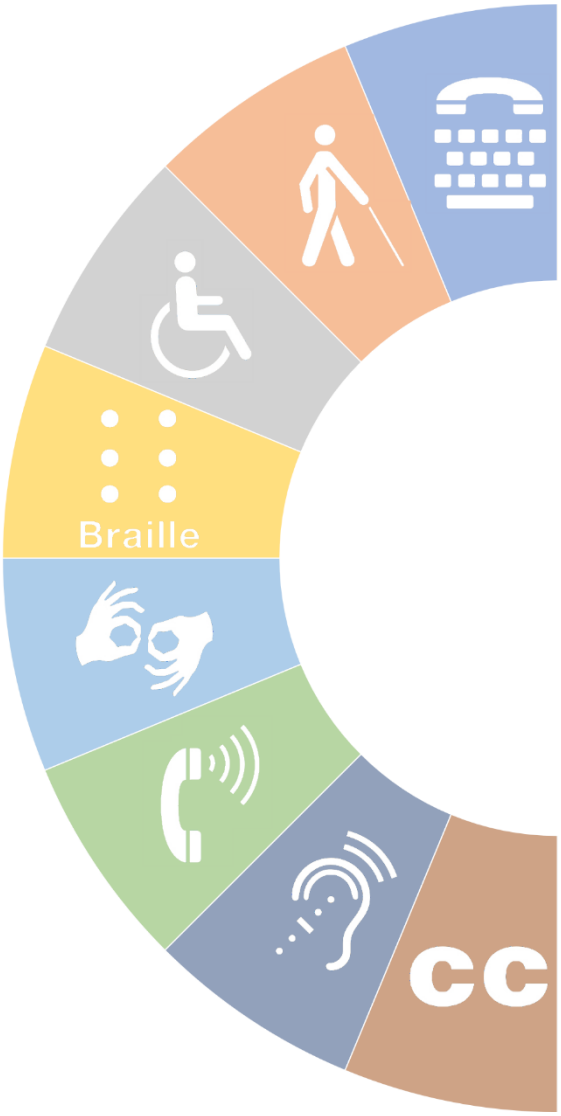
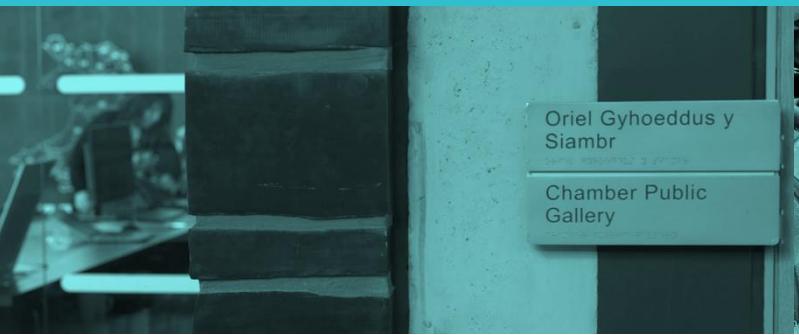


Disability Inclusive Communication Guidelines for Parliaments

Facilities of Inclusion

CPA COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES



© Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Published September 2020.

All rights reserved. This publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photography, recording or otherwise provided it is used only for educational purposes and is not for resale, and provided full acknowledgement is given to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as the original publisher. Rights are not extended for the reproduction of any photography or design not owned by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as contained in this publication.

Views and opinions expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Headquarters Secretariat and should not be attributed to any parliament or member of the Association.

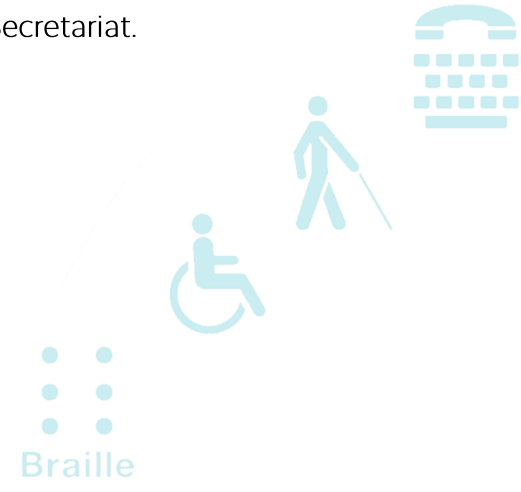
About the CPA

The **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)** connects, develops, promotes and supports parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth. The CPA collaborates with parliaments and other organisations, including the intergovernmental community, to achieve its statement of purpose. It brings parliamentarians and parliamentary staff together to exchange ideas among themselves and with experts in various fields, to identify benchmarks of good practices and new policy options they can adopt or adapt in the governance of their societies.

The CPwD network provides a means of supporting the capacity of parliamentarians with disabilities to be more effective in their roles and helping to improve the awareness and ability of all parliamentarians. The network also encourages all parliamentarians to include a perspective mindful of disabilities in all aspects of their role - legislation, oversight and representation - and helping parliaments to become institutions that are sensitive to issues surrounding disabilities.

About the authors

Clive Barker is a Programmes Officer, and James Pinnell is a Programmes Manager at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Headquarters Secretariat.



Overview

There has been growing public appreciation in recent years of disability as a vital and necessary component of equitable and inclusive political participation.[1] As stated in Article 29(a) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), states shall "*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.*"[2]

These Guidelines describe challenges that persons with disabilities (PWDs) face and provide guidance on what steps parliaments should take to ensure that their communications are more inclusive and considerate of people with various types of disabilities.

This document can be read separately or in combination with the CPA's Disability Inclusive Communication Guidelines for Parliaments on *Linguistic Principles*. If you have already read the *Facilities of Inclusion* guidelines, you can skip ahead to page 8.

[1] ODIHR, O., 2019. Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities. Accessible from: https://www.tandis.odihr.pl/bitstream/20.500.12389/22513/2/22513_EN.pdf

[2] United Nations, 2007, Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Page 21. Accessible from: https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf

Foreword

As the 55th Speaker of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, a Regional Representative for Canada on the CPA's International Executive Committee and as a Parliamentarian who has been involved in the activities of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network since it was first proposed in 2017, I am delighted to present the *Disability Inclusive Communication Guidelines for Parliaments: Facilities of Inclusion* document.

Following its conception at the CPA Conference for Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Conference, hosted by the Nova Scotia House of Assembly from 31 August to 1 September 2017, the CPwD network has supported Commonwealth parliamentarians with disabilities in discharging their parliamentary duties. A fundamental requirement of all parliaments, in ensuring that they are accessible to PWDs, is that their communication with and about PWDs is inclusive and respectful. Effective representation of PWDs should go beyond the numbers of parliamentarians with disabilities in a legislature to address what can be done to have a more equitable environment for all persons within the institution.

Giving a meaningful voice to PWDs in parliaments and legislatures leads to improvements in the following three functions of a parliament. Oversight will be more comprehensive; representation will be more equitable, and legislating will be more sensitive.

Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff that do not live with disabilities must ask themselves how they would like to be addressed if they were a PWD, but also, what positive role they can play in fighting prejudices, stigmas and stereotypes there are around disabilities in their communications.

These guidelines have been designed to provide a starting guide for what language and services can enable and enhance the participation of PWDs in parliament. Though the Commonwealth has a deeply diverse range of parliaments, both in their cultures and resources, taking inspiration from these guidelines to be more inclusive to PWDs is a positive step any parliament can take. The range of case studies used in the guidelines emphasises how achievable it can be for legislatures to improve their approachability for PWDs no matter their size.

I hope that these guidelines will assist in guiding parliaments towards more inclusive communications and I am hopeful that they can engender a greater representation of PWDs across your parliament.

Hon. Kevin Murphy, MLA

55th Speaker of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly and
a CPA Canada Regional Representative of the CPA
International Executive Committee

About the Guidelines

Based on standards established in international commitments on the rights of PWDs, these *Disability Inclusive Communication Guidelines for Parliaments* are aimed at providing a practical resource for Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Members to ensure that their parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with disabilities can fully and effectively participate in their respective parliamentary practices and procedures, as well as day-to-day working life.

Although these Guidelines are intended for the use of parliaments, other audiences may benefit from this handbook as well. Some examples of these stakeholders include potential partners with legislatures in their efforts towards this cause, such as disability rights organisations, policy experts and academics.

This guide is intended for English and not for other languages used in Commonwealth jurisdictions.

The CPA Secretariat would be very happy to work with parliaments and parliamentarians to provide these guidelines in a more accessible format, where required and requested.

Why Parliaments?

Parliaments are critical participants in efforts to advocate for and support under-represented communities, since they are often regarded as the pinnacle of political participation. In this role, it is particularly important as well as beneficial for parliaments to follow opportunities to engage PWDs as parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. Though parliaments may have different levels of resources, there are many pan-Commonwealth strategies that any legislature can deploy which these guidelines explore.

Plans for an addition of an external elevator to the Parliament of Gibraltar, source: https://www.yourgibraltartv.com/society/20316-parliament-lift-to-be-fitted-on-western-side

These guidelines are focused on the creation of an accessible and participatory environment within parliaments for PWDs. While references are made to PWDs who have become parliamentarians, readers looking for further information on the electoral process may wish to look at the ODIHR's *Handbook on Observing and Promoting the Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities* (2017)[3]. Another resource on this topic is *Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes* (2014)[4], by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). For information on the promotion of PWDs' political participation in areas such as political parties, the ODIHR's *Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities* (2019)[5] is a good resource on the topic.

[3] Accessible from: https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/handbook-observing-people-with-disabilities
[4] Accessible from: https://www.ifes.org/publications/equal-access-how-include-persons-disabilities-elections-and-political-processes
[5] Available from: https://www.osce.org/odihr/414344

Barriers to Inclusion

In the CRPD, communication is defined as including *"languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology."*[6] A lack of these means is reflected in the Parliamentary context, where PWDs are often not included or consulted when legislatures consider the ways in which they communicate with their Members and the wider public. Even when issues surrounding disabilities are discussed, the methods of communicating them are often inaccessible for PWDs. Below are some examples of ways that parliaments can improve their interactions with PWDs:

- Making parliament websites accessible for screen readers (a technology commonly used by persons with visual disabilities), make finding information on parliament easier for PWDs who are interested in learning about, or visiting, parliament. Screen readers convert digital text into audible speech enabling users to hear the content and navigate a website with their keyboard. This technology is primarily for users with blindness or visual impairments, allowing them to process the information with the same level of independence as any person without a disability. In developing a website, in order to ensure it is accessible for screen readers, it is important for it to be able to interact with screen

Photograph of a braille screen reader.

[6] Article 2, United Nations, 2007, Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Accessible from: https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf

reader software such as NVDA[7] (for Windows) and Voiceover (for macOS)[8]. These programs interpret the text on the website and play it to the user. They can also feed the information into braille screen readers. Further, more detailed information on how websites can technically interact with software can be found with this helpful online guide: https://soap.stanford.edu/tips/screen-reader-testing.

- If television or online coverage of parliamentary proceedings are shown, captions or sign language interpretation being provided, ensures people with hearing impairments or who are hard-of-hearing can observe proceedings. Although the dictation technology used to create live captions has improved markedly in recent years, there can still be mistakes. As a result, it is best practice to provide sign language as an additional option for users.

- Discussions of accessibility to parliament often looks at physical adaptations, such as ramps and lifts though, whilst these things are important, it can overlook other important measures and adaptations that ensure PWDs can visit parliament and understand how to navigate the building(s). Forms of physical communication in parliaments, such as staff training in sign language, clear signage and the use of braille are ways of communicating like any other, that PWDs experience with parliament.

Translation services during the UK Parliament's Prime Minister's Question time

[7] Accessible from: https://www.nvaccess.org/

[8] Accessible from: https://www.apple.com/accessibility/mac/vision/

- Text-relay or captioned telephones are an innovative example of a technology that assists persons with impairments and also individuals with speech impediments. This technology converts the speech received into the handset into text that is conveyed on the screen of the telephone. As offices in parliaments, like any other offices, use telephones regularly, ensuring that this type of telephone is available or can be procured, is a good way of ensuring the inclusion of PWDs.

Text-relay/captioned telephone by CapTel

The Necessary Facilities

Facilities play an important role in enabling the participation of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with disabilities. There are many examples of where legislatures have set up facilities which enable PWDs to engage with parliamentary procedure. A good way of looking at these measures is by considering what can be done with existing communications that a legislature produces.

Case Study: Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament

In the Welsh National Assembly, Members' desks are provided with headphones to ensure that any Members with hearing impairments can still participate fully. The computer screens in front of the Members are also adjustable to meet the needs of individuals with visual impairments, as the size of text font can be adjusted.

Desks and individual computers of Members of the Welsh National Assembly

The following table features some examples of promotions/publications and what can be done to ensure they are accessible to PWDs:

Examples of Promotions/Publications	Possible Accessible Formats or Features that Should be Considered
Printed Information Banners, posters, brochures and booklets Diagrams and infographics Magazine/newspaper articles	Use of braille Larger text for persons with visual disabilities Digital copies (as these can be viewed through software designed for use by PWDs)
Online Information Research reports Online articles Social media posts	Larger text for persons with visual disabilities Formatting for screen readers

Examples of Promotions/Publications	Possible Accessible Formats or Features that Should be Considered
Spoken word Debates Committee sessions Speeches	Speech-to-text (live captions) Sign language interpreters
Audio Podcasts Interview excerpts Radio	Transcripts with clear guidance on where they can be found
Video Online videos Television	Audio descriptions Sign language interpreter Captions or subtitles

Case Study: Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

The Parliament of Fiji was one of the first to use sign-language interpreters for live television broadcasts of parliamentary sittings, on 23 April 2017. Other state institutions, including TV networks now regularly use sign-language interpreters. The Parliament of Fiji employs, whenever possible, sign-language interpreters for parliamentary sittings and related parliamentary events.

Photograph of a sign language interpretation of a Fiji Parliament sitting.

Public Accessibility

An aim of every legislature is to ensure that the public are engaged with its activities. However, without implementing measures that enable accessibility to PWDs, no legislature can claim that it is fully open to the public. There are many examples of physical measures that a legislature can put into place that are centred around communicating with PWDs, which include:

- Signposts with large lettering, to ensure that PWDs with visual impairments can see how to navigate the building. For those with more advanced visual impairments or blindness, signs that use braille are appropriate. Signage that includes both large lettering and braille is, obviously, a way of ensuring all PWDs can understand what is being communicated.

- Staff members on site that are trained in sign language and can therefore communicate with people with hearing impairments. These staff can also communicate audio announcements that are made over public announcement systems. Legislatures can look to hire externally for these individuals, making sign language competency an 'essential' or 'desirable' criterion for application. Or, alternatively, they can explore training existing staff in this area. One way this could be done is via an online course. The online course provider Udemy provides several courses in a range of different sign languages.[9]

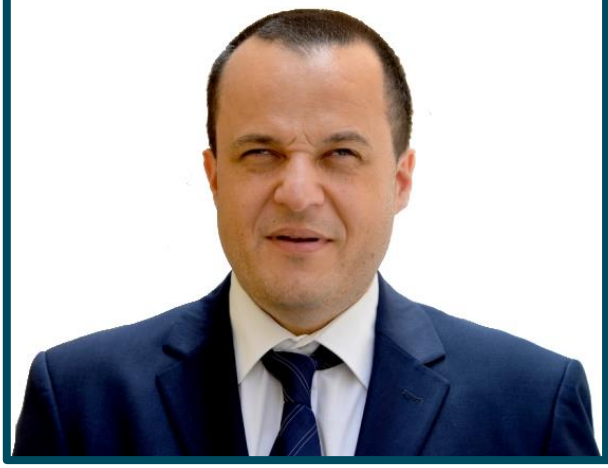
[9] Accessible from: https://bit.ly/2FjYzLj

Recommended Reading

While references are made to PWDs who have become parliamentarians, readers looking for further information on the electoral process may wish to look at the ODIHR's *Handbook on Observing and Promoting the Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities* (2017)[10]. Another resource on this topic is *Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes* (2014)[11], by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). For information on the promotion of PWDs' political participation in areas such as political parties, the ODIHR's *Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities* (2019) is a good resource on the topic. The organisation *Web Accessibility in Mind* and its website (https://webaim.org) are a great resource for information on screen readers, how websites can alter their websites to accommodate them and other website accessibility technology. Of course, the CPA's other *Disability Communications Guidelines* on 'Linguistic Principles', are another publication we would recommend. This document provides guidance on the language aspect of communication with or about PWDs in parliaments.

[10] Accessible from: https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/handbook-observing-people-with-disabilities

[11] Accessible from: https://www.ifes.org/publications/equal-access-how-include-persons-disabilities-elections-and-political-processes



"Focusing on the ability and potential of persons with disabilities is the key to success. Creating inclusive societies where everyone feels they can contribute can be achieved through awareness, education and modern technology. Plans must consider the circumstances of all those with disabilities, not a one-size-fits-all approach."

- Hon. Kevin Cutajar, MP
Member of the Parliament of Malta

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) will continue to work with its membership of over 180 Commonwealth parliaments and legislatures and with international partners to support the work of parliaments and parliamentarians.

If you would like to support the international work of the CPA in providing advice and guidance to Commonwealth Parliaments and parliamentarians on communications guidelines for persons with disability, then please contact the CPA Secretariat at hq.sec@cpahq.org.

CPA COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

Image credits: CPA Secretariat and CPA Branches, shutterstock.com, freepik.com
Published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), September 2020
Registered Charity Number: 263147

CPA Headquarters Secretariat
Richmond House, Houses of Parliament
London, SW1A 0AA
United Kingdom
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7799 1460

E-mail: hq.sec@cpahq.org

Website: www.cpahq.org