activities as well. Only one interviewee used the polling card to learn where the elections would take place: *“It was easy, I found the place because it is written on my personal polling card!”*. The others got this information from their parents.

Only one interviewee from Ireland referred to their polling card when asked about where they voted. The other interviewees explained that they returned to vote at *“the same place as always”*, and this was usually a community centre or school. While, all electors receive a polling card in the post when they are on the register to vote, it is not obligatory to bring it with you to the polling station. Therefore, the general population would also presumably not refer to it when asked about where they voted. However, the majority of interviewees stated that they went to the polling station with their parents, and this would usually be the case. Thus a population with learning disability may rely on a family member to advise them of their venue to vote.

In Spain, the interviewees were either not asked or did not answer this question.

Deciding who to vote for

A crucial part of voting of course is deciding who to vote for. We also asked the interviewees if they found the decision making process difficult. Where many of the interviewees who had voted found the physical act of voting easy, the opposite was the case when asked about deciding who to vote for. Deciding who to vote for was something that many interviewees identified as the most difficult part of voting. This was especially the case among the **Irish** and **Danish** interviewees in both the first and second interview rounds. In **Italy**, almost half of the voters in the second interview round stated that deciding who to vote for was a little bit difficult.

The answers from the interviewees showed that many of the issues faced by people with learning disabilities are the same as those faced by all people when deciding which political party to side with. It was explained that it is difficult to see through all the things the politicians say and find out what they really intend to do if they are elected. Other issues were related to trust and political transparency:

“If I vote for someone, he doesn’t even do what I need him to do”

“They all say the same thing”

Some interviewees explained that it was harder deciding who to vote for in the election for the European Parliament than it was in local elections.

The interviewees who found it easy to decide who to vote for mainly explained that they knew who to vote for before the election. This was attributed to the fact that they always vote for the same party. In the second interview round, that was the case in **Malta** where nine out of thirteen voters found it easy to choose who to vote for. In **Spain**, twelve out of fourteen voters found it easy, and in **Hungary**, all five voters found it easy.

As part of the decision-making process, some of the interviewees talked with others about who to vote for. Those who talked to others prior to making the decision had

mostly talked to their family. Hence, parents and siblings seem to be a major influence on the interviewees' choices in terms of parties and candidates to vote for.

Very few had talked to anyone other than family about for who to vote for. Those who did talked to social workers, friends or the people they lived with. One Danish interviewee also mentioned that he had talked to others about who to vote for in the M.O.TE class.

When deciding who to vote for, it is important to know the parties that are running for the election. In the second interview round, we chose to ask if the interviewees knew the parties standing for the election, and how they had been informed about these parties.

In Malta, nine out of thirteen interviewees said they were fully aware of the parties that were contesting the election and who had their candidates running for election in the European Parliament. Most interviewees actually mentioned the two main parties and the Green Party, which has a smaller following on the island.

In Denmark, six interviewees did not know the parties standing for the European Parliament Elections, while eight interviewees knew the parties.

In the rest of the countries, this question was either not asked, or the interviewees did not answer it.

Getting information

For many interviewees, talking to the family and family influence was their primary method for obtaining knowledge and forming an opinion of who to vote for. But most of them also used other sources of information.

In the period prior to an election, information about the election, the parties and the politicians are available from many sources, the most prominent being television and newspapers. We aimed to ascertain the extent to which the interviewees had sought information about the election and about the different views of the parties and politicians from these or other sources. Interviewees were asked if they had seen something on the television or read something in the newspapers about the general election. We also asked questions to ascertain if the interviewees knew something about the views of the different political parties and how they had obtained this information.

It is important to stress that the questions have not been designed to test the political knowledge of the interviewees. There is no right amount of political knowledge that one must possess in order to be a voter just like there is no amount of political interest required in order to be a voter. People come from different backgrounds and will inevitably vote for different reasons. A person's level of political interest or political knowledge may however influence one's decision as to whether to vote or not. It may influence a person's experience of voting. The questions are therefore intended to bring nuance and depth to the answers concerning voting experiences and voting history.

Another important issue concerning the information is how accessible it is. This issue is of special importance to people with learning disabilities, as they may require

information to be prepared in a more accessible or “easy to read” format. In order for people with learning disabilities to access information fully, it may need to be prepared in a way that facilitates comprehension difficulties. The questions therefore aim to ascertain if people with learning disabilities experienced the available information as being relevant and appropriate to their needs.

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

In the second interview round, we asked the interviewees how they acquired knowledge about the attitudes of the various political parties before the election.

The Irish project partner reported that all the Irish interviewees were confused by the question relating to their acquisition of information prior to the elections. Participants stated, that they did not understand what this meant, other participants asked to skip the question, and the remainder said that they could not remember. However, when provided with the list of possible methods of acquiring information, it transpired that participants did engage in various forms of research before the EU elections. This problem seems to be the case in some of the other countries as well since the interviewees were only asked or did only answer what sources of information they had used.

In Denmark and Hungary, most interviewees generally said that they had not made any particular efforts to find out what the politicians proposed in relation to various issues. When provided with the list of possible methods of acquisition, however, some answered positively stating that they used the Internet and newspapers.

In general, most of the interviewees in all the countries watched news on the television and inevitably used this as a primary source of knowledge. It however, also transpired that some found it hard to understand the news on the television. Newspapers were also used as a source of information. The Internet was used the least, but two of the Italian interviewees referred to the M.O.TE website as a source.

Some interviewees also referred to the M.O.TE education programme as a tool for acquiring information in advance of the elections.

“I suppose it was all the stuff I did with you.”

“The handouts you gave us told me all I needed to know.”

“All these workshops did the trick for me.”

Some of the Italian interviewees further reported that television ads run by the parties in the lead up to the election were especially influential and enhanced their knowledge about the stance of the different political parties and subsequently influenced their vote.

The methods and means of acquiring information about the political parties emerged to be relatively similar in the first and second interview rounds, although for some interviewees in the second round, the M.O.TE education programme presented as a new tool for acquiring information.

In the second interview round, we also asked if the interviewees had sought more general information on politics recently. The majority of the Danish and the Maltese interviewees had not sought information on politics and those who did mainly did so incidentally by watching television. In Hungary, eight interviewees did some research on politics recently, and they explained that they were interested in the forthcoming Hungarian elections in April 2010.

Interviewees were further asked if they generally watched the news on television, or if they read the newspaper. The majority of the Danish, Hungarian and Italian interviewees stated that they watched the news. Fewer interviewees read the newspaper. In Spain, all the interviewees said they read the newspapers every day, but they did not usually read the news about politics.

The interviewees were also asked if they followed the election results in the media. In Malta, Denmark and Hungary, most of the interviewees said they mainly followed the election results on television.

Talking about politics

As previously mentioned, a great many of the interviewees mentioned their family as a source of knowledge and influence when deciding who to vote for. We also asked the interviewees if they talked about politics and elections in general, i.e. not necessarily in the lead up to an election.

When the interviewees were asked in Malta whether they discussed political issues and with whom, only six said they did, and all did so with family members although two persons also mentioned friends/workmates as well.

Six interviewees in Hungary said they talked with others about politics, referring to their parents and siblings for the most part. The other nine interviewees did not talk about politics with anyone.

Half of the interviewees in Italy stated that they usually speak about politics, the rest explained that they do not speak about politics citing the following reasons: a lack of interest, finding the topic boring or the subject too difficult to deal with. Most of those who speak about politics do so with their families, only four stated they also talk with their friends.

In Denmark, some interviewees had talked to friends, parents or colleagues about politics, but most of them said that they did not talk to anyone about politics.

In Spain and Ireland, the interviewees were not asked or did not answer this question.

The first interview round showed the same tendency with national differences.

In the second interview round, we asked the interviewees more detailed questions about their friends' and relatives' participation in elections.

Eight interviewees from Hungary said their families and friends usually vote. The other seven interviewees said their families and friends do not vote usually, and some of them emphasized that it was because “*My friends are under custody, as well*”

In Malta, fourteen out of nineteen said their close relatives all vote in elections, while the others said “no” or “they were not sure”. In Denmark, the same pattern emerged with most of interviewees stating that their friends and relatives voted, or at least some of them. A few did not know if their friends and relatives voted.

We also asked if the interviewees knew who to talk to if they wanted to know more about politics. In Denmark, half of the interviewees did not know, whereas the other half knew and referred to social workers, colleagues, relatives or politicians.

Nine out of fifteen interviewees in Hungary did not know who to turn to if they would like to know more about politics. The remainder stated that they would ask their families.

In Malta, family members are also the most referred to if the interviewees wished for additional information about political matters with more than half of the interviewees stating so.

Topics of political interest

It is often assumed that people with disabilities will only be interested in disability related issues when discussing politics such as accessibility, accommodation and non-discrimination. It is no more reasonable to assume that people with disabilities have such specific political interests than it is to assume the same for the general population.

We talked to the interviewees about the topics of their political interest by asking the interviewees what issues were important to them. A broad variance in answers were noted. Some mentioned topics that belong within the topic of disability related issues, but most of the topics mentioned were not related to disability issues.

In **Denmark**, many of the interviewees answered that disability policy and *good conditions* for people with learning disabilities were important to them. One interviewee explained in the following way what was important to him, “*That means decent conditions for people with learning disabilities – decent conditions – that means decent housing and decent working conditions, and on the whole equal opportunities and equal treatment in society.*” Some also mentioned issues such as pension, traffic, climate and crime as important issues.

When asked in **Ireland** about the issues that were important to them, the interviewees stated that the most pertinent issue was that of the current economic crisis. This would presumably be quite typical for the general population. The majority of participants referred to disability issues, which differs from the first round of interviews, when only five participants referred specifically to disability issues. This may be reflective of the M.O.TE education programme.

“We have a right to more education after school and to jobs.”

“We deserve a fair wage for the work we do but nobody is listening to the lads with Down syndrome.”

“We need to stop the cutbacks like classroom assistants.”

“What is happening with our benefits that is what I want to know, the medical card and travel pass, it is all very worrying.”

A variety of other topics were also referred to in Ireland by most interviewees namely the environment, laws, child benefit, education and employment issues. Such issues are dominating national debate and media during present times, indicating that the participants are quite engaged with the issues pertaining to citizens of Ireland / Europe. Such engagement was not interpreted during the first round of interviews.

When interviewees were asked in **Malta** if there were any issues that were of great interest to them, five of them found this question too difficult to reply to while the others mentioned issues like work and employment, transport systems, cost of living and the environment.

In **Italy**, most of the interviewees were interested in topics such as sport and health, public security, environment, schools and employment. One explained his/her interest in public security in the following way:

“You need to feel safe for anything you would like to do and politicians should ensure it to you!”

In **Hungary**, the interviewees consider the following issues important: helping people with disability, creating new workplaces/jobs, more revenues and making it possible for people with disability to work at “outside” jobs.

In **Spain**, the interviewees were not asked or did not answer this question.

We also asked the interviewees if they found the governing of the EU interesting and what they would decide if they were to govern Europe.

Only some interviewees seemed interested in the governing of the EU. This was the case in Malta and Denmark, where only five out of the nineteen interviewees and five out of twenty interviewees respectively stated that the governing of the EU was of interest to them. Many of the Danish interviewees explained that they found the EU very far away and difficult to grasp. Several Danish interviewees also expressed that they were more interested in those who make decisions in Denmark. In Hungary, eight out of fifteen interviewees communicated that those leading Europe were important figures. In the other countries, this question was not asked, or the interviewees did not answer it.

When the interviewees were asked what decisions they would make if they had the power in Europe, a variety of answers were noted.

In Ireland, disability and economic issues were yielded. A national perspective was predominantly communicated. However, many of the issues would be relevant at European level also.

Among the main issues that arose in Malta were employment, law enforcement, improvement of roads, and participation of women in EU politics, pollution, and other environmental issues.

In Hungary, the imaginary /abstract decision-making question was very motivating for the interviewees. Some of them only focused on their own personal interests, for instance: *“I would appoint the Prime Minister”*. Others looked at the common interest and emphasised that they would only make good decisions, for example:

“I would not take away the maternity aid and the old age pension.”

“I would not reduce the work hours of disabled people”.

In Italy, immigration, inclusion and disability rights were some of the topics mentioned:

“All the people with Down syndrome must vote”

The interviewees in Spain did not hesitate to express their ideas either. One interviewee explained that he /she would do the following:

“Remove the cars from the city and put more buses”

Many of the interviewees in Denmark were not sure what to answer and some explained that the EU is very far away. Eight interviewees had different ideas of what they would do. The answers ranged from doing something for people with disabilities to climate consideration and preventing war. One interviewee explained it in the following way:

“Then I think that we all should work together for some better goals For example a good climate”.

In the first interview round, we asked the interviewees what they would decide if they were to govern their own country. The answers to this question also varied a lot. Topics relating to disability issues were mentioned as well as other topics.

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

Most of the interviewees in the first and second interview round had voted at some point in their adult life. This does not correspond with English and Swedish studies that show that the voter turnout among people with learning disabilities is much lower when compared to the general population.¹⁰ It is, however, not possible to ascertain from the two interview rounds if the interviewees voted in the last election held in their country due to the fact that not all interviewees were able to remember if this was the case. The high number of voters recorded in the two rounds of interviews is therefore not an estimation of voter turnout as such, merely a number on how many had voted at some point in their life.

Thirty-one interviewees did not vote in the European Parliament Elections. In addition one interviewee from Malta was not of legal age to vote at the time when the elections took place.

In the first interview round twenty interviewees from five countries had not voted. In addition, two from Italy did not vote because they were not of legal age to do so at the time of the last election.

The non-voters expressed various reasons for not voting. One was a lack of political interest, but lack of accessibility and political apathy were also mentioned as reasons.

Generally, the interviewees from the two interview rounds were interested in political matters. Most of the interviewees had voted, they further looked upon voting as important and had ideas on how to better society. Many interviewees also talked about politics in general, i.e. not necessarily leading up to an election.

The two interview rounds did not yield many differences. In the M.O.TE project, the interviewees attend an education programme about democracy and participation in elections. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if more interviewees would vote after they had been through the education programme than before. Unfortunately, the two interview rounds do not show clearly if such a development has taken place. There are probably too many factors coming into play. For example, in some countries the interviewees had not been through the education programme when they voted in the election for the European Parliament. In many countries it is a common tendency in the population in general for less people to vote in the European Parliament than in other elections.

¹⁰ Keely m.fl. : Participation in the 2005 general election by adults with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, Volume 52, Number 3, March 2008 , pp. 175-181(7) and Kjellberg: Participation – Ideology and Everyday Life, The Swedish Institute for Disability Research, 2002 and United Response <http://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/press/every-vote-counts-press-release.htm>

The process of voting

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

The majority of participants in the two interview rounds stated that they did not find it difficult to vote. When asked more questions about voting, it did however emerge that many interviewees found that the ballot paper was hard to read and understand. The interviewees from Ireland differ in this respect, as they did not find the ballot paper difficult to use. The Irish ballot paper has pictures of the candidates, and in the first interview round several of the interviewees explained that this is what made the Irish ballot paper easy to use. In accordance with this finding, pictures on the ballot paper were suggested by many of the interviewees from the other countries as something that would make the ballot paper a lot easier to use. Other suggestions for making a more accessible ballot paper were writing in a large font and the use of party logos in colour on the ballot paper. E-voting was also mentioned by some interviewees as a way of making election procedures more accessible.

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

Deciding who to vote for – the accessibility of political opinion

The most difficult part of voting was not connected to the physical act of voting, but rather the decision of who to vote for. This assessment would most likely be shared by most voters and is thus not specific to people with learning disabilities.

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

Having a learning disability can however make it especially difficult to obtain and understand information thus suggesting that the issue warrants closer reflection in this regard.

The level of knowledge about the views of the political parties was generally low in the two interview rounds. Most interviewees stated that they found it quite hard to find out what views the political parties and/or politicians have both in general and more specific terms.

The interviewees found politics generally inaccessible. One reason for this is lack of accessible information about politics. Accessibility is not just related to written materials, but also the presentation of ideas in general. The political ideas were represented in a way that was described as confusing and difficult to understand, with the parties and politicians perceived as “all saying the same things”.

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

One way to address the inaccessibility to politics is to produce election and campaigning materials in a manner that is accessible to people with learning disabilities, for instance using an easy-to-read format with a limited amount of text presenting only one idea at a time and using pictures to support the text.¹¹ Political party organisations in Sweden, England, Scotland and Wales have already undertaken this task and have shown that it is possible to do.¹² As part of the M.O.TE project, information materials were made in connection with the EU elections in June 2009. Two leaflets were produced. One targeted people with learning disabilities with information about the elections and how to vote. The other was targeted at support persons of people with learning disabilities calling for support for the right to vote for people with learning disabilities and urging that the information and knowledge necessary be provided.¹³

Another important way of addressing the deficit in information among people with learning disabilities is to make sure that sources of accessible information are available. It can for instance be newspapers made with text that is easy to read and understand – newspapers like this already exist in several countries.¹⁴

¹¹ Guidelines in English on how to produce material in easy read can be found at <http://www.mencap.org.uk/document.asp?id=1579> and <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Pages/HowtouseEasyWordsandPictures.aspx?k=easy%20words> and www.inclusion-europe.org/documents/107.pdf

¹² Centrum för lättläst: Rösta på oss! i valet 2006 (2006), <http://www.lattlast.se/pub/4647/R%C3%B6sta%20p%C3%A5%20oss!-pdf.pdf>
Learning Disability Alliance, Scotland: Our Easy Read guide to the Political Parties manifestoes for the 2007 Scottish Parliament And Scottish Local Councils Elections, (2007). Disability Rights Commission: "Getting involved in a political party. Information for people with learning disabilities", <http://www.library.nhs.uk/learningdisabilities/ViewResource.aspx?resID=268630>
Mencap Wales: Partners in Politics, The Scottish National Party. http://www.symbolworld.org/eLive/election_special/snp/manifesto.pdf
The party of Wales: <http://www.plaidcymru.org/uploads/publications/277.pdf>

¹³ The leaflets can be read and downloaded from www.myopinionmyvote.eu
¹⁴ In Denmark <http://www.paaletdansk.dk/> and <http://www.ligetil.nu/>, In Finland <http://papunet.net/11-sidor/11-bladet.html>, in Sweden <http://8sidor.lattlast.se/?page=42> Denmark also have a TV production company TV Glad (www.tvglad.dk) that produces television made by and for people with learning disabilities.

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

Deciding who to vote for - talking about politics

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

Family influence was thus mentioned by many of the interviewees as an important factor in forming political opinions. This is the case for most people in the general population. For instance, one study shows that, in general, people are much more likely to change their votes in a particular direction if those with whom they discuss political issues support that direction, especially if they are members of the interviewees' family and are the individuals with whom they discuss politics most.¹⁵

On a more worrying note, some interviewees in the first interview round did not vote mainly because they had their potential interest in voting put down or not supported by family members or others. Others seem to have voted not out of a personal choice, but because of familial pressures. This shows that there is still a need for education, not only with people with learning disabilities, but with their families and in society in general in order to eliminate the prejudices still connected to people with learning disabilities exercising their right to vote. As part of the M.O.TE project, two awareness-raising campaigns are launched. As mentioned above, one was already done in connection with the EU elections in June 2009. The other is still pending. Both these campaigns are addressed to people with learning disabilities themselves and persons who support them. The results of the survey support the need for these initiatives.

National differences

Conducting an interview survey with the same content of the same client group at the same time in six different countries gives a unique opportunity to detect national differences in behaviour and opinion. The results from the two interview rounds in the six participating countries actually show very few significant national differences. However, there were a few that emerged.

Interdiction is used much more in Hungary than in the other countries, but in spite of this, some of the Hungarian interviewees had voted at some point in their life. At the

¹⁵ "People Who Talk Together Vote Together": An Exploration of Contextual Effects in Great Britain
Charles Pattie; Ron Johnston, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 1467-8306, Volume 90, Issue 1, 2000, Pages 41 – 66.

time of the second interview round, ten of the Hungarian interviewees were partially interdicted, and five were fully interdicted.

Denmark is one of the countries where few of the interviewees had voted. Only 50 % of the interviewees in the second interview round had voted in Denmark. At the same time, Denmark is a country that in general has a relatively high voter turnout in elections. The fact that only 50 % of the interviewees had voted could likely reflect a general low voter turnout among people with learning disabilities.

The majority of the interviewees in all of the participating countries who had voted had liked the process of voting and found it interesting. Many of the interviewees expressed satisfaction with the possibility of having influence in society by voting. The Italian voters expressed this especially strongly. Nine of the Italian interviewees who had voted in the second interview round referred to being deeply touched while voting, because they felt it was an important civic action.

Many interviewees talked about politics in general, i.e. not necessarily during an election time. This was however one of the objects of national difference in the first interview round, but the differences changed in the second interview round. In Denmark, most of the interviewees explained in both interview rounds that they do not talk about politics. This could be due to many reasons. It could mirror a tendency in the population as a whole, but it could also have to do with a lack of education or expectation in relation to people with learning disabilities. It should in any case warrant some reflection especially since studies point to a correlation between talking about politics, political knowledge, forming political opinions and engaging politically.¹⁶

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

Appendix

A: Interview guide for second interview round

Interview guide for one-to-one interviews

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

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

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

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

Questions

1. Age of the interview person

To begin with, could you tell me your age?

2. Participation in elections

Then I would like to ask you some questions about the latest election. In June there was an election where we voted for members for the European Parliament. Do you remember if you voted the last time there was an election?

If yes, go to section 3.

If no, go to section 5.

For interviewees who voted

3. Questions about the previous election

- What was it like to vote?
- Was it easy or difficult to vote? Why?
 - o Did you get any help to vote? If yes, what kind of help?

- Was the staff at the polling station helpful?
 - Was the ballot paper easy or difficult to understand?
 - Why?
- Had you seen the ballot paper before?
- Had you discussed it with anyone? If yes, with whom?

- How would you have liked it to be? The following suggestions are read aloud to the interview person:
 - With pictures or party logo
 - With photos
 - Read to you
 - Large print
 - On computer

- How did you find out about the fact that the EU elections took place?
- How did you find out when it took place?
- How did you find out where to vote?

4. Questions about deciding who to vote for

- Did you know the parties that were running for the EU Parliament before the election was held?
- How did you find out who was running for the EU parliament?
- Was it easy or difficult to decide who to vote for? Why?
- Did you talk to anyone about who to vote for?
 - If yes: Who did you talk to?

5. For interviewees who did not vote

- Did you know about the EU election?
- Did you know when it took place?
- Did you know where to vote?
- Did you talk to anyone about voting?
- Would you like to vote next time?
- Why, why not?

6. All interviewees

Information about the Election

- Before the EU elections, did you do something to find out what the politicians or the political parties think about different issues?
 - o Did you ask someone?
- Did you use the Internet?
- Did you read newspapers?
- Did you do other things?
- What issues are important to you?

7. General Questions

- Do you talk to anyone about politics and about voting in elections? If yes: Who? Friends? Staff? Family? If yes, what did you talk about?
- What about your friends and family. Do they vote?
- Have you sought information about politics lately? Why? How?
- Do you know who to talk to, if you want to know more about democracy (too abstract) and politics?
 - o If the answer is yes, then ask who.
 - o If the answer is no, then ask why.
- Do you watch the news?
- Did you follow the election results on TV, on the radio or in the paper after the last elections?
- Do you read the paper?
- Do you find how Europe is run interesting? Why/why not?
- If you were making all the decisions in Europe, what would you decide to do?
- Are you interested in other political topics?

For countries where you have to register as a voter

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

Round off – all interviewees

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

B: Interview guide for first interview round

Interview guide for one-to-one interviews

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

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

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

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

Questions

Participation in elections

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

For interviewees who voted

Questions about the previous election

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

Questions about deciding who to vote for

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

For interviewees who did not vote

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

All interviewees

Information about the election

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

Polling card and registration as a voter

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

General questions

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

For countries where you have to register

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

Round off

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

C: Interview guidelines

Guidelines for interviewing people with learning disabilities

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

Form of interview

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

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

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

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

Interview guide

The interview guide is based on the following considerations:

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

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

Information meetings

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

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

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

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

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

Locality

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

Anonymity

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

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

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

Presence of support person

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

Timeframe for the interviews

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

Using pictures or symbols

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

Round-off (end of the interview)

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

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

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

Payment

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

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D: Criteria for the selection of interviewees

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

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

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

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

Criteria for selection:

50% women, 50% men

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mild to moderate learning disability.

Two men, two women

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

Basic reading skills.

Have participated in project work, research and likewise before.

Are interested in the subject matter.

Can travel without private support person.

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

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

E: The project partners

AIPD, Italy

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

The association's main objectives comprise the following:

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

The AIPD provide the following services:

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

The AIPD has conducted the Italian interviews.

Down Foundation, Hungary

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

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

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

- Two temporary residence halls

- Day-time hall
- Residence halls
- ‘Down Ambulance’
- Specialised dentistry services
- Early-development centre
- Specialised ‘Down-Nurse’ service.

Down Foundation has conducted the Hungarian interviews.

Down Syndrome Ireland

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

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

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

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

Down Syndrome Ireland has conducted the Irish interviews.

Equal Opportunities Centre For Disabled People, Denmark

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

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

information on the subject of equal opportunities for disabled persons in the Danish society.

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

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

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

Equal Partners Foundation, Malta

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

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

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

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

Project Aura, Spain

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

Project Aura comprises four programmes:

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

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

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

Project Aura has conducted the Spanish interviews.

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

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

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

The curricula available are:

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

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

SIO 2 Srl, Italy

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

SIO 2 Srl has not participated in the interview survey. SIO 2 Srl has established and maintains the M.O.TE project webpage www.myopinionmyvote.eu

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

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

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

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

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

F: Outline of the recruiting of interviewees in each participating country

Below is an outline from each country describing how the interviewees were recruited as well as the general characteristics of the interview group of each country.¹⁷

Denmark

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

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

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

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

Hungary

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

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

¹⁷The information appears in the length and form it was supplied by the project partners.

Ireland

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

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

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

Italy

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

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

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

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

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

Malta

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

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

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

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

Spain

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